

Submission regarding Disability Discrimination Amendment Bill 2003

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I shall try to be as brief as possible but this in no way reflects my intense sense of injustice regarding this amendment.

I am VERY strongly apposed to any ability to discriminate against individuals addicted to prohibited substances. And very disturbed that this could happen in Australia in the year 2004.

My brother Dean Foster, died of a heroin overdose at my parents home in 1996, aged 28, following many years of struggle to manage his addiction.

From 1992 he was fully employed and his employer was aware of his addiction. However his work colleagues generally we not.

Dean was not an easy person to employ. Anger, frustration, pain, sickness and youth sat uneasily with him. But his employers had a long history in the navy with young sailors, and they were committed to assisting him and gave him great support.

Dean repaid their forgiveness with great dedication. Working very long hours 7 days a week for years, on extremely low pay. The belief was that if he had little money it was harder for him to relapse....but also being extremely poor limited his ability to lead a life independent of his parents which was both a bonus and a problem. Supported by his mother, but persecuted by his father, life at home was difficult.

At one time, Dean was requested to accompany the engineers on a trip to Victoria, as their technician. He went without complaint. However they failed to understand he would be without his daily dose of methadone. I have a photo of Dean sitting on the back of the station-wagon about 3 days into the trip looking absolutely terrible. The pain, cramps, he must have suffered silently would have been terrible. But he would have been too proud to say anything. And I know his boss would not have deliberately put him through this, it was just lack of information.

The only positive in Deans life for many years was this job. Without it he would have been totally lost to all of us. His addiction was very bad, and despite many efforts to get it under control, he died trying. Every step of the way my mother offered her total support. Providing daily transport to the methadone clinic at Woden and then across to Fishlike to work. She held no value judgment regarding the addiction having been a nurse and dispensing heroin years ago as pain relief. She understood addiction and appreciated Deans struggle.

Families are deeply effected when a member is addicted. This legislation will increase their suffering and pain, and provide no real understanding within the community with regard to the support they need. Employers who assist addicts to restore their lives cannot be praised enough. And were there more we might not end up with such dreadful circumstances as we do.

I implore the committee to refuse this amendment, it is ill conceived and misguided and below the Australian people and their support of the underdog. There must be a better way of solving the problem which gave cause to this terrible amendment.

Sincerely
Bronwyn Barnard