

Story vignettes

The following story vignettes are used to trigger case discussion. Each unit has two story vignettes to allow participants to explore issues that arise for young people with mental health and substance use issues and their families and carers from various perspectives.

The trigger questions for each story are to direct discussion and lead participants to think how they would help this person through their service and how they would access other relevant services.

Facilitators have additional discussion questions and notes for each story vignette.

- Unit three:
 - Story A: Gillian
 - Story B: Michael

Unit three

Story vignette A – Gillian

"I keep trying to get help from a variety of people but there doesn't seem to be any systematic approach because the resources aren't out there and the few services that do exist have such tight criteria about who fits into the groups they service.

So for me, it's been like 'hang on, you don't understand. I am one person looking after this kid.' I feel like I've got this child who's in trouble and why won't anyone in the system help me? This is the case even with the Department of Health because there just aren't the children's psychiatric facilities.

There was one place where I took Luke to get assessed but they said, 'No, he has a drug problem so he doesn't fit our criteria.' There are only eight adolescent psychiatric beds in the state so during one episode he was sent to an adult assessment place where they put people who are in psychosis. These are adults who are seriously ill and my child was there with them. And they just said, 'Oh, we'll look after him. And we'll give him his own room. That makes it sort of different.' I stayed with him until 10 pm that night and when I came back in the morning they just went 'He can go home now.'

No one had dealt with him the night before and I was like 'Hang on a minute, what if I take him home and it happens again?' And they said. 'Just take him back to hospital.'

During these psychotic episodes we're sent away from hospitals with a tablet and bounced from one service to another. You feel totally responsible and totally helpless. Who can you turn to who'll sit with you and actually listen? And offer ideas?"

Points for discussion

1. What are the important issues here for Gillian?
2. How do you think she is coping?
3. If Gillian was telling YOU this story, how would you engage with her? Would you involve Luke?
4. What role might the general practitioner play in supporting Gillian?
5. Are there strategies that could be put in place to prevent Luke from being bounced from one service to another?
6. What support could other local health and community services offer at this point?

Unit three

Story vignette B – Michael

"I don't know for certain all the ways that Steve's addiction has affected me but I do know I'm a different person to who I was. And professionally, it has been difficult. I'm normally a very open person and that has been quite damaging to me.

Many people who I work with have been horrified to learn that I would have a son like that and it's made it very difficult for me to continue to do business with them. There's been no support and a lot of negativity. The assumption is that I haven't done a good job as a father, that I must be a bad parent and yet they know me well, we've worked side by side for a long time. These are very smart, highly qualified people and yet their level of compassion is non-existent. Just terribly judgemental.

I have one dear friend, a barrister, who has been wonderful. He persuaded me to talk to our GP about it. Having a child in the throes of addiction, wears you down. You get desperate. And I know that sometimes I've been scratching around for meaning and I've been almost suicidal myself. You think you're going mad.

My GP told me I have to take anti-depressants. But there was no way I wanted to. I didn't think I needed them because how would that solve Steve's problem? But he convinced me.

So I have been taking them and it has given me some breathing space while I continue to live with the chaos and try to find help..."

Points for Discussion

1. Discuss the effect that social stigma connected with mental health and substance use is having on Michael.
2. What does the story tell you about Michael and his family?
3. If Michael was telling YOU this story, how would you engage with him?
4. Discuss the use of anti depressants for Michael.
5. What other support strategies might the general practitioner offer Michael?
6. What support could other local health and community services offer at this point?