

3 August 2013

### **To Whom It May Concern**

I would like to share my story with you, in the hope that maybe someone out there will help fund Freedom Housing homes.

I was driving slowly on a dirt road, just after just receiving my P plates at 18 years of age. I was inexperienced on a dirt road, and due to no known fault of my own, i.e., drinking, drugs, or speeding, I crashed into a tree.

The doctors said I would not live, then I would not walk, then I would not have children. But through all the heartache and tears, I kept on pushing through. At the hospital, where I was bed-ridden for months - unable to move - they said I had the 'heart of a soldier, and the guts of a warrior'.

I moved into rehabilitation, which lasted years, and years. I remained positive and optimistic that things would turn out okay, even though the medical evidence indicated otherwise.

I will try to make this short and to the point, even though these are matters of the heart. I did end up walking, but it is very, very, limited. I use a walking stick on my good days, and an electric wheelchair on bad days.

I am on daily government-approved morphine and other painkillers. I have a broken pelvis, so I can only sit in my wheelchair, or in lift-up recliner chairs. My options are limited. I must sleep in one of those medical hospital beds that are adjustable, so that I don't sleep flat and do further damage my hips.

I am unable to get any support at all. Every government department says that it's not their area, and they tell me to try another department.

The major one here in Adelaide is Disability SA, and they say I don't qualify for two reasons. The first reason is I'm not bad enough. That is, I don't have Multiple Sclerosis or Cerebral Palsy. Please don't misunderstand me here, I agree these people need help, but that doesn't mean that I don't. The second reason is that they don't treat mental health patients. I explained, "Yes, I'm on anti-depressants and anti-anxiety medication daily because I'm a physically disabled person with no one to help me! If you were in my shoes you too would be struggling, and a little stressed and depressed also." If I received physical practical help like what Freedom Housing offers, then I would not be on these medications any longer.

I went to Dom Care. Their reason for not helping is "There is an able-bodied person living in the house". I will go into this in detail in a moment, but for now what you need to know is that this 'able-bodied person' is on anti-depressants and anti-anxiety medication, because of all the weight of the household - and all my needs - which is resting completely on him - all of the time - and there is no one ever helping me - or him. Then, when I later told them that this person has now moved out - just to get their response - they still would not help. They simply said, "You don't qualify."

Only a few months ago I called Family SA - again - and I was honest with them, saying that I am a separated woman with two young children and a physical disability, and I'm not coping. I'm getting suicidal thoughts and I am really, really, struggling just to keep my family together.

"I have already lost a husband," I said crying. "Please help me, I don't want to lose my children as well." Well their reaction did shock me. They said, "Call Mental Health SA and they will connect you to where you need to be." I said, "My children are being neglected, and I want to change things around so that my children get a better life." I was talking to deaf ears.

I'm so desperate now. My disability began in 1996 and it's now 2013. So for those who are good at maths, that's seventeen years of not just asking, but begging for just one department to 'please help me out'. It's so embarrassing having to justify my case by telling them the intimate details of my personal needs, and still I get knocked back.

I called Mental Health SA, which already has a case file on me from when I overdosed, and I was admitted into hospital. I explained everything again. Basically they said, "Call Disability SA or Nanny SA and tell them you are struggling with 'mental health' issues, because you have a real physical need of in-home-care and you are not 'really' a mental health patient. Say you are not depressed because of an emotional or mental issue; you are depressed and stressed because of practical day-to-day difficulties." They did spell out however, that they could not help me, as they do not provide practical assistance with housework etc.

Nanny SA. Okay, so now these guys are my last option. They reckon as long as I pay them \$28-30 an hour, I can have as many in-home-care hours, as I like. Yes, well I don't know if any of them had to live on a poverty line CentreLink disability pension, but I couldn't afford them for a single hour, and they have a minimum of three hours per call-out!

I asked CentreLink for them to pay under Special Child Care Benefits, but they said I have not given enough evidence to support my claim. I have a doctor's letter and a psychologist's letter indicating I need 'day-to-day' help with planning and activities. I need assistance with transport to and from school, as I can't drive. I need help before and after school hours. I need help on weekends. They agreed that my children have been identified as 'at risk' due to neglect for over four years now. But apparently that's not enough 'evidence'!

My son is six and he has been home from school since April, because I can't get him there. I contacted the school - who were supportive from a distance - but ended up saying they only have support available for disabled children, not disabled parents, "So you will have to home-school him".

My daughter is four and half and gets dropped off at day care by seven in the morning, and she is home as late as five thirty in the afternoon. I never get to see her; she eats her dinner and then goes straight to bed. Freedom Housing would allow my children to be in a functional family setting i.e. normal school hours of school - or day care - and help with transport, and all the 'normal' things that just get taken for granted by able-bodied people.

Now I have mentioned every department that I know of. If you know of another please let me know because I'm out of options and feeling helpless, and I want not to feel this way. I need real, practical help with the day-to-day things that a house needs, and I am simply not coping without this.

I was married for over ten years to a lovely man, but that fell through for one - and only one - reason: we could not get anyone to help us. He did everything for me. He cooked; he cleaned; he showered me; he did the grocery shopping; and he took sole responsibility for our two children, which he loves and looks after. Because of my morphine, I can't function properly anyway, and then my physical disability compounds it.

He almost had a complete mental breakdown, and now he needs medication daily. The doctor has described his mental state as environmentally caused. He told him that if he moved out of his environment, it would be different and he would no longer need the medications.

So I do not qualify for help, because I have 'an able-bodied person' living with me. Can someone please tell me, how a person who is heavily medicated, and sedated most of the time, with anti-depressants and anti-anxiety pills, is 'an able-bodied person'?

We did separate due to the huge demands and the constant stress. Now that I'm not married, guess what? I still don't qualify for help! Now they say, "Well you have two children so why isn't their father helping you out?" God! We can't get a break. He did help out. He helped out so much that it has caused him to burn out. He needs to be away, for his own health right now. I still love and care for him, but we can't be together because the children and I are too much of a burden for him.

Now my father has passed away, and all I have left is a mother who is already on aged-care herself. Yet she is caring for her mother, who is blind and now has limited movement.

I called Christos from Freedom Housing in desperation and I explained everything to him. He was patient and kind. He listened as I cried and I said, "Please, I don't know if you can help, but can you at

least point me in the right direction for some help. He waited for me to stop and calmly said, "That's why I invented Freedom Housing. Yours is the exact sort of situation that we are trying to address. Our housing concept is tailored to suit your needs."

He said it's a family environment, so I would be looked after, and my children would be looked after. And even my husband, who is now my ex, would be completely welcome to stay: and maybe we could even reunite again as a family unit. I burst into tears with such joy. In my seventeen years of seeking one form of help or another, I have never, ever, heard anyone say, "We can help you."

I cannot tell you how much a housing opportunity like Freedom Housing would do for my children and for me. There would be someone there at the press of a button, to help me with showering, meal preparation, shopping, even for a chat if I was lonely.

I am very isolated, and without any friends. This would allow there to be someone with me, to take me out even to a café for a cuppa. This person would be able to help with pillows or cushioning so that I could sit down on a chair, or even to take my wheelchair there. Do you know I have never been out of the house with my children to go anywhere? This would all change. There would be someone available for my children and me, on call, anytime we needed them.

At Freedom Housing they have Home Carers not just Personal Carers. This means that yes, they will help with my personal care, but they will also help with the household things.

Currently, my mother comes once a week to do the dishes. I don't know if you have ever seen the dishes of a family of three stacked up for one day, let alone for a whole week. They get piled up galore. The house is always filthy, because I'm simply unable to care for my house. It's an embarrassing situation, and one I certainly don't like discussing, because it makes me feel lousy. However I do believe in the Freedom Housing concept so very much, that I will admit all this, to support this in any way I can.

My mother does the clothes washing once a week for us, when she comes to also do the dishes. She takes the washing back to her house and returns it a week later. I have to tell my four and a half year old to wear soiled underwear that she wore the day before, because I can't manage to even get help with washing clothes for her.

I would go from being a single mother of two dependant children, struggling with being heavily medicated - and juggling my suicidal thoughts - to getting practical help on a daily basis, being confident, having my family (all of it, husband and all!) back together. I would not have to burden my partner with transport to physio's and doctors, as there would always be someone to help me go to these on-site appointments, and even the off-site one's.

My partner would be able to live with his family again. Play with his children again. Go to work again. He has not worked for over ten years because he was caring for me, and I know we are all different, but he is not the domestic type. He is the out-of-the-house type of guy. This would be a win-win-win for him, our two children and for myself. Have you ever done anything where it was not your thing, and you felt like a fish out of water? Well, that was my husband for ten years!

I would not be suicidal any longer. I would not be depressed. I would get help with dishes daily, instead of living in chaos and feeling guilty. I would gain confidence almost over night. I would be able to go out from time to time, maybe in my wheelchair to the zoo with my kids, and have someone there to help me the whole time. With Freedom Housing I would not be able to 'just' dream of going out, I would actually be able to do it.

This change is hard to put into words because I have never lived one day in the sort of set up that Freedom Housing offers. But from what I know, this would change all of our lives simply overnight. The change would be so dramatic, that I believe the physical pain I'm in would be significantly reduced, because right now I am in a huge knot, because of these day-to-day things that I'm not coping with.

If I had the money I would invest in Christos's idea, because these are exactly the sorts of homes we need in our community, ones that can support all of us, without discrimination, to live healthy and happy lives.

Please I'm asking, I'm begging you, to please fund Freedom Housing, because if you can save one life from self-harm then it's completely worth it.

I would be more than happy to discuss anything further with you over the phone if you want to call me. I can't come and see you because I don't have a Freedom Housing carer to take me to you, but one day - in the near future - I certainly am hoping to be living in one of these homes.

Yes, I'm in Adelaide and I would move states tomorrow if I got approved for Freedom Housing, because this will literally save my life and it will allow my children to grow up functional, versus growing up dependant on the government, because no one was there to help their mum out.

My children have already lost one parent. Please don't make it two. What affects me affects my children. If we want the next generation to come out stronger and better than ever before, then we need to act now to build a stronger today. Christos is taking that first step and I support him all the way.

Yours truly,

Megan

(This is not my real name. If you would like to get in touch with me, Christos will pass on your details.)