Mental Health Series, The Wireless
9-12 February 2016

Story One: Seclusion

*Mental health services are supposed to avoid locking patients up in isolation - also known as seclusion. But it still happens.*

http://thewireless.co.nz/articles/mental-health-patients-are-being-locked-up-when-they-shouldnt-be

Story Two: Turned Away in Crisis

*New Zealand’s suicide rate spiked again last year and those on the frontline - parents, friends and health workers - say more help is needed to prevent deaths.*

http://thewireless.co.nz/articles/turned-away-in-a-crisis

Story Three: Shining A Light on the Mental Health System

*Jess McAllen goes into detail about getting the stories and her thoughts on the mental health system.*

http://thewireless.co.nz/articles/shining-a-light-on-the-mental-health-system

Support Material

I’ve included screenshots of me tweeting the two feature stories so you can get an idea of the level of engagement on social media via retweets and likes. My work was referenced in this story https://overland.org.au/2016/04/the-language-of-mental-illness-is-broken/ as a good example of reporting on mental health. Also the mental health radio show Take It From Us spent one episode discussing the series:http://www.takeitfromus.co.nz/archive/2015/journalist-jess-mcallens-hard-hitting-articles-our-mental-health-system/(the audio doesn’t appear to be archived at the moment but here’s a link to prove it was there). I’ve also attached messages from my journalist Facebook page and some tweets in lieu of “letters to the editor” - I’m sure you can appreciate how big a role social media plays in audience engagement.

*screenshots on the following pages*
Jess McAllen has the remarkable ability of being able to get sources to open up about some of the most difficult and painful parts of their lives. This is built on a foundation of trust.

She treats sources with respect and understands a journalist’s responsibility to treat them fairly and not exploit them, protecting them where necessary, while also remaining true to what she hears and sees unfolding in front of her.

In her series of mental health stories for The Wireless, Jess tackled difficult issues that other media shy away or cover without much depth. She talked to mental health patients and their families about the realities of trying to get help from a failing system.

There was extraordinary pressure on those she interviewed to remain silent: Patients feel they’ll put their treatment at risk, services feel they’ll put their funding at risk, and bureaucrats try to shroud the difficulties the sector faces instead of demonstrating how it can be improved.

This pressure is evident in Jess’s stories.

However, through months of reporting she was able to earn the trust of sources who provided - along with statistics obtained through the Official Information Act - the foundation for the stories.

As Jessica recounts in her final stories for the series, the reporting also took a personal toll on her: “By December I was getting phone calls from people on two month waiting lists, people who were suicidal, but since they hadn’t had an attempt couldn’t get any more serious help. I started to feel like I’d unwittingly declared myself a suicide hotline.”

Hopefully, she feels the messages she received from patients, loved ones, and those working in the system made it worth it.

Jess’s work matters – and as a journalist, that’s what she strives for.

It’s worth celebrating.

**MARCUS STICKLEY**  |  DIGITAL FEATURES EDITOR |  RADIO NEW ZEALAND  |  M: 021 321 685  |  Level 2, 155 The Terrace |  PO BOX 123, Wellington 6140 |
Dear Jessica,

I write to commend you for your exceptional pieces written for The Wireless’s mental health week.

Your stories were sensitively and thoughtfully written, and raised important questions about mental health in New Zealand. Each article was well-researched and engaging, and gave your readers a greater understanding of complex and challenging issues.

You tackled three very difficult subjects extremely well. Mental health patients are being locked up when they shouldn’t be is particularly well-done. Few New Zealanders are aware of the realities of seclusion, and although some work has been done toward its eradication, progress is not happening quickly enough. Your article will have introduced this important issue to many readers.

We know that covering stories about mental health can be challenging for journalists – your personal experience added a fresh perspective to Shining a light on the mental health system is compelling. Thank you for sharing your story.

I was impressed with the compassion and respect you showed toward the subjects of this series. Each had a powerful and compelling story to tell, and your writing covered their experiences without diminishing or sensationalising them.

I congratulate you on this work, and look forward to reading more from you in the future.

Regards,

Hugh
Chief
Mental Health Foundation of New Zealand

Norriss
Executive
Thank you

Andrew Jacombs <ajacombs@gmail.com>  11 Feb

to me

Hey, not sure if you remember me, I emailed you while you were still at Fairfax in response to a story you wrote about ECT.

Anyway, I just wanted to thank you for the work you’ve been doing culminating in the series of stories for the Wireless this week. Both pieces so far were gut-wrenchingly painful reads that I’m so incredibly glad have been published. There’s long been a narrative in NZ that our mental health services are a bit rubbish. They’re underfunded, they’re overstretched, people fall through the gaps. But there’s been scarcely any coverage of what that actually looks like, what that actually means for peoples lives, what the real implications are for people of being failed by ‘the system’.

Which is exactly what you’ve done. You’ve gone around, you’ve got people on the record, you’ve provided an unignorable account of not only how broken things are, but more importantly how that affects peoples lives. What it’s actually like when you desperately need help and it’s not fucking there because of reasons entirely out of your control.

So thanks, basically. Thank you for doing what you do and doing it so well.

Regards,
Andrew

Jessica McAllen
@Jess_McAllen

I've been working on this for a while! Re mental health patients being locked in solitary confinement

Mental health patients are being locked up when they shoul...
Mental health services are supposed to avoid locking patients up in isolation - also known as seclusion. But it still happens.
thewireless.co.nz

12:46 PM - 9 Feb 2016
2nd feature from me. We tell suicidal ppl to get help but a large number of NZers are asking and help isn't there:

Turned away in a crisis
New Zealand’s suicide rate spiked again last year and those on the frontline - parents, friends and health workers - say more help is needed to prevent deaths.
thewireless.co.nz

#mentalhealthmatters

Marcus Stickley <Marcus.Stickley@radionz.co.nz>
11 Feb

Hi,
The person who sent this in is going to remain anonymous though you deserve to read what they have to say. It's been a full-on week, but the work we've been publishing matters to people:

I wanted to congratulate you on the mental health stuff being published on the Wireless over the last few days.

I've been in therapy and hopping from med to med since high school. Specifically over the last two years, I've been struggling to recover from being hospitalised after a suicide attempt.

I don't tell anyone any of this shit ever because, despite the calls for more people to talk about it openly, there are still very real world consequences. "Will this person still hire me if they know?" "Will an employer suspect me of being less reliable if they know?" and even so-called progressive friends easily fall back to "stop being so self-absorbed" and I've even had "you're just being manipulative." It can be fucking hard.

It makes a difference seeing this stuff out there. The fact that the journalism is to the calibre it is - that's even more special.

It's not always an easy read, but it's an important one.

MARCUS STICKLEY I DIGITAL FEATURES EDITORI RADIO NEW ZEALAND IM: 021 321 685 I Level 2, 155 The Terrace I PO BOX 123, Wellington 6140 I
Hi Jessica

Thanks for writing and tweeting about Mental Health.

I've been really struggling with anxiety depression and suicidal thoughts

Saw the Crisis Team yesterday after contacting them the day before. They referred me to a GP to refer me to Mind Matters for counselling services etc

Go to Tui Medical in Hamilton they can't refer me because they're under a different PHO?

Apparently they're going to refer me to some other counselling service. Instead they've given me a blue prescription - some online cognitive behaviour therapy like mood gym

I really just want a professional to talk to and maybe some medication if needed (kind of opposed to chemical solutions but ...)

I'm working, have 2 kids and apart from the impact anxiety has on my life pretty successful and functional

Second time I've seen Crisis Team in 12 months and still haven't got help. First time lead to a referral to linkage who suggested another Counsellor who charges $100 a session.

Seems unless I actually do something really stupid and get admitted to Henry Bennett I have to diagnose and fix myself

I don't even know why I'm writing this but thanks for the articles. Helps in a sense that it's not just me but an underfunded and broken system

Please keep doing what you're doing its making a difference already

---

John Palethorpe
@MrDuttonPeabody

Shout out to @Jess_McAllen, whose work on Mental Health at the wireless helped me join some dots and work out I wasn't ok. Thanks Jess.

LIKES
21

8:55 PM - 5 Apr 2016
Thank you again for your articles.

I had OCD for about 7 years. so debilitating. I don't know how I'm still here, and the whole period is a blank, a complete writeoff.

I love what you're doing... even if it makes me cry to remember. Haha.

You're great. Kia kaha.

Hi Jess, I read your article about Shining a Light on the Mental Health system, and about Warren Botica. Heartbreaking stuff. I was interested to read about issues with St. Luke's Community Mental Health, I've never heard anything good about them, and my own personal experience with them was horrific. I'd disagree that the system isn't inherently broken, I believe it is, it was at breaking point over 20 years ago when I sought help when I was suicidal and was turned away and told they had more important people to be helping. We have an ambulance at the bottom of the cliff model in public mental health that doesn't meet the needs of people suffering with mental health issues. I realised a long time ago that to get the help I needed, I had to go private. I'm fortunate that I have a decent income that allows me to pay for the care I get, there are many in my life who need it but can't afford it. I think your stories on mental health are brilliant, so much is swept under the carpet, we as a nation need to talk more about this.