



Years 11-12 Category Runner-Up

LILY WOODING – THE FRIENDS SCHOOL

The Boy I Once Knew

Let me tell you the story of a boy I once knew. A boy I used to play mario-kart with for hours, a boy who challenged me to trampoline contests, a boy who played all night ping pong tournaments with me, a boy who once lied to my father for me when I got my new shoes soaked at a saltwater beach. Let me tell you the story of a boy I once knew.

It's always hard to know what to call this boy, my almost stepbrother? My dad's ex-girlfriend's son? My almost kind-of, sort-of brother? None of it feels right. Although all those over-complicated options are better than what he is, a boy failed by the Tasmanian Health System.

The boy I once knew is dead; he killed himself just two days after being discharged from an adolescent psychiatric hospital in Melbourne. He had to travel to Melbourne just to get the vital help he needed, because, even though Tasmania is home to over 112,600 young people [1], we still don't have a dedicated adolescent mental health ward. Meaning young people like the boy I once knew, who are suffering, are forced to travel to the mainland to receive the help they need to survive. Where after they cross the Strait, they are cut off from essential support systems like friends, family, and familiarity, and all of this comes at an atrocious out-of-pocket price.

Almost half of young Australian women, and a third of young Australian men suffer from a mental illness. [2] Still, the Tasmanian Government does not provide them with the essential life saving services they need desperately, letting the young people of Tasmania down so badly, it is killing them.

In the 2022 budget, the Tasmanian Government spent over 10 million dollars more on renovating the Derwent Entertainment Center than they spent on Tasmanian adolescent mental health services collectively [3]. We can see 'What Matters' to the Tasmanian Government is clearly not the young people under their care.

But 'What Matters' to me is that Tasmania develops the essential life-saving services it desperately needs. 'What Matters' to me is that innocent people like the boy I once knew do not have to keep dying just to barely get the Government's attention. 'What Matters' to me is that the mother of this boy I once knew gets the justice she deserves. She fought for years to implement the services her son desperately needed and didn't get, and was denied at almost every turn. 'What Matters' is her subsequent suicide on her son's death anniversary does not go without justice. 'What Matters' is that she and her son get justice for the criminal lack of adolescent mental services available in Tasmania, even when neither of them is around to see it.

The family of the boy I once knew is now broken forever, both son and mother gone from this world. So thinking for a second that the lack of Tasmanian adolescent mental health services doesn't affect every single Tasmanian, is not an option. We must implement policy that will stop these all too-common tragedies from continuing to devastate families in Tasmania, We must implement what will be life-saving changes.

So What does Matter to me?

Overall 'What Matters' is Tasmania gets the dedicated adolescent mental health inpatient and outpatient wards it vitally needs. 'What Matters' is immediately implementing policy to stop the deaths of innocent struggling young Tasmanians, who deserve better. 'What Matters' is making meaningful change right now, so the story of a boy I once knew, won't have to be anyone else's story.