My Role In Helping Mental Illness Sufferers

Mental illness is a condition which causes serious disorder in behaviour or thinking, in other words it is your level of psychological well-being which affects how you think, feel and act. For example, depression is a mood disorder causing you to feel extremely sad or lose interest in everyday activities, and schizophrenia is a condition that causes you to have a decreased ability to understand reality.

Mental illness is caused by a combination of genetic, environmental and psychological factors such as severe emotional, physical or sexual abuse, feelings of low self-esteem, loss of a parent, neglect, or a mutated gene.

Mental illness prevails because there is no complete cure for it. Unfortunately mental illness is often ignored or sufferers are told to “get over themselves” which makes the problem worse and results in people being less inclined to seek help for their condition. It has a definite social stigma attached to it and people believe, for example, that schizophrenics are dangerous and that anorexia is self-inflicted. People suffering from mental illness are often ostracized making them feel abnormal, isolated and worse about themselves.

It has however been discovered that specialised group or individual therapy is beneficial to most mental illness sufferers therefore offering a solution. Therapy sessions explore thoughts, feelings and behaviours and can teach mental illness sufferers helpful coping mechanisms and strategies to ensure that they are able to live life fully in spite of their illness, and with few relapses. Group sessions offer support and understanding and help people realise they are not suffering alone.

Many sufferers are of school going age and their symptoms are worsened by the pressures of school, like peer pressure, having to do presentations, being forced into social situations and the unrelenting pressure of having to obtain good marks. For this reason schools should get involved in establishing student support groups where students can meet after school in a safe environment with like-minded people to discuss their problems and coping mechanisms. These groups should be organised between the principal, school psychologist and students who would like to help run or be involved in the groups. Another option for students is booking an appointment with the school psychologist or talking to a trusted teacher or friend. Schools should prioritise mental health and should offer at least one day a term where students can come to school but be excused from lessons to talk to the school psychologist.

Most people cannot afford private therapists and as a result do not go to counselling. Government should step up and offer professional therapy and counselling free of charge or at affordable rates to benefit society at large. Government could advertise this counselling online, through social media, and television to target sufferers, making them aware that therapy is available to help them and at the same time helping educate people and making them understand that mental illness is not something to be feared and that it is more common than people think.

These proposed measures introduced at school and Government level will greatly improve

general well-being of sufferers as therapy will teach them coping mechanisms which will help them to deal positively with their mental illnesses. Schools allowing students to take a break from busy school life and having a mental health day would improve student morale and also possibly give them a day where they can catch up on work. With the Government advertising that mental illness is not a reason to exclude or discriminate against people, this would make individuals who have mental illnesses feel more included in society which ultimately helps them live better lives.

Personally, I feel that my role in helping mental illness sufferers is to talk to them and make them feel special, loved and accepted as they are. With immediate effect I can volunteer to attend group therapy sessions and listen to people talking about their mental health issues which would give me a better understanding of what they go through. I can also talk to sufferers online through mental health websites and forums ensuring that they feel accepted and not alone. I can also spread the word about mental illnesses by making blog posts and spreading general messages about mental health awareness on my social media and amongst my peers.

I may also consider studying psychology at University to enable me to qualify as a psychologist as a full or part time career specifically to help those who suffer from mental illness.