

Stacey, 52

Nurse, carer & mother-of-two who faced challenges in accessing anorexia nervosa treatment for her daughter, supports the launch of InsideOut Institute's eClinic, **BENDIGO**

Nurse and mother-of-two, Stacey, 52, Bendigo, cared for her daughter, Amelia, who battled anorexia nervosa from the age of 18.

Amelia first began experiencing symptoms of anorexia nervosa while living away from home, during her university studies in Tasmania. She started noticing the warning signs – obsessive low-calorie eating, over-exercising, and dramatic weight loss – which eventually led to her diagnosis around 18 months post- initial symptoms.

Characterised by psychiatric and physical symptoms,^{1,2} anorexia nervosa is a serious and complex illness marked by extreme food restriction and significant weight loss.³

Stacey acknowledges a combination of factors may have triggered Amelia's challenge with anorexia nervosa, including the pressures associated with being an elite lawn bowls athlete, difficulty forming friendships during her adolescence, and possessing perfectionist personality traits.

The illness compromised Amelia's quality of life, causing her to be severely withdrawn, isolated, and weak – making even the smallest of tasks draining. As the effects of her eating disorder intensified – marked by oversleeping and exhaustion – Amelia became increasingly isolated, eventually forcing her to return home from Tasmania.

During the most critical period of Amelia's illness, Stacey had to step away from work for six months to provide full-time care and manage refeeding Amelia from home.

Despite being a healthcare professional herself, Stacey felt ill-equipped to help her daughter deal with the struggles of an eating disorder. After local services discharged Amelia, they were referred to a specialised unit in Melbourne, requiring a two-hour drive each way, twice-a-week, for nearly a year.

The challenges in accessing care for her daughter reinforces Stacey's strong support of the InsideOut Institute's eClinic – Australia's first free, fully online, national treatment hub for eating disorders. It offers flexible, self-paced programs, including BEeT for binge eating and bulimia nervosa, SkilledED for a wider range of eating disorder symptoms, SupportedED for carers, and a Healthcare Professionals (HCP) Hub. By removing traditional barriers to care, the eClinic ensures people like Stacey and Amelia can access vital support when they need it most, regardless of their postcode, socio-economic status, or cultural background.¹

As Stacey reflects on her experience as a carer and her daughter's lived experience with an eating disorder, she explains how immensely helpful it would have been to have had free access to evidence-based programs available anytime, from anywhere.

Today, Stacey urges those experiencing eating disorder symptoms, as well as their carer's, to explore the InsideOut eClinic resources to help guide their journey to recovery.

This is Stacey's story.

Stacey's daughter Amelia developed disordered eating after moving interstate for her university studies.

"She became very withdrawn. Everything revolved around food. She couldn't go out with friends, not even for a coffee. She didn't have the energy, and she didn't want people to see her like that," said Stacey.

The illness also placed a heavy emotional and financial burden on their family.

"We were completely isolated. Friends stopped visiting because it was too confronting. Family didn't understand, and often inadvertently made it worse with their comments around food and appearance.

"The fewer people who had contact with Amelia, the easier it was," Stacey said.

"It felt like we had no choice but to face it alone.

"The financial strain added another layer of stress. But at the end of the day, I'm a mother, and I did absolutely everything in my power to help my daughter," said Stacey.

To make matters even harder, Amelia was resistant to treatment. She was silent during therapy sessions, and lacked interest in treatment. Despite this, Stacey was determined to help her daughter and could see her daughter's underlying desire to recover.

"The medical system didn't have the training or tools to support us properly.

"One mental health worker even gave Amelia a brochure suggesting she should 'start a new diet or join a gym'. It was shocking and completely inappropriate," Stacey said.

"Even my medical knowledge as a nurse didn't equip me to deal with this.

"I turned to support groups run by other mothers who were caring for loved ones living with eating disorders. I found this to be more helpful than anything else," said Stacey.

As a healthcare professional and devoted mother, Stacey advocates for earlier and more accessible evidence-based support to combat the challenges she endured during her daughter's journey to recovery.

"There's no shame in it. Eating disorders are not a choice.

"The sooner you get help, the better the chance at recovery," Stacey said.

"And now, with digital tools like the eClinic, there are options. Support is becoming readily available, and barriers are being overcome."

Stacey also urges fellow carers to seek support for themselves too.

"You feel like you're alone, but you're not. There is help for you, too.

"Having a platform like the eClinic, where both of us could have accessed Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) and support on our terms and from the comfort of our own home, would have made a world of difference," said Stacey.

"The eClinic provides resources which would have helped us both to feel seen, supported, and guided."

Stacey has a message for those currently living with an eating disorder, and their carers:

"You're not alone. Don't wait. Recovery is possible, and with the right tools, it can start today."

To learn more about the InsideOut Institute's eClinic, head to eclinic.insideoutinstitute.org.au.

Should you suspect you, or a loved one, may be living with an eating disorder, speak to your local healthcare practitioner without delay, or head to insideoutinstitute.org.au to complete their online screener and assessment, and to access more information and professional support.

Australian professional patient support services offering 24/7 helpline services include:

- Butterfly National Helpline: 1800 334 673
- Beyond Blue: 1300 22 4636
- LifeLine: 13 11 14
- Men's Line Australia: 1300 78 99 78
- Kids Help Line: 1800 55 1800

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To coordinate an interview with Stacey, please contact:

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References

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2. Eating Disorders Victoria. Classifying Eating Disorders 2024 [Available from: <https://eatingdisorders.org.au/eating-disorders/what-is-an-eating-disorder/classifying-eating-disorders/>].
3. Walsh BT, Hagan KE, Lockwood C. A systematic review comparing atypical anorexia nervosa and anorexia nervosa. Int J Eat Disord. 2023;56(4):798-820.