

## **Audio Transcript**

I want to talk to you today about a lesson that has taken me over 30 years to learn. That lesson is the danger and trap of enabling.

At 32, I found myself a single mother with three children under eight.

One of my sons struggled throughout his school life with learning difficulties that were identified but hard to effectively do anything about. In hindsight I can now see that he probably started having mental health issues from around age 13. Unbeknown to me he started to self-manage his problems by smoking marijuana by 15. At 17 he left home to live with his then girlfriend's family and then on to another group of friends. There he had his first child. After the breakup with his son's mother, he broke down. I brought him back to live with me.

Eight years later, he had had two more sons with a new partner. By then I had my son, his partner and her son from a previous relationship, their two sons, and my son who was still at university, all living with me in a three-bedroom house.

When my son's second relationship broke down, his partner moved out and took her three children with her. This left me at home with my two sons.

From when my son came back to live with me, I was effectively his mental health support worker as well as his mum. With the diagnosis of anxiety and depression he was considered sick enough to receive a disability pension but not sick enough to qualify for case management or a support worker. He saw a private psychiatrist regularly. This doctor kept telling him that medication would not effectively control his mental health problems until he stopped smoking marijuana. Finally, he took himself off to do a residential rehabilitation program which lasted about 12 months. This addressed his addiction problems but not his mental health issues.

He came home without any follow-up or support services in place; expected to be well enough to organise these for himself. He could not do this, so soon lapsed back into old habits, merely being medicated by his GP.

I retired from work with health issues, so I was then home with him all the time. I began to suspect that a new relationship had introduced him to harder drugs than marijuana. I became increasingly anxious about how fast I was going through my superannuation, well on the way to no longer affording rental housing.

One day, when I was particularly distressed, I was referred to Joseph's corner, and I found their counselling sessions invaluable and free! Over time, my counsellors helped me to see that my life with my son could not keep going the way it was. I was excusing him, drifting through life in a drug induced haze because of his unresolved mental issues. While I was giving him a place to live and money if he needed it, I was ENABLING him to avoid facing his issues and taking responsibility for his own life and actions. I was not doing him or me any good. This was very much at odds with my mothering instinct and it took a lot of hard talking from my counsellor for me to see what I needed to do.

At 64, I applied for an aged care package, and on a waiting list of 12 months for secure housing. I then had to tell my son that he had this time to find himself somewhere else to live. I was scared that I would push his mental health over the edge but was surprised by how well he took the news. He started looking for other housing options and though limited, an agency connected him back to DHS for further assessment and diagnosed him as having bipolar disorder. This meant that he finally qualified for a case manager and support worker, encouraging him to apply for another rehabilitation program and community support to find permanent housing.

That was when I moved into my secure housing and am now well settled into a life that I love, with far less stress.

Without the counsellors at Joseph's corner none of this would have happened. They helped me to see what I needed to do and gave me the courage and support to do it. I thank God I was led to them.

So, my message for you today is please be aware of the situations in your life where you may be enabling loved ones to avoid facing their issues and learning from their mistakes. Not enabling has been a hard lesson but one well worth learning.

I still go to Josephs Corner, as I know that they are there whenever I need someone to talk to and help me sort out my thoughts and feelings.