

# HOPE IS WHERE

SENATOR JACQUI LAMBIE MADE NEWS IN 2015 WHEN SHE SPOKE IN PARLIAMENT ABOUT HER SON'S ADDICTION TO THE DRUG ICE. DYLAN MILVERTON, NOW 23, HAS SINCE OVERCOME HIS ADDICTION, BUT THE PAIR THINK IT'S ESSENTIAL TO SPEAK OUT. THEY TELL THEIR STORIES TO CATH JOHNSEN.

## Jacqui

I SERVED IN the armed forces for 10 years. One day I was doing push-ups and pulled a muscle in my back. It kept causing me problems, but I was in denial, and the last thing I wanted was to get downgraded.

So I tried to hide the fact and get on with it, but in the last six months before I was medically discharged, I'd be going into the toilets and lying on the floor and crying my eyes out because it was killing me. I started taking a lot of painkillers...

At the end of 1999 I was getting ready to go to East Timor and they put a flak jacket on me and I collapsed. I couldn't get back up. That was the end of my army career and the start of nine years of hell for me and the kids. I had a partner around that time and that deteriorated very quickly. From 2002 I brought up the kids by myself and descended into major depression. I was going round in circles and it got worse and worse by the year.

The kids were still young; Dylan would have been five or six years old when it first happened. To go from being physically fit in the army to being basically bedridden within 12 months... It was not just soul-destroying for me, but it affected everybody else in the household, too.

My battle was with pharmaceuticals and alcohol, because they really put the boot in the pain for a few hours. Whatever the medical professionals gave me, I put down my throat. I was down and out, and my head was in a fog from all the drugs and alcohol. I walked out in front of a car and tried to take my own life.

That landed me in a health clinic in Hobart and I started detoxing from all the alcohol and pharmaceuticals. I decided on that day: this is my second chance at life.

I went cold turkey on the pharmaceuticals, which led to a bout of chronic fatigue. I don't think Dylan went to school much during that time, because I couldn't get out of bed. When I had a shower, I had to have him standing there in case I passed out.

But I started doing little walks of about 15 minutes each, and then I built that up to an hour a day. I was no longer drinking alcohol or taking pharmaceuticals and that was when I started to turn our lives around.

From a very early age, Dylan had to help pick up the pieces and look after me. I think that once he left, it was fresh air for him; he didn't have to worry about Mum, and I think that's where it all came undone.

Once he got onto ice... I had never come across anything like that before. The person standing in front of me was just one really angry person. The look in his eyes was haunting.

But no matter what I tried to do I couldn't get him help. Politicians were living in denial and thinking that we didn't have an ice problem in this country. I thought, *I've only got one choice here*, and so I got up to do the speech in parliament, I took a big breath and went with it. I said, "My son is on ice, and there is an ice

epidemic in this country, so wake up."

I then had every rehabilitation centre ringing up saying, "We can help your child." Teen Challenge were one of the first ones that responded. They were extraordinary. They were more disciplined than the armed forces! And I thought – *this is what my son needs*. I had nothing left, I had no control, no matter what method I used, it didn't work. There's nothing worse, as a parent, than seeing your child suffering from an illness and being powerless. To other parents going through this, I say, if you've gotten to the point where you're walking on eggshells and you're hiding your purse, it's time to get help.

Dylan and I have always been quite close. He was basically my carer at one time. We have the same sense of humour and we've always been able to talk to each other. In the end, Dylan was not so much my son, he was my best mate.

He had an issue with me going public, and that divided us for a while. But he's been able to forgive me for that and I'm very grateful. I think there was always so much love, closeness and respect for each other, and that's what has seen our relationship through.

If Dylan puts his life experience and everything he has learned to good use, he can be anything or anyone that he wants to be. I'm really excited to see where he goes in life... He can only go on to much bigger and better things from here.

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# E THE HEART IS

## Dylan

I'M FROM TASMANIA... It's cold down there! My mum fell sick when I was young and my brother and I had to take care of her. I was about four or five when it happened. I just remember going and visiting her in hospital and I had to help out around the house. Other than that, my childhood was pretty good and my weekends were usually filled with playing sports.

I started using alcohol and cigarettes when I was nine years old. And then I got to high school and I started smoking marijuana and hanging around bad crowds. I think that led to other stuff, like stealing my mum's painkillers when she was sick.

I went on a bender with those, which caused Mum to call the police and have me taken to the mental clinic for a few days. I was pretty unstable and got kicked out of school. I know that she did everything, even then, in her power to help me out.

When I got into ice, Mum kicked me out of home. I was a bottom feeder – stealing and selling drugs, just to get by. It was nothing glamorous. I was always trying to chase that high, but in reality, I was at a low point.

I'd lost everything. I'd lost my family, all my friends, everything I owned. I wasn't healthy – I weighed about 65kg. But then one night I'd had a fight with the person I was staying with and I ended up sleeping in a shed in the backyard of an empty house. It was the middle of winter, so it was freezing. I'd stolen some curtains from the house for warmth and I was sleeping on the concrete floor. That was when I thought, *Oh man,*

*I'm not doing this anymore. I've got nothing to lose anyway.*

Once my court cases were settled, I moved into the Teen Challenge residential rehabilitation centre in Toowoomba, Queensland. It's a long program – it goes for 12 months! But it was probably the best 12 months of my life because you share it with 20 others who are going through the same thing as you, and you're all on one journey to do something good with yourselves.

I was really grateful that I had my own bed to sleep in, and I got to have a shower and three meals every day. I didn't have to worry about anyone turning up and causing trouble or anything like that. It was a good escape for me.

When I first rocked up there, I didn't

know whether I really wanted to change. I still had a bit of that old mentality about me. And I was still bitter and angry at my mum because she had told everyone publicly that I was an ice addict. I didn't know anything about her doing that until I was woken up by a mate and told I was on TV. That was a bit of a shock. I got on the phone to Mum straight away and I went off at her. She just hung up on me. At that time there was no relationship between us.

I achieved a lot of things at Teen Challenge, including a Certificate IV in Warehousing. I also worked on repairing my relationships with my family. I had to forgive myself for the things that I had done, and I realised that Mum went public about my drug problems because she had no choice. I wrote a letter apologising and sent it to Mum. At that point, I realised I wanted to prove to everybody that I wasn't a drug addict.

My recovery is definitely something that's going to be ongoing. I still have my struggles now. I've moved to Melbourne and I'm working in construction six days a week. It keeps me out of trouble, that's for sure. When I'm not working, I go to the gym, or to church.

Now I speak to Mum all the time and catch up with her whenever we can. I've always been proud of her – going from where she was to where she is now. It was a really big thing to see her sick for so long, and now she works more hours than I do!

When you're an addict, there's no point getting help unless you actually want to change. You can do 12 months of rehab and be the exact same person you were when you went in there. But if you know that you want to change, there is help out there. «

