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Christine George at Bentley Hospital.

Christine lifts lid on depression

WHEN Wilson woman Christine George entered the surrounds of Bentley Hospital in 1997, she was a disillusioned, depressed mess, unable to cope with the constraints and pressures of daily life.

Attempted overdoses, self-hatred and self-mutilation had become routine.

But those days are a far cry from the life of Christine today. She is an inspiring young woman endeavouring to make a difference to local youth.

Fed up with the social taboos and stigma surrounding mental illnesses, Christine has embarked on a project to change widespread negative perceptions.

Last Friday, she applied to the Office of Youth Affairs for a \$2000 grant to produce a book about her experiences in surviving clinical depression.

But Christine's story has been a battle of colossal realms — a stack of journals is evidence enough.

"I could just print everything word for word and it would be a story in itself, but that's not the way it is going to be," she explained.

"People use comments about mental illnesses so flippantly and they just don't realise the implications they can cause," she said.

"When I was admitted I was at the

end of my tether," she said. "The psychiatrist asked me why I was in and I said because my birthday is in a week and I don't want to be alive for it."

Christine confessed that birthdays and celebrations were especially difficult times for her.

"People expect you to be happy and you just aren't," she said. "I couldn't see my life past 20. How do you tell people that you feel like dying?"

"I had a split persona. At home I was just a naughty kid and outside people thought I was just a shy girl — they had no idea what was going on inside my head."

Within a year, Christine, who was 14, was questioning her existence and had fallen from her Year 8 academic status of A-grades to D and F grades.

From June 1997 to March 1998, Christine spent seven months in and out of Bentley Hospital.

"Being in hospital is similar to jail. It is a locked ward and you have no freedom, except you are not there for doing something wrong."

Through her membership with the Association of Relatives and Friends of the Mentally Ill, Christine hopes to move awareness into schools.

"People just don't realise that early detection can mean being able to manage the case," she said.

— NICOLE COX