

The Mind Reader

MENTAL HEALTH NEWS, ARTICLES
AND INFORMATION

December 2018

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Letter from Liz



Dear Mind Readers,

Another year is coming to a close and what a year it has been for WayAhead. This issue of the Mind Reader will look back at just some of the highlights from the year and there have been many for us in 2018. We have had the biggest Mental Health Month yet; we have travelled around NSW, as well as interstate and overseas to meet consumers, carers, workplaces and sector peers face-to-face; we have continued to build on our presence and profile; and we have reached more people than ever before.

Late last month, we held our Annual General Meeting where many joined us to hear about our work, nominate as board members and hear from our partner across the border, Mental Illness Education ACT. It shows the level of interest that people have been taking in our work, the interest in being involved as members and board directors and the strength of the relationships we have been building over the course of this year and the many years preceding it.

There are so many who have supported WayAhead's work and contributed to this year's successes. Staff, volunteers and board members have worked with dedication and a commitment to innovation and continuous improvement of our work.

From all here at WayAhead, best wishes for the holidays and into the 2019.

Elizabeth Priestley

[Read our 2018 Annual Report HERE](#)

MIEACT helping everyone affected by bullying through their innovative program



During the WayAhead AGM in late November, Mental Illness Education ACT (MIEACT Program Manager Megan Mills presented on the findings of their new anti-bullying education program No Labels.

MIEACT has been working directly with its youth population when designing No Labels. 65% of the students they spoke to during the research and design phase said the current education on bullying was not representative and therefore not helpful for their experience.

Taking a behaviour-centred approach, focusing on three areas: participating, experiencing and witnessing, MIEACT found that mixing discussion with awareness building, and anonymous reporting and assessment created a very honest platform where participants could self-analyse their behaviour and disclose participation in bullying behaviour without fear of judgement or “labels” from their peers. With content and discussion driven directly by participants, 63% of the pilot group stated that the No Labels program represented their experience with bullying.

Since No Labels’ launch in early August, MIEACT has seen positive outcomes, measured by the use of formative assessment tool, Plickers, allowing our facilitators to capture responses and measure the content’s efficacy Live!

Some of the data captured to date reflects:

- There is a high need for support and strategies around bullying to be provided in Schools – 85.5% of students in No Labels sessions across the ACT are concerned about the occurrence of bullying on some level.
- The majority of participants have a great understanding about motivations for bullying, but are initially unable to articulate strategies for responding to or coping with bullying behaviour.
- Self-reported participation in bullying behaviour increased to 75% – an increase of self-awareness sitting at approximately 25% – and an overall average of 75% of participants in each session identifying as having participated in bullying behaviour.
- It has been pleasing to see the impact of honest conversations around bullying behaviour, and strategies to address this behaviour among all behaviour streams: participating, witnessing or experiencing with 84% of students indicating holding an increased confidence in implementing strategies to address bullying as a result of the session.

World's Largest Mental Health Awareness Lesson



Around 1500 Year 9 and 10 students from around NSW came to Sydney Olympic Park to take part in the NSW Department of Education's Guinness World Record-breaking largest mental health awareness lesson. The students were joined by more than 9000 others online through a livestream.

Kristen Douglas, headspace national manager, and Kim Harper, a PDHPE teacher from Sydney Secondary College, ran the lesson, which included clips from celebrities and politicians, including Prime Minister Scott Morrison. WayAhead joined several other organisations there on the day.

[Watch a video from the day](#)

WayAhead joined in the festivities with a stall that students and teachers could visit after the lesson. Students could cast votes on which "Stress Less Tips" they liked best and "Laugh Each Day" was a clear winner. The selfie frames, carrying Mental Health Month 2018's "Share A..." messages, were also a big hit, with many students gathering with groups of friends to take photos.



Buying a packet of mental wellbeing



If you were wandering around the Sydney CBD in late March or early April, you might have spotted a vending machine, standing alone in the middle of Martin Place, Pitt Street Mall or even Customs House Square.

It looked a lot like an ordinary vending machine that sells chips, lollies and chocolates to hungry office workers or shoppers. If you had a chance to take a look, or even buy a package, you would have seen that the machine was selling something very different. Instead of being branded with “Smiths” or “Skittles”, the packaged read “Reassurance”, “Courage” and “Friendship”.

Welcome to the world of Intangible Goods.

Intangible Goods is the brainchild of advertising creatives, Mark Starmach and Elizabeth Commandeur, and was developed and exhibited with support from the City of Sydney’s Art and About public art program. It has been in the works for more than a year and finally came to fruition earlier this year in some of the most iconic places in Sydney’s CBD. We spoke to Mark when he dropped by the WayAhead offices to talk to us about the project.

“At the beginning, it was honestly just a bit of a creative release and a bit of a thought experiment. We have these things in our heads and in our minds that we need. What if they were actually available on a supermarket shelf?” said Mark, of the initial impetus for Intangible Goods.

“I think often mental health is perceived as something really heavy and confronting, especially stuff like mental illness, schizophrenia and all that sort of thing is really big and scary so [trying to] break it down, make it bitesize and snack-size, that sort of became the objective.”

The creatives were aware of the possibility of potentially reaching thousands of people so they worked with clinicians and the general public to develop each of their Intangible Goods. Mental health professionals Barbara LeBas, Dr Tim Sharp, and Charlotte Stapf worked closely with Mark and Liz to ensure that there was a solid grounding for the goods that they created. Mark and Liz also shared surveys with Sydney-based groups online to get feedback.

“We got over 500 responses from Sydneysiders but 600 responses overall... From that, certain needs simmered to the top and so it was a very clear hierarchy... right at the top, a need for greater sense of connection with others. Slightly below, there was a split between structure and spontaneity, which are at opposite ends of the spectrum, and then slightly below that was confidence... From those, Liz and I developed concepts for each of the products and then we just kept liaising with Barbara, Tim and Charlotte,” Mark said.

“[The first round of goods] were kind of like if I typed something into Google, I’d get that response. It was super broad and applied to everyone. The second round was completely the opposite. It was way too specific, it was like we kind of developed them for ourselves and then when we tested them on other people, it just didn’t resonate and didn’t work but then we kind of got there in the end.”

The project certainly did get there in the end, with thousands of Intangible Goods sold over the three weeks that the project was running. The stock often ran low or completely sold out by mid-afternoon. Feedback seemed to support the popularity of the packages with lots of positive stories reaching the creators through social media. Mark shared the story about a young dancer who got in touch after a performance.

“One girl was going to a ballet recital in the morning and then she was walking across Martin Place and she saw the machine and she saw “Reassurance”, which is what she needed,” he said.

“Reassurance is a card where you’re reminding yourself of your previous confidence when you’ve felt weak so it’s this little contract that you sign and put in your wallet. And so she took a picture of that and shared that with us and reached out to us, saying how it helped her get through the day and made her feel less nervous.”

We asked Mark why he thought the Intangible Goods had been so well-received and why it seemed to work.

“I think a lot of it is honesty. Just being honest with yourself and doing a bit of an audit and so I suppose, accidentally, the machine forced you to do that by thinking “What do I need?” and then it’s presenting you with all these things.”

The team at WayAhead really loved the concept too, with staff members visiting the Intangible Goods vending machine and sharing the packages with each other.

“We really love the concept behind Intangible Goods. It is such a simple, effective way of starting conversations and making little changes in our daily lives for better mental health. At WayAhead, we received a sample of each of the Intangible Goods and we really enjoyed opening them up, sharing them around the office and seeing how clever and insightful they were. Although the messages seem simple, each Intangible Good actually conveys complex, best-practice messages about better mental health and wellbeing,” said Marge Jackson, Senior Manager at WayAhead.

Proceeds from the sales of Intangible Goods were donated to several mental health organisations including WayAhead. For Mark and Liz, raising funds for charity was always a part of the process. Their work in advertising has also been used to support other charities too, like Amnesty International Australia and Foodbank.

“We’ve done things in the past like that for charity, where you give something and it’s more than what you’d typically see, like a badge or a teddy bear or whatever it is. People engage with it,” said Mark.

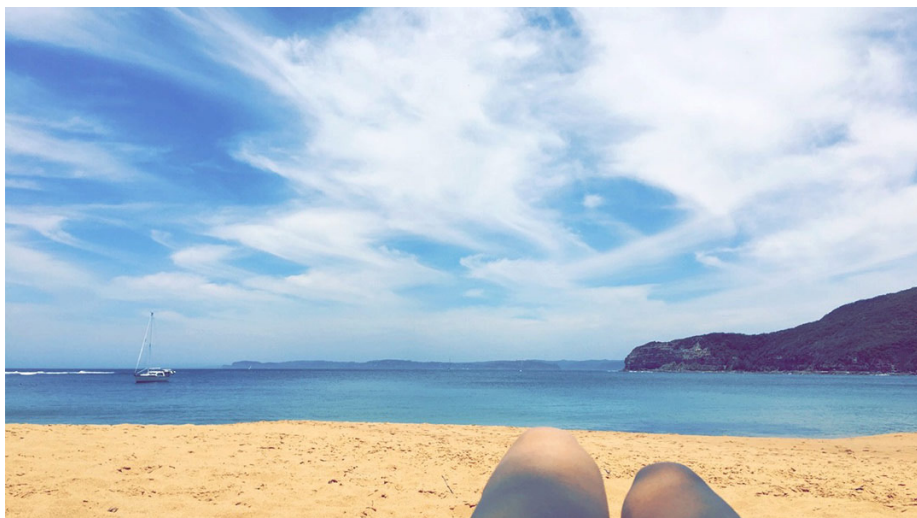
Since the end of the project, a number of organisations, including workplaces, schools and community groups, have been in touch with the Liz and Mark to see if they could host the Intangible Goods vending machine.

“We’ve had some enquiries from a number of people, like businesses, who want to run it in their workplace... city councils also want to bring the machine out for local festivals and that sort of thing so there’s been a little bit of interest there. And medical conferences – that’s the other one – so mental health conferences, and so we’re working out how to do that,” said Mark.

“People have been asking if they can get their hands on the products without the vending machine, just send it online so we’re working out ways to make that happen.”

By Tasnim Hossain

It's Summer Time: We Need to Talk About 'Summer Bodies' and Body Image



Summer is now officially here, with the weather warming up around Australia. As the layers are shed and people start heading towards the beach, certain phrases start cropping up:

"Beach Body in 7 Days!" from the Women's Health Magazine.

"Get Your Summer Body Now!" from Oxygen Magazine.

To be fair, other magazines do fare slightly better: *"Crush Your Life Goals: Get a strong bod"* Cosmopolitan

But from magazine covers to TV to the online sphere, there are strong social cues that it is summer time and that your body needs to look a certain way to enjoy it.

WayAhead spoke to the Butterfly Foundation, an organisation dedicated to providing support for people with disordered eating and body image issues, about this phenomenon and the risks of this increased pressure on body image across both on social media, traditional media and other advertising platforms.

"Over the festive season, Butterfly's National Helpline tends to see an increase in the number of calls and webchats. There is an increase in advertisement and hashtags focusing on 'bikini bodies', 'shredding', 'summer bodies', dieting and exercising. We have constant access to images of people, their food, their lives and quite frequently their bodies," a spokesperson for the Butterfly Foundation said.

"This can lead to unhelpful comparisons, pressure to achieve a certain body type and may contribute to body dissatisfaction. Advertisements such as these may encourage [people] to 'fix' or 'alter' their appearance rather than seeking health professional advice,"

Dr Jennie Small, a Senior Lecturer at the University of Technology, Sydney, wrote a research paper last summer analysing the phenomenon of women's "beach body" in Australian magazines. Dr Small's research found that throughout the year, women's magazines focused on women's bodies in a myriad of ways – hair, skin, make-up, body shape and clothing – but during the summer, the focus was specifically on the "summer beach body". The magazines implied that women's bodies are on display during the summer, and by repeatedly showing pictures of slim, toned muscles and fit bodies in bikinis, these magazine covers targeted women's feelings of insecurity which ultimately made it easier for marketers to sell things to women.

In fact, the popular concept of a "bikini body" was actually created as part of a marketing campaign from the 1960s for a weight loss company called Slenderella. Their tagline at the time it was created was: "High firm bust – hand span waist – trim, firm hips – slender graceful legs – a bikini body!"

While these specific words are no longer as widely used, the concept of a bikini body remains fairly similar. This is reflected in Dr Small's research, which concluded that the favoured body shape is slim (no larger than an

Australian size 12), toned, tanned and fit. Dr Small recognised that the characteristics of the summer body have broadened in recent years, but the changes have been slight.

Advertising in Australia is mostly self-regulated with a code of conduct. While the code adopted by the Australian Association of National Advertisers (AANA) regulates the use of models in bikinis, the regulation itself refers to the use of nudity and whether the portrayal of people depicted is discriminatory. The code does not have clear guidelines on how bodies are portrayed and how this may negatively affect viewers. Many of these marketing images, which come under this regulation, and the ones on social media, which do not, are professionally shot, airbrushed or digitally enhanced. It is unrealistic for viewers to compare the way they look to these models and social media influencers.

The Butterfly Foundation recognises that there is a positive aspect to social media through raising awareness around good mental health and wellbeing, and through creating spaces where people can connect and reach out for help.

However, they also recommend that people consider which accounts they follow and that it might be helpful to unfollow accounts that raise uncomfortable feelings or comparisons.

“Monitor the changes in your mood after doing this – it’s a simple change but an effective way of controlling what we are viewing and its influence on our self-esteem and body image,” a spokesperson for the Butterfly Foundation said.

If you, or anyone you know is experiencing an eating disorder or body image concerns, you can call the Butterfly Foundation National Helpline on 1800 33 4673 (ED HOPE) or email support@thebutterflyfoundation.org.au

By Cindee Duong

Helping Your Anxious Child – An interview with Professor Ron Rapee



As a parent or teacher, it can be hard to know how to help a child you think might be dealing with anxiety. For more than 25 years, Professor Rapee, of Macquarie University's Centre for Emotional Health, has been at the forefront of studying how to best treat anxiety in children. Although anxiety can have a significant effect on a child's life, it is highly treatable and adults can often recognise it in their children if they have an understanding of what to look for. For many parents, Professor Rapee is someone who can help them navigate what is best for their child.

"One of the really common questions that I get often is "my child's worried, or my child's anxious – do they need help? Or should they get help?" And my answer there is "it really depends on the impact on your child's life";" said Professor Rapee.

Professor Rapee's research has seen him developing and evaluating the Cool Kids program, which works with anxious children, aged seven to seventeen, and their families. It is a Mental Health Matters Award-winning program that is informed by the latest research and focusses on teaching hands-on skills.

"We teach very common-sense, very practical, skills to young people and to their parents, to teach them ways of managing and handling their anxiety," Professor Rapee said.

"We're not doing anything fancy, we're not going to try and uncover your inner secrets or anything, it's just going to teach you practical ways for handling your anxiety."

"It doesn't hurt anyone, there's nothing negative about it, so if the anxiety is at a point where it's stopping your child from achieving their potential, from where it's impacting on their life, where it's causing a problem for them or their family, then why not do the program?"

There are signs that parents and teachers can look out for if they think a child might be experiencing anxiety. These could include both thoughts that the child may express to parents or teachers, as well as behaviours that might reflect their anxiety.

"Kids are often very shy and withdrawn, have trouble mixing or making friends, they express a lot of worry, so they might worry about all sorts of little things and they'll often say those worries to their parents. They might worry about their parent being killed in an accident. They might be worried about just normal, run-of-the-mill things, like family finances or they might worry about what other kids think of them or kids laughing at them... they might take an incredibly long time to do homework, or they might be really slow at getting ready in the morning or they might really be hesitant about not wanting to sleepover, so they avoid a lot of things," said Professor Rapee. "They're the sorts of behaviours that parents and teachers can look for; it's the avoidance, it's the worries, the hesitation, nervousness and shyness."

For children who experience these thoughts and behaviours, the Cool Kids program helps them and their families with treatment.

"[We] teach the kids to think more realistically, we give them a lot of education, we teach them to gradually face their fears systematically and we teach the parents different ways of handling the young people and different ways of interacting with them...it's very structured, very systematic and the important thing is that we get really good results."

The rigorous, evidence-based approach has clearly been working, with significant success in treating young clients over the last two and a half decades. According to the research on the current version of the program, Professor Rapee says that 60 per cent of children are completely free of their anxiety disorder at the end of treatment. However, over the following three to six months, about 70 to 75 per cent of children are shown to have recovered from their anxiety.

"The majority of kids do get better so that's really wonderful. Occasionally, we get emails from parents who tell us how their child's life has turned around and it's really nice to see."

This is a marked difference from how anxiety in children has been viewed in the past. Over the last two and a half decades, Professor Rapee has seen both the evolution in the emerging field of research as well as the increase in public awareness.

"When I started doing this work, most teachers, most professional psychologists used to say "Oh, anxiety, there's no such thing as anxiety in kids. Kids are happy. Childhood's a happy time. What do they have to worry about? They just sit around and play all day"...Back then, there were probably two or three scientists in the world who were doing research in this area. Now there are actually hundreds; there are dozens in Australia alone."

Along with an increase in academic research, Professor Rapee has also seen a change in attitudes towards mental illness in children. He shares a story to illustrate the changes that have taken place in Australian society over the last several decades.

"I gave a talk a few months ago to a group of people and there was a man – a man stood up, he was of a traditional Australian background, I think must be rural and he was around 60 or so, and he said "I was quite a shy, sad kid when I was a kid growing up but in my day, if you said anything, you'd get a slap and get told to get on with it" and I think that really summed up exactly the difference between then and now."

Although people's understanding and perceptions are changing, for Professor Rapee, there is still a lot more work to do to help young people and their families.

"Certainly, over the last twenty years, it's been a very exciting area to work in and there's still a huge amount that we need to work out. There are still a lot of things we need to learn."

He'll Be Right: My Journey with Anxiety



I was probably always what people would assume was just shy, as a child, but there was always that worry that other kids didn't seem to have. Things got really bad around Year 7, when I was going into high school and I wasn't dealing very well with all the social changes and I started to withdraw more and more and I stopped going to school often. It just kept getting more and more difficult to force myself to go. I started seeing a team of people but they were pretty bad at what they do.

I was extremely depressed; the anxiety was a problem. I was ashamed of all of that, being found out by my peer group. I mean, things have improved in these last twenty something years but certainly, at that point in time, men were not supposed to be depressed or have feelings. You were supposed to just be confident and that's the sort of image that was in Australia. And that definitely was not very helpful to me at that point in time. I know I would have taken my own life if I knew my peers had found out about it. That was the level of shame around my anxiety and depression. The team that I saw, they gave up on me when I was at such a young age, it might have been Year 8. They said I could keep coming but they didn't feel it would be helpful and this was a team of people who were supposed to be experts in their field. I had to learn how to do it on my own without anyone's help.

I was spending a lot of time on my own, not doing much. I was still managing to keep a few friends, but I was still hiding it from them. Definitely all that time, in those formative years, being away from those social interactions certainly didn't help. My social anxiety was really terrible; just being able to communicate with people I'd met was very, very difficult. Things that seem crazy trivial now were impossible to me at the time.

This sort of stuff was not really well-established – depression, with men, even for women as well. There was certainly stigma, but more so for men. You look back on things like postpartum depression and things like that, it's a really only very recently in the last 10, 20 years that there is a mainstream understanding. And with men, there's always been that sort of, particularly in Australia as well, that macho sort of society; you suck it up, you know. I think that's overall been damaging for me and for many men. I mean, look at the suicide rates with young men and feeling like you can't speak about these things, feeling shame to be able to speak about these things, bottling it up, not having an outlet.

That feeling of hopelessness, the impossibility of change, and all that stuff, there were definitely times when I had that feeling of hopelessness and "this is never going to change, this is all I'm going to have and is there any point to life?" Being able to find those first steps, I think, are so important. You look at that cliff face and you want to get to the top and you think "maybe these steps will work" and you get up that first step and you look back and you can look back and think "this is how far I've come, this is progress, I've done something". It is so important to just be able to say "this isn't hopeless, this isn't all I have for life, I can move on, I can progress and it's a hard climb but I can get to the top, and that was something that's a huge thing for getting out of that point, just making that small amount of progress and I did it clumsily and I did it without help."

Those first steps are often times so difficult and so stress inducing but I think that helped me. When I am

feeling down, even now, when I'm down in the dumps and the anxiety is bad, I can look back and think about how far I've come. Even if I'm focussing in my head about all the negative, all the bad things, I remind myself that this is the progress that I have made, from not leaving the house, never wanting to leave the house on my own, to living a fairly productive life.

It's been good going to the Anxiety Support Groups. It's helping me to look constructively about what I did. I remember the first or second group I went to, there was this guy who had a daughter who was 20 and she's not leaving the house and "you seem confident, how did you get from there to where you are?" and I kind of just froze because I thought, "well, how did I do these things?" Unfortunately, it takes a lot of distress, a lot of pain, exposure therapy, also challenging thoughts has been helpful but not to a 100 per cent. I know I'm being irrational, I know when the anxiety is setting in, it's not a logical thing, because I'm quite a logical person, most of the time, but it doesn't make the feelings go away either. I guess mostly, it's been really just exposure, putting myself in difficult situations, continuing to do so. I didn't actually think I'd benefit from the support groups but I went as something that would make me uncomfortable, make me feel anxious, to challenge myself.

Going to the group was helpful, I have been open about things with friends, with family in the past, but until that point I'd never spoken to someone who had a similar experience. And I guess in those first few times at the support group, what made me keep wanting to come back was not just that it was good and freeing for me but some people did seem to take something from some of my experience, about what things have worked for me. It's good to always note that everyone's different and it's not an exact thing with psychology. What things help someone won't necessarily help someone else but still. It did make me think maybe I have something to offer in that area. I met someone there who works as a peer support worker, which wasn't a job I was aware of existing prior to that, and so I thought that's something I'd like try to do. One of the facilitators suggested maybe I wanted to try to facilitate a group so signed up for the training and I have started doing that as well. I have seen a few different psychologists, things like that, that have made suggestions to me a lot of which hasn't worked necessarily but it's still good, valid information that could work for other people.

I have always struggled with being vulnerable and trying things that sort of putting myself out there and saying "this is the best I can do" and then the possibility of people saying "well, that's shit." So that's always been a difficult thing for me – failure, fear of failure.

When I was younger I would tell people I was sick, just say sick, and try to avoid questions. I must have been 18 or something at that point and my friend and I were just hanging out, talking, and I told him about being depressed. I was thinking it was going to be such a big thing and then he was like "yeah, I've been depressed in my life as well". I thought "well, that didn't go so bad" and it was really kind of a blasé thing for him and then we went down and I told my other friend and it was quite freeing to sort of be able to talk about it and not be harshly judged. Some people see me go through some pretty bad times but those close friends I had made at that point are still good friends of mine now.

It does help me to go through certain scenarios in my head, most won't eventuate but I try to think of the worst things that could happen and think "can I be okay with that?" Unfortunately, bad experiences are going to happen and, you know, my bass teacher, when I first started playing said, "everyone makes mistakes, it's how you recover." Because you're going to make a mistake, but you can't just stop playing. You've got to get back into it and just keep going and try to make it as minimally impactful to the song as possible. Same with life. Try to take in that damage and not have it be something big. And over the years, I have gotten better with things like obsessing for weeks over if I've said something or done something or even silly, little things like you know when you go to pass someone and you both go the same direction, I think about it for hours afterwards.

I would love to be able to work with young people with anxiety, you know, being there for people, when I was most alone with it but just doing something, doing these groups and stuff, you know, trying to be helpful to people.

If this raises any concerns for you, please contact Lifeline on 13 11 14 or Mensline on 1300 78 99 78.

If you would like to know more about anxiety, contact us at the WayAhead Anxiety Disorders Information Line on 1300 794 992.

By an Anxiety Support Group attendee and facilitator as told to Tasnim Hossain

Why sharing the journey matters



What 2018's Mental Health Month theme means to one of the WayAhead team members.

Sometimes when things are bad, when my emotions are exhausted and overwhelming, when my eyes are puffy and red from crying, on the lowest days, despite all the feelings, I can, even in a small way, feel some comfort in the knowledge that I have connections. That I have people I can talk to who will make me laugh, or smile, or even just say “that sounds awful” – it seems that even the worst days are made bearable by knowing that I can connect with others. But that hasn't always been my world. I remember so clearly being in a room full of people, all having fun, and feeling utterly lost and hopeless because I was so lonely. So alone. Despite doing things which are “fun”, having no one to share it with, whether I wanted to or not, in-person or on the phone, the fun things felt empty somehow.

Loneliness has been shown to have as big a health impact as smoking, and, importantly, the perception of your own loneliness is more important than whether you see people every day, or are “objectively” alone. If you feel lonely, that's real for you. You can be surrounded by people and feel lonely, or you can be on your own and feel connected to others, but if you experience loneliness, you likely know the pang of the realisation that there's no one to share things with.

The theme of this year's Mental Health Month is Share the Journey, and whilst this might, for some, mean sharing a specific mental illness journey, it's mostly about the journeys everyone can share – the moments of social connection, of seeing and being seen, of feeling valid in the eyes and hearts of others. Something we all can benefit from, something that can improve our mental wellbeing no matter whether we have a diagnosed mental illness, or just coping with day-to-day life.

If loneliness is a sickness, the remedy is connectedness. We might connect with others to “cure” our own loneliness, or to prevent it in someone else. Like many positive actions, it benefits the giver and the giftee – sharing a cup of tea with a friend who has had a bit of a rough time will help them feel a bit more connected, but it will help you as well: the connection, and the reward of the comfort you've given another.

And while conquering loneliness might seem too big a task to imagine, sharing small things does make a difference, chips away at the mountain, carves paths to wellbeing.

Part of the Mental Health Month campaign this year is a series of postcards showing some of the small things people can do to increase social connectedness – Share a cuppa, a meal, a task, a song, a yarn, a hug – and the images show a wide variety of situations, including connection between people and animals (animals can be a great source of connectedness). If we can take small steps to connect with others, it does make a difference, however small. The postcards can also be written on and sent to someone – who doesn't love receiving some snail mail?

As a teenager, I had a few pen pals and seeing the envelopes, frequently brightly coloured or decorated with little drawings, gave me such excitement. I've recently taken up pen-palling again, and holding people in mind as

I write their letters, waiting expectantly for the reply, taking joy in each other's life in such a concentrated way makes me feel I have connections all over the world. And whilst I know that pen palling isn't for everyone, I think it's the small connections that can have the most impact. Things that don't feel like a burden, that are easy to do. Some people find connection in speaking to a room full of people, sharing their journey of mental illness, giving others connection and understanding through the power of contact – and that's hugely important. It's important that we hear more stories of all parts of the spectrum of mental health. Some people might find individual or group therapy the best way for them to share their journey. But social connectedness is important for all of us – and it will look different for each of us.

The more we work on our mental health when we are well and the more connections we build when everything's fine, the stronger we will be when things get a bit rough and the bigger our safety net will be if we fall.

Sharing the Journey needn't be difficult, but the rewards can be momentous.