

The Mind Reader

MENTAL HEALTH NEWS, ARTICLES
AND INFORMATION

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CONTENTS

WayAhead Celebrates the LGBTI community	3
Ending loneliness by working together	4
A helping hand with hoarding disorder	5
Drawing on mindfulness - our new anxiety support group	7
Exam stress and how to build resilience	8
12 things to remember when telling your story	10

WayAhead Celebrates the LGBTI Community

Take a look below at some of what we got up to at Mardi Gras Fair Day in Sydney's Victoria Park on 17th February 2019. We spoke to many people about good mental health and collected their thoughts on the best Stress Less Tips. We also kept everyone cool with our brand new fans.



Ending Loneliness by Working Together



There are many emerging public health issues that governments and society are seeking to address, with the issue of loneliness attracting increasing attention. Loneliness occurs when our relationships are felt to be inadequate. It is the difference between how someone sees the quality and quantity of their existing relationships, compared to what they want them to be. As a result, people can feel lonely whether they are surrounded by others or are socially isolated. Everyone experiences loneliness at points in life. It is a prompt to seek out a way to meet our needs which, in this case, is social connection. For many people, the experience is temporary, but for others it becomes entrenched and damaging.

Loneliness causes physical health problems, with consequences as dire as smoking fifteen cigarettes a day. It also contributes to, and exacerbates, mental health problems. People experiencing loneliness have been shown to have less optimism about social situations. They are also more likely to behave in ways that distance them further from others. These behaviours can develop into a persistent spiral of feeling increasingly lonely.

However, the research evidence is clear; loneliness can be addressed. Interventions that focus on changing negative thinking are important for breaking patterns. Improving the quality of our relationships and building intimacy with those around us can also reduce the feeling of being lonely.

The work of the Australian Coalition to End Loneliness

Dr Michelle Lim, from the Social Health and Wellbeing Laboratory at Swinburne University, and Lesley Brooks, from the Friendship Initiative, a social initiative, set up the Australian Coalition to End Loneliness in 2016. It is a collaboration of organisations and community groups working together to build an evidence-based approach to ending loneliness in Australia. The Coalition's work is inspired by the United Kingdom's Campaign to End Loneliness and other, similar international initiatives.

In Australia, the campaign focusses on addressing loneliness across the lifespan. In contrast, other UK counterparts focus on connections in old age. However, as we know, loneliness can affect people from childhood to old age. The Coalition aims to build the evidence base around loneliness as a social and health issue and raise awareness. Reducing loneliness has the potential to alleviate both physical and mental health issues, promoting individual and community wellbeing.

The Australian Coalition to End Loneliness is considering what its structure will look like beyond the next 12 months, consulting with member organisations and focussing on priorities. WayAhead is auspicing and providing secretariat support. If you would like to be considered for membership of the Australian Coalition to End Loneliness or would like more information, please get in touch with our CEO, Elizabeth Priestley. At this stage, only organisational memberships are being accepted. We are pleased to be part of such a worthwhile community initiative.

A helping hand with hoarding disorder



Hoarding disorder and the behaviours that accompany it are often widely misunderstood or dismissed. Estimates suggest that between 2 and 5 per cent of the Australian population are living with problematic clutter and hoarding disorder.

Although it is a disorder that affects many, often people treat it thoughtlessly or symptomatically.

For friends and family of those with hoarding disorder, it might be tempting to tackle the accumulation of things with clean-outs and rubbish bins.

However, it is important to approach this disorder like any other, with compassion and consideration for the people with the lived experience.

Our new 16-week Buried in Treasures Workshops, will be piloted in Sydney's east. Trained facilitators will work with people who live with problematic clutter in order to help them take control of their lives.

The workshops are based on the research behind the book, *Buried in Treasures: Help for Compulsive Acquiring, Saving, and Hoarding*, by David Tolin, Gail Steketee and Randy Frost.

WayAhead's Support Group Leader, Rachel, will be co-facilitating the workshop along with another facilitator who has her own lived experience of hoarding behaviour.

"We know that there is a gap in reaching people with help who might be experiencing issues with hoarding disorder. Often, people aren't reaching out to services and getting the support they want and need," said Rachel.

How Buried in Treasures can help with hoarding disorder

The trained facilitators work with a small group of participants to support them on their journey. Participants will develop strategies to overcome clutter and resist collecting more, learn how to organise and prioritise their existing belongings and learn why it is hard to overcome clutter.

"The Buried in Treasures workshop is useful because it gives people the opportunity to engage with a scientifically-based, effective program that can help people with hoarding disorder make their own way out of their circumstances," Rachel said.

Lee Shuer and Bec Belofsky Shuer visited Australia last year from the US in order to deliver the Buried in Treasure train-the-trainer workshops. Lee and Bec are both experts in the field and have spoken at length about their research, insights and experiences into hoarding disorder.

Rachel, along with a number of other volunteer facilitators, worked with the experts on how to deliver the Buried in Treasures workshops in order to best support those living with compulsive acquiring or hoarding disorder.

"The training was a great experience in understanding and empathy. For people who are not experiencing hoarding disorder, it may seem like all clutter is junk. However, we also know that for many, there are strong emotional connections to their belongings. It is not just about throwing things out," said Rachel.

"The Buried in Treasures workshop recognises this and supports people in feeling empowered in their own lives."

WayAhead is encouraging people who have experience with problematic clutter to register to attend the workshops. It may help those struggling with clutter to develop tools to identify and manage tendencies to compulsively collect items and how to organise existing belongings to have less impact on their lives.

[Find out more here](#)

Contact Rachel to register your interest – rachel.flint@wayahead.org.au or 02 9339 6013

Learn more about the Buried in Treasures workshops starting in Sydney's east

Drawing on Mindfulness – Our New Anxiety Support Group



We know that meditation is good for mental wellbeing but, for many, it can feel hard to quieten the mind. Thoughts of meditation may evoke impressions of incense, darkened rooms and trying hard to empty the mind of thoughts. Others might find meditation to be a solitary practice, with headphones and a guided app on their smartphones.

However, various practices, such as mindfulness colouring books or incorporating mindfulness into daily activities, help people achieve the mental wellbeing benefits of meditation without having to specifically meditate. The focus of attention on a single activity can help people reach the same state of calmness. One of these activities involves writing Chinese characters with a soft-tipped brush which, when practiced mindfully and with care, can be both an art form and a deeply meditative practice.

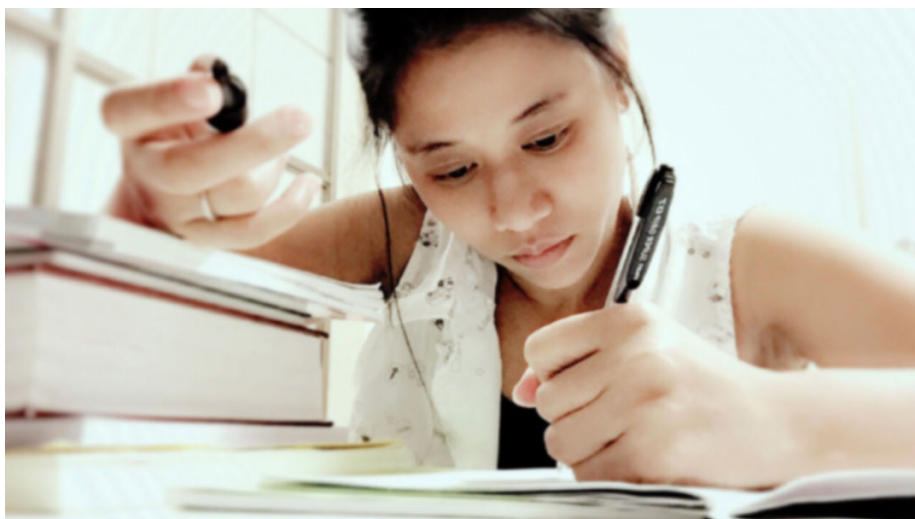
A small study in Taiwan found that the practice of Chinese calligraphic handwriting had comparable beneficial effects on people experiencing stress as practicing traditional meditation over a course of several weeks. After practicing the calligraphy, participants' heart rates and breathing slowed, which are both markers of relaxation and calmness.

WayAhead will be running a new mindfulness and meditation group trial for the next six months for those experiencing anxiety. The group will practice a particular type of meditation that uses the smooth, flowing movements of calligraphy to focus the mind. Carol, who is already an Anxiety Support Group facilitator and trained in calligraphy meditation, will lead the group.

The group is specifically for those who are experiencing anxiety as a way to calm restless thoughts. It will help build a mindfulness practice without having to engage in traditional meditation. The group will run on the first Sunday of the month with the next group meeting on April 7.

For more details, visit: understandinganxiety.wayahead.org.au/crows-nest-meditation-mindfulness

Exam Stress and How to Build Resilience



Exams are likely to cause stress and require significant resilience at some point during the course of young people's lives. During school, it is often the first time young people experience being evaluated on their performance. Exams and their subsequent grades can significantly contribute to stress levels, self-perception and have lasting impacts on self-efficacy.

There has been significant research regarding final school exams, showing the impact of high-stakes examinations on students' mental health. Studies have also interrogated whether their use as a performance measure should be reduced. Research has shown that anxiety and stress increases for teenagers during their final years of schooling. This is accompanied by a decrease in self-efficacy.

Exams are something we all have to encounter during our lives. In an age where pressure is rising and mental illness is increasing, it is important to find ways to minimise the negative impacts of exam stress and anxiety.

Students' peer relationships are correlated with lower levels of test anxiety. It is important to maintain friendships, even when it feels students are too busy to socialise or think about anything other than their studies. These friendships serve them well, as lower levels of test anxiety are linked to higher academic achievement.

Parents also have the power to mitigate or exacerbate feelings of stress. For example, nagging or continually reminding your child about the magnitude of exam results increases anxiety. This is crucial to remember, as there may be a misconception that children need to be reminded of this in order for them to realise the importance of their exams and perform accordingly. However, it could be counter intuitive considering anxiety is linked to lower performance. Similarly, using fear in attempt to motivate a student does not help either, and is in fact linked to lower motivation.

How can we help?

Reassuringly, there is a lot that can be implemented at home by parents to counter a child's exam stress and build resilience. Research has shown resilience in the face of academic adversity is linked to not only minimised stress, but also better performance. As a result, if a student is reminded that there are several opportunities throughout their school year to showcase their academic potential, this will reduce anxiety. It will also allow them to best prepare themselves for future assessments. Teachers and parents play crucial roles and have a level of responsibility regarding a student's academic experience, as they can help shape whether it is a positive experience.

Instilling feelings of positivity and resilience in students is important, as opposed to using fear as motivation. Building confidence will minimise stress and has shown to prevent stress and anxiety. Assessments and exams are first encountered during school, but we will come across daunting experiences throughout our lives. Whether job performance reviews, interviews, presentations, being judged externally is unavoidable. It is important we help students establish healthier thinking habits. These habits will help them to better handle the

stress and occasional disappointments that can come from exams and the challenges we all face in life.

References

Putwain, D., Daly, A., Chamberlain, S. and Sadreddini, S. (2015). "‘Sink or swim’: buoyancy and coping in the cognitive test anxiety – academic performance relationship". *Educational Psychology*, 36(10), pp.1807-1825.

Ringeisen, T. and Raufelder, D. (2015). The interplay of parental support, parental pressure and test anxiety – Gender differences in adolescents. *Journal of Adolescence*, 45, pp.67-79.

By Vanessa Azzi

Vanessa is a psychology graduate, currently completing an honours year exploring occupational stress within the healthcare sector.

12 things to remember when sharing your mental health story



[See A Guideline for telling your story to WayAhead](#)

Whether you are a person with experience of a mental health issue and/or families and carers of someone with a mental health issue, you may at some point want to share your experiences/recovery journey with others.

“Stories have the power to change the decisions people make... inspire people to learn”

(Suicide Prevention Australia, 2017).

Letting people know of your experiences can be rewarding, as well as contribute to destigmatise societal stigma in mental health.

However, there are major factors you should consider before sharing your story:

Purpose

Consider why you want to share your personal story, for example, is it to inform and educate others? Is it to share what has been helpful to you?

If you have been asked to share your personal story consider how it will be used and for what purpose. You always have a choice and can say no.

Exposure

You will need to consider the exposure that the story will bring to you. Publishing the story online may cause you to be opened to judgements and feel overwhelmed. Once your story is out in the public domain then there is no going back.

Have you shared your personal stories with others – it is better to share first with people you trust before going public.

Honesty

Share your story from your own view point. You are the expert (Suicide Prevention Australia, 2017). Be yourself.

Others

Will your story include other people? Do you need to seek their permission prior to telling your story? Will publishing the story affect them?

Boundaries

It is always best to think about your boundaries prior to telling your story. There may be aspects of your story that you wish to keep private. You do not have to tell all of your story and you don't have to answer questions you do not want to answer.

Name

Do you want to use your full name, first name only or a make-up name ?

Anonymous

Do you want to remain anonymous? Do you want to use an alias?

Emotions

Telling your story may be an emotional experience as you revisit past experiences. It is important to ensure you have a support system in place to deal with any issues which may arise during and after the storytelling process.

You can ask for any material that is in the public domain by WayAhead to be removed, e.g. from a website - before using your personal story WayAhead will inform you if it is possible to remove it at a later date, for example, a story on the website can be removed but participation in an online video is more difficult.

Audience

Keep in mind who you are sharing the story with. Be mindful that sharing your story with the media may sometimes cause your story to be sensationalised, askew and/or your personal life to be intruded.

You do not know who will be your audience and how they are feeling so care is needed when discussing suicide (see guidelines re talking about suicide).

In order to counter stigma and discrimination toward people who experience mental health issues it is important not to perpetuate myths that people may have.

Stories of both challenge and positivity, and examples of your achievements and aspirations that go beyond your experience of mental illness are helpful.

Content

Consider what do you want to tell in your story. Things you may consider:

- Successful instances in challenging times
- The types of support system which has helped you
- Your unique view and experiences
- Any challenges which you and/or your loved ones may have faced and how they were overcome
- Avoid language of shame or guilt / language which may perpetuate stigma and stereotypes towards mental health
- Your first experience of distress
- Your recovery journey to wellbeing
- What is your motivation for sharing your story?
- Where are you now
- Where do you want to tell your story?
- Depending on your purpose, think about finding a comfortable, non-distracting time and place to tell your story.

How do you want to tell your story?

Do you want to tell your story via speech to the public, interview, written stories, poems, painting, video, or song?

[See A Guideline for telling your story to WayAhead](#)

However, remember that telling your story does not replace seeking help.

Useful Resources/ Contact number:

For Emergency please call 000

Lifeline (24 hours service) 13 11 14

Suicide Call Back: 1300 659 467

Kids Helpline: 1800 55 1800

Mensline Australia: 1300 78 99 78

Carer Australia (Eligibility criteria applies): 1800 242 636

SANE Australia: 1800 187 263 (Also provide online forum to share experiences and talk with other carers, families and consumers with ill mental health.

Beyond Blue: 1300 22 4636 (24 hours/7 days) or Chat online: 3pm to 12am / 7 days a week.

Reference:

Suicide Prevention Australia, 2017. Stories Matter: Why sharing the journey matters

