

The Mind Reader

MENTAL HEALTH NEWS, ARTICLES
AND INFORMATION

November 2018

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Letter from Liz



Dear Mind Readers,

It has been the busiest and most exciting Mental Health Month I can remember. The theme Share the Journey has been adapted to numerous messages and has been met with positive applause. The Launch, conducted over lunch, showcased the amazing work being done by 8 award winners plus the Commissioner's Community Champion Award Winner. I encourage you to read their stories and share that journey.

For the first time in many years, WayAhead organised or partnered with others to hold various events throughout October and we each have our favourite event and experience. I was excited to see racing car driver, Cameron Hill, drive his Porsche along the tracks in Bathurst and on the Gold Coast with the Mental Health Month logo clearly visible on the side of his car. That is an audience we haven't targeted before.

Another first was the sharing of the theme and Mental Health Month (rather than Week) with Victoria and the ACT. We are hopeful other States will follow the lead and join us for a month of celebration in the years ahead.

There are many people to thank for the success we enjoy. The NSW Ministry of Health and the Mental Health Commission of NSW for their continuing financial support and presence for the Month; the many community groups and individuals who, in some cases year after year, organise mental health and wellbeing events that are creative and engaging. Our Mental Health Matters Award sponsors ACON, Transcultural Mental Health and grant sponsors such as FACS are invaluable in keeping those activities going.

I want to thank the judges for the grants and the awards. They gave their time and expertise in the best spirits. Last but not least is the amazing team we have here at WayAhead. They work hard prior to the month, and this year in particular, they worked even harder supporting all our events throughout the year. Thank you all and I look forward to Mental Health Month 2019 when we Share the Journey once again.

Have a great read,

Liz

Carol's Story



I was a quiet achiever since childhood. I grew up in a family that speaks very little English and I had some challenges connecting with people. All through primary school, I was the only one in my grade who was Chinese. There were also times when I was discriminated against and bullied. One example was at every end-of-year dance party, we would form a circle where we rotated and danced with everyone of the opposite gender. There was a group of people who always found ways to not dance with me by pretending to tie their shoelaces or step away when it was my turn. When there was physical contact, such as touching hands, they immediately wiped their hands afterwards. I had not thought about this affecting me in life at the time. More recently, I realised that deep down these incidents have internally affected me without knowing and led me to gradually distance myself from others. As I moved into high school, there was the opportunity to connect with other people but I had already developed the tendency to be more introverted and couldn't really socialise with others. With the new school and new people there was still discrimination and bullying happening to me. Someone would deliberately bump me whenever they saw me. When I passed a ball, she would wipe it first before grabbing it to throw.

I became quieter and quieter over the years and found it difficult having conversations with others. This continued into university and work. It takes much effort for me to connect with others.

My motivation was being recognised through good grades and by working well. I couldn't see what I wanted to do and had a negative outlook on life. Many of the choices I made were based on what I didn't want to do or what was expected of me. I felt I wasn't living for myself.

I chose to be a Software Engineer because of my grades and what I didn't want to do.

As there were significant changes in the people and work environment where it became very negative, this triggered me to go into deep depression and anxiety. I had sudden bursts of crying and shutting myself in my room, not bothering to connect with others. Apart from work I stayed at home in my own room.

I knew that I needed help and sought counselling and started researching ways I could get over this. Anything I came across that could help, I did. I gave myself around 2 months for each method as to give sufficient time before I dismissed them as not working for me. It took me almost 2 years before I found a way that worked for me.

As someone who works with logic, I was not really on a spiritual journey. I believed in facts and statistics. As I ran out of options and was desperate, I visited the Mind Body Spirit Festival for any other ways to help me.

It surprised myself that Tao healing with Dr and Master Sha worked for me. I practiced for 2 months intending to quit before I realised that there were significant changes within me. This inspired me to learn more so I continued on the practices and attended more training and events.

As I continued, it allowed me to find joy and happiness. It allowed me to find my purpose in life. Each time I reflect back on the transformation with myself, it is beyond belief. I had never imagined becoming what I

am today and experiencing the life I now live. From someone who has severe social phobia to becoming a worldwide travelling teacher of Tao Calligraphy, teaching hundreds of students globally, offering guidance, consultations and being a mentor to others. From someone who feels numb and has no meaning to life to finding my purpose and passion to help people and experience living a happier and healthier life.

As I learn more, it made me aware that how the essence of the different teachings are similar. Why Tao healing worked for me as someone who has a busy mind was because it incorporates many positive techniques at the same time which makes it hard for my mind to be distracted and being negative. My multitasking mind was working on the different techniques at the same time.

We each have different qualities so what works for you can differ with others. Give anything a go as these are opportunities for you. You never know what will work for you as I didn't believe soul healing would work for me at the time. You have nothing to lose and have the opportunity to gain something.

You can search for support in your area using the [WayAhead Directory](#).

Living with clutter and hoarding disorder



There is a lot of misunderstanding about hoarding behaviours and people who live with clutter. Lee Shuer and Bec Belofsky Shuer, experts in hoarding disorder from the USA, spoke to us about their experiences and insights from years working with and for people with hoarding disorder and from their own lived experiences. They visited Sydney during Mental Health Month to bust some myths, share their stories and teach people how to deliver their innovative Buried in Treasures workshops. It's not the first time the couple have visited Australia to share their insights, in fact, Bec shared a story about the misconceptions and stigmatisation she saw on her last visit.

"They said, on the news [about people experiencing hoarding disorder], "They're messy, sentimental, and they think all trash is treasure". Wrong, that is wrong. I would say that hoarding disorder is really about the idea of attachment. It's an excessive attachment to things," said Bec.

"It was supposed to be a story about the hoarding conference that was going on with researchers from around the world but really, they made this story about what a fire hazard these awful hoarders cause, that was the real punch of the story. "These hoarders are costing the country billions of dollars!" That was the story, and they didn't even mention that a conference was happening, they didn't mention that treatments are being developed and that people are working on this. They just talked about, I think it was about 30 per cent of fire deaths are related to hoarding situations. So the emphasis was on the money and not care of the people... They didn't take any consideration of the mental health of the person-centred aspect of it, it was all about the money and the physical damage."

The sensationalism and judgement that greets people who are living with clutter is something that Lee and Bec tackle in their work around the world. It is not just in Australia or the US that people experience hoarding behaviours, however, there are a lack of positive or hopeful stories in both countries that Lee and Bec aim to counter because they know of the serious negative impacts of such stigmatisation.

"Who's going to want to get help if you're getting a finger pointed at you on national TV like that? Why would you ever call for help if you're going to be treated so horribly and I don't think there's any model or publicity about compassionate care," said Bec.

"That's what we're trying to promote, that's what we're all working on and people don't hear that part, they see the salacious shows and they hear the mean-spirited news reports but they don't know that there's so many of us working behind the scenes that do care and we do have ways to make life improvements. And also, people haven't seen models for success and that's really, I think, what we bring to the table, is we show people that you can work on it, we're there too, we've been through it and we want people to see you can do it. It can be done. It's not helpless."

However, there are a number of barriers, including misinformation and stigma, that can get in the way of people getting appropriate support.

“There aren’t a lot of people who know how to address the issue, I’d say that’s the top [barrier]. That’s why we’re really happy to do all this outreach work, to make the treatment more accessible to people and to explain what it is because even in the diagnostic manuals in mental health, it was inappropriately listed until 2013,” said Bec.

“I came out about having bipolar disorder in 2003 and incorporated that knowledge into my work. It wasn’t until 2008 that I shared that I had a clutter issue because I felt like there was really strong stigma about it and I was worried about how other people would feel,” said Lee.

“[With] bipolar disorder, there’s plenty of misconceptions about that but, working in the field, joining the local hoarding taskforce and then feeling vulnerable about sharing my story kind of held me back. But once I shared, the opportunity came up to run a peer support group and have it studied to see if it could help people.”

The couple were visiting Australia to train people to deliver their Buried in Treasures Workshop, the peer-led workshop Lee spoke about, for those who live with clutter. It is a peer-led program that supports people to make changes in their lives without judgement, shame or force.

“Dr Randy Frost is a member of our taskforce, one of the authors of Buried in Treasures [the book] and a leading researcher and I ended up essentially collaborating with him to help develop the program and since then, we’ve really been off and running, developing groups that help people,” said Lee.

“So there’s the Buried in Treasures workshop, there’s a group called WRAP for Reducing Clutter, based on Wellness Recovery Action Plan, and [it is in] a spirit of being able to help the next person and empower them to help the next person.”

For Lee and Bec, the goal for successful programs that address hoarding behaviours is supporting people and providing them with options to continue to live their lives with a focus on harm reduction.

“A lot of people need the help but either don’t want it or feel like they don’t need it, but there are health and safety hazards because of the amount of stuff and where it’s placed, so even if somebody isn’t ready to acknowledge that they have a real struggle with this, in order to improve the safety of their home and make it more likely that they’ll keep their tenancy and their family,” said Lee.

“[It is useful] to be able to go in and mitigate the risks, to go in and have a checklist and know what to do in that space to make it safer, safe enough, to pass a safety inspection and that’s something we try to get out there as well, our tools, so that people know what they need to work on, so for a lot of people, whether or not you feel like you have a problem with this, that’s a really useful first step: make it safer, because you need to be in a safer place or else there won’t be a place to be in.”

Living with clutter can also be difficult for the loved ones of the person experiencing hoarding disorder. For Bec, there are some tangible actions that family members and partners can do to make things easier for themselves and their loved ones.

“When it came to hoarding disorder, I felt kind of unseen and unheard and squeezed into a corner, both physically and metaphorically as well, that’s how I felt. And so, I’ve been working with Lee for a few years now in our shared business. . . showing that there is another side to this story, and together, it becomes a whole, when you get a whole family involved and the partners involved, in getting better. It’s not just a matter of working on the clutter and the person whose possessions are filling the home, but it’s a matter of also helping everyone, really, and working together,” said Bec.

“For other members of the household, I say self-care is key. I always tell people that it’s really important that even if your house doesn’t have room for you to put up a bouquet of flowers, find a place where you can put one stem flower, to show you that beauty and hope can be in your household. Find it in small ways [so] that you can feel good. I also think being able to compromise in the home, and do some limit-setting, so it can work for all people in the home is important, and having some negotiations and trying to retain a loving spirit while going about it,” said Bec.

For the two of them, sharing their personal insights and opening up about their experiences is a key part of connecting with others who may not know how to seek help, or even that there is support available.

“I think having stories like ours out there, people can say “I can relate to that. I’m either living with that person

or I am that person. I recognise that there's someone like me up there, talking about "this is difficult" but it can get better". And that's not something that you hear a lot of, so to be able to provide a message that things can get better and show ways to do it, actually have something like the Buried in Treasures workshop available to people that they can facilitate together. It doesn't require reliance on a mental health system and government funding for people to get together and help each other," said Lee.

"[Through] our collaboration with people like Randy Frost and other academics, we've been able to do a lot of clinical studies so it shows that this is helpful, as helpful, or more helpful, than anything else that's out there so helping people feel like things can get better and not just saying it, but showing it and educating [people]."

Education is important, not just for those who live with clutter, but also for their friends, family and the general public. Lee spoke about some of the questions that come with experiencing hoarding disorder.

"There's this cycle that we want to break but there's also, I think, a really frustrating experience that people have is like "why aren't you better yet? Where's the improvement?"" Lee sighs before he continues.

"You wouldn't say that to people with a lot of other mental health challenges because there's a different sense of how long it takes to work things out, but with people living with hoarding disorder often there is an underlying trauma history the person needs to work through. You're working through a lot of different things, a hundred different things."

For Bec, there is a really important message to share with those who support others in their lives who are experiencing hoarding behaviours.

"The love, don't lose sight of that while you're working through it. Things can get really intense in a crowded home and I think it's really important to keep that vision of love and care forefront in your mind so you see it through all this stuff," said Bec.

For both of them, it is important to focus on the whole of the person. A person experiencing hoarding disorder is a person, not a hoarder, a stigmatised and unhelpful term for people who are just as complex as anyone else. Giving back and sharing support is also key to Lee and Bec.

"Someone helped me and I just pass it on and that kind of chain of peer support is really important. I also play violin, I love cats and I play a lot of Atari games so my identity isn't just as someone in recovery but as someone who's just really living more and more life," says Lee.

By Tasnim Hossain

Christmas, retirement and the importance of financial wellbeing



Finances play a huge role in people's lives, from where they live to how they spend their spare time, including their broader wellbeing. Ryan Porter, the Director and Senior Adviser at MLC Advice Carlingbah, is someone who knows this well. Ryan has worked with people just starting in the workforce or looking to retire for almost ten years, supporting them to reach their personal financial goals. "Finance is a big part of everyone's lives. The thing that I normally talk about is that it has an impact everywhere, even when things don't have a dollar amount linked to them," said Ryan.

Sharing skills and teaching financial literacy is something that he is passionate about. The impacts of financial stresses can have far-reaching consequences for people's mental health.

"Mental wellbeing is impacted significantly by finances because it can be someone's number one stress in their lives. Through education, planning and strategies around your finances, hopefully you can improve the mental well-being side of your life, [like] feeling in control, goals and the things that you can work towards and achieve, which will make you happier and feel better."

Through his work, Ryan sees a range of people with a range of different needs. Often, they are thinking of retirement, trying to manage personal debt or making sure that they are doing everything they can with their money. However, being more financially aware and responsible is something that anyone can, and should, do. There are some things that anyone can do to better understand their financial situation, even though it might feel overwhelming.

"The first thing is to take stock of where you are at. If you don't know where the starting point is, it is very difficult to make some changes... From a finance point of view, it is in two areas. One is from an income or budget perspective, looking at what your expenses are on a month-to-month basis, then checking that against your income to see if you have any money left over that you can start using for different targets or goals. The second part is trying to work out: what debts do I have? What are the interest rates? What does it cost me? How much do I have in super? What are my assets and what are my debts? So then, I have a clear picture of where I am at [and] can start thinking about where I want to go and from there make some changes."

Ideally, those changes are what can lead to people achieving the financial goals they set for themselves, and meet their immediate and longer-term needs.

"You can start thinking about, or getting help with, what strategies or actions you should be taking for that to happen... It sounds simple but it's not that easy to pull a lot together to make it happen and then stick to it when everyone gets busy and they're time poor and have got family and personal commitments."

Personal commitments can play a significant part in people's financial obligations. For Ryan, it is important to start planning when we know that things are coming up, like Christmas, start saving as early as possible and

make considered choices about how we spend money.

“What you don’t want to happen, which normally does happen to a lot of people, is it is easy to put their hands in the air [and think] “it’s Christmas time, I will just do what I need to do.” Normally what that means is I will spend on my credit card throughout this period of time and I will worry about things next year,” said Ryan.

“Being a bit more thoughtful about the events that are coming up, the presents that need to be bought, and really trying to get value for money is important... a significant portion of gifts purchased gets turned into trash or get used for a week and they are done. From a family perspective, the Kris Kringle option is quite smart. Or in an office environment, where there is quite a few people, join together, work on a set dollar amount and buy one person a present. Everyone can still be part of the giving season but economically it is a little bit better.”

“Four weeks out, six weeks out, ten weeks out, if you can, try to start putting a little bit of money aside each week in preparation for that time of the year. That is probably the biggest and smartest way that might allow you to avoid having to use a credit card and starting the following year on the back foot or in a negative tone [by] having debt.”

“If you do look at the events, you can start trying to allocate a proportion of money for each one, rather than just leaving it open because that normally leads to overspending... try and allocate a budget for each [event] and stick to it. If you’ve done your forward planning and save a little bit of money, you might come out of that time of the year sticking to budget and not having a credit card debt, which will lead to a much better first week in January.”

These simple, though not necessarily easy, steps for Christmas specifically but also for one’s life more generally goes hand-in-hand with improved wellbeing across all aspects of life.

“If you can set a good foundation which, in its simplest form, is knowing where you are financially, having some goals or targets to work towards and then having plans for those things, you can really help your mental wellbeing,” said Ryan.

“Everyone is in different circumstances, everyone is in a different starting position. If you can try and get that financial foundation in place, have some targets to work towards and have a little bit of a plan to achieve it, I think you can significantly improve the well-being of yourself and then also those closer to you, because those money stresses and dramas won’t be a big part of your life.”

You can set up a time to speak with Ryan about your personal circumstances or for financial advice by emailing ryan.porter@mlcadvicecentre.com.au. To learn more about Ryan, you can visit his LinkedIn page here <https://au.linkedin.com/in/ryan-porter-b4a93327>

By Tasnim Hossain

Celebrating mental health champions



At the start of Mental Health Month each year, WayAhead presents the Mental Health Matters Awards, recognising individuals and organisations for the work that they do. It is our biggest event each year and the best way to kick Mental Health Month off with a bang: by celebrating the most extraordinary achievements in NSW over the last year.

This year, for the first time, the Mental Health Matters award ceremony was open to the public and held at the Shangri-La Hotel. We had more than 170 people attend on 27th of September, including Minister for Mental Health the Hon Tanya Davies and NSW Mental Health Commissioner Catherine Lourey. Other guests came from the NSW government, NSW Mental Health Commission, Mental Health Matters Award-winning organisations, our sector peers and members of the general public.

We shared drinks and a wonderful lunch, met some extraordinary new people and learned more about the previously unsung work being done across schools, workplaces and communities.

It was a wonderful way to mark the start of a new Mental Health Month and to share the journey with so many who work towards better mental wellbeing in NSW.

Take a look at all the winners of this year's Mental Health Matters Awards at the [Mental Health Month website](#)

Navigating welcoming a new baby



Are you one in five?

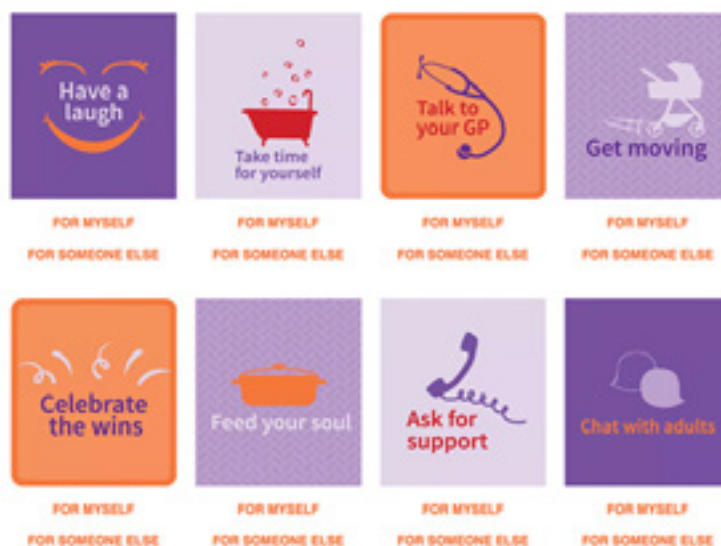
That's the question that WayAhead is asking new and prospective parents this Perinatal Depression and Anxiety Awareness Week.

Parents might feel like their baby is one in a million, but from recent research, we know that many will be struggling and that it is more common than people think.

Preparing for, and welcoming a newborn, can be quite overwhelming. Recent research suggests that approximately 1 in 5 birth-parents and up to 1 in 10 non-birth-parents experience problematic symptoms of perinatal depression and anxiety (PNDA).

This year's campaign focuses on helping people understand the difference between "adjustment" difficulties all parents experience and something that might be more serious, such as PNDA, that can have a huge impact on parents and families. It is also important to draw attention to the fact that PNDA has a really high rate of recovery with the right support and treatment.

We have pocket-sized fold-out cards with information about PNDA for people to read and share. We have also developed a series of "Stress Less Tips", available online, designed for both parents and those in their support networks, providing practical ways people can support each other.



We are also launching a new Perinatal Depression and Anxiety Awareness Week website, which will include a simple screening quiz for PNDA, and lots of useful links and information.

For more on perinatal depression and anxiety, visit our website