

The Mind Reader

MENTAL HEALTH NEWS, ARTICLES
AND INFORMATION

September 2018

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Letter from Liz



Dear Mind Readers,

Here we are again, a few months out from Mental Health Month. The team in the WayAhead office are busily putting the finishing touches onto this year's campaign and associated events we are hosting throughout the month.

Of course, Mental Health Month kicks off with our launch on Thursday 27 September at the Shangri-La Hotel in the city. We hope to see as many of you there at the launch, where we will announce the winners of this year's Mental Health Matters Awards. If you haven't already you can buy your ticket to the launch on our Eventbrite page.

During Mental Health Month we are also hosting another Collective Purpose Speaker Series event, here at our offices in Woolloomooloo. This time the focus is contemporary perspectives on Cultural Diversity and Mental Health. We are lucky enough to have Maria Cassaniti, the Centre Manager for the Transcultural Mental Health Centre as our speaker. At WayAhead we understand and appreciate the role culture plays in how different communities think about and treat mental health and ill health. Also, from a service provider perspective we realise that working with culturally diverse communities through NSW is not a one size fits all approach, nor is it a tick the box exercise for WayAhead. We'd love to see you at the event on Tuesday 23 October at 5:30pm, tickets again can be purchased from our Eventbrite page.

If you are looking at what is happening during Mental Health Month in your local community, make sure you visit our events calendar.

I look forward to getting out into the community during Mental Health Month and meeting many of you during the month's activities and events.

Have a great read,

Liz

The Bridge to Employment



In our series on WayAhead Directory, we turn to an employment agency with a difference and a reach across not just NSW, but also ACT, Queensland and Victoria.

Unemployment can be tough – messages never returned; applying for positions but never making interviews; feelings of rejection and a loss of confidence. For job seekers dealing with mental illness, these challenges can seem even greater. They can seem insurmountable.

OCTEC has been working with people and employers for more than 40 years to bridge the gap and create strategies to help people overcome barriers related to their mental health diagnoses and find fulfilling work.

In 2017, over 40% of OCTEC DES participants had a primary disability that was mental health-related, including anxiety, depression, bi-polar disorder, schizophrenia and other psychiatric conditions. And, when considering participants experiencing mental health issues secondary to another primary disability, this included the vast majority of OCTEC's participants.

“For people dealing with the challenges of mental health, long-term unemployment can be devastating, potentially leading to other serious personal barriers, such as homelessness and substance abuse,” said Adam Swist, the Deputy Manager for Employment Services.

The company builds strong and trusting relationships with clients to support them through their journey in finding employment. They also work with employers, providing celebrating “champions of inclusive employment” through National Employer Awards.

“Building relationships with employers – from multi-nationals to small and micro businesses – is another essential part of our success. In partnership with business, we work to overcome barriers and stereotypes often faced by job seekers with mental illness. We provide financial and resource support to employers of our participants, with services such as mentoring, peer training and wage assistance,” said Mr Swist.

OCTEC is also a member of the WayAhead Workplaces as part of a strategy to work more closely with mental health specialists, mental health initiatives and other like-minded organisations.

“We share expertise, resources and research information with other [WayAhead Workplaces] members, enhancing our delivery of innovative and individualised vocational services, as well as creating positive workplace health and wellbeing cultures for participants and their employers.”

To assist participants facing multiple and complex barriers, OCTEC works closely with specialist services to meet a range of participant needs. This includes sharing resources and referrals to services including culture and country (for Indigenous and/or CALD participants), literacy and language training, domestic and family violence support, disability and mental health services, including via the NDIS.

“There is still much to do. Mental health continues to be a major challenge for those seeking employment. Mature age participants – including those made redundant as a result of economic downturn or sector decline – are increasingly joining our caseloads. Many of these job seekers face mental health challenges,” said Mr Swist.

“Participants in our youth services are often challenged by mental illness. Disconnection from education means they may lack important skills, qualifications and motivation to compete in open employment, setting them up for long-term welfare dependence. Employees and employers are often reluctant to speak about mental health, meaning unresolved issues can develop into major barriers.”

For OCTEC, breaking down those barriers, supporting people experiencing mental health conditions and bringing them, and employers together is work well worth doing.

Find out more about OCTEC at the WayAhead Directory, with separate listings for regional offices including Penrith, Toukley, Condobolin and more.

The cost of entertainment: the wellbeing of artists



Those who work in the entertainment industry – the actors, musicians, writers and even roadies – create experiences for others to enjoy, however, the very nature of their work can have a negative impact on their own wellbeing. In a recent paper, *Falling through the gaps: Our artists' health and welfare*, entertainment and arts lawyer, Dr Mark R.W. Williams explores the impact that being a performer or entertainment industry worker can have on the person's wellbeing. Along with all the physical impacts of long hours, sometimes physically strenuous work and often irregular and low-paid employment, the paper also explored the impacts of the industry on the workers' mental health and wellbeing.

"Performing artists who have achieved great heights and made substantial contributions to our culture and society will, by comparison to the rest of working Australia, end up poorer, have worse mental and physical health, and a shorter life span," William writes in the paper.

The paper referenced findings from a study that found that the irregular working hours had a correlation with sleep disorders and insomnia. Entertainment industry workers also experienced mental health conditions, including moderate to severe anxiety, at ten times the rate of the general Australian population; depression at five times higher; suicidal ideation at five to seven times higher; and double the number of suicide attempts.

Australian actor, Neil Pigot, shared his experiences with depression and the ups and downs of his career, including a suicide attempt three years ago.

"My career fell apart on me as a result of my depression...I had no other skills..."

If you survive cancer, people congratulate you and they warmly welcome you back...When you come back from a mental illness, they treat you [differently]," he said.

The Artistic Director of Griffin Theatre Company in Sydney, Lee Lewis, spoke in a podcast about the wellbeing of actors in an industry where people have historically always prided themselves on the idea that "the show must go on" and on accessing emotional depths.

"I think just talking about it, and acknowledging that it is a regular workplace hazard—there is emotional stress in the work that we do. Yes, that's what we sign up for and that's what you have to learn to manage in your life, but acknowledging that we're doing it in a community of people that understand that is part of making it easier to bear," said Lewis.

"A lot of plays structurally are built on conflict. As soon as you're playing conflict, your body doesn't necessarily know the difference, does it? You go home and you're as exhausted as if you had had an argument for six hours, and how do you take care of your body and your mind?" asked Lewis.

Griffin Theatre Company explored mental illness in their production of *The Almighty Sometimes*. The play, written by a young Australian writer, asks questions about the nature of identity in the wake of a mental illness

diagnosis and the impacts of diagnosing and medicating young people. The production led to conversations among the creative team about the impacts on performers' mental health due to difficult subject matter as well.

"I've started just saying to people, "Look, this work might not be the right work for you to be doing now. Two years from now you might be in exactly the right place to do it so it's ok to say no." You don't have to take things that mightn't feel right at the particular time, if it's too close, don't do it!" said Lewis.

Actor and lead performer in *The Almighty Sometimes*, Brenna Harding, also shared her experiences and considerations when choosing roles.

"I do find it easy to say no, but I know for a lot of actors that's not necessarily the case. I've been very fortuitous, getting quite consistent work, and I'm also at university, so I'm not putting all my pressure on my next job. But I know for a lot of actors there is a pressure to say yes to every job, because you want the opportunity and work breeds work, so, if you're doing one thing, you're more likely to get other work," said Harding.

The realities of intermittent, casualised work has a huge impact on the wellbeing of performers and other arts workers. In his interview, Neil Pigot spoke about his own experiences and those of his fellow performers.

"We don't have sick pay or holiday pay and often our superannuation is poor... This is not to complain: we make the choice to do what we do [but] many of us in our fifties are living in rented accommodation because often we struggled to get the money together for a deposit and we can't guarantee our income for servicing a mortgage," he said.

The *Falling through the gaps* paper also examined the dilemma of performers having to balance the financial need to work against the mental need to take breaks, with the author stating that performers "even some of the most experienced – Sir Anthony Hopkins was one publicised instance – can find playing other people becoming far too stressful. Sir Anthony may have been able to afford not to work for a few years. Most cannot."

The recommendations that Dr Williams proposes to better the wellbeing of arts workers largely cover financial security and access to housing, both of which are vital for good mental wellbeing. One recommendation also refers directly to the immediate need for funding for dealing with both physical and mental health concerns, as well as a concentration on these issues within training institutions, companies and the wider performing arts community.

Some of that change is already starting to happen, with increasing conversations about wellbeing and care happening in companies, in rehearsal rooms and among peers. Lewis recounted an experience to illustrate how the conversation has begun to shift in recent years.

"There was a conversation about how a family member had passed away, and the director had said "Well, can they move the funeral so it is in the morning, so we don't interfere with tech." [It was] about ten years ago that that comment was made, and another actor said "Was there just no compassion back then?" And I said "No, not really." Even the fact that a young actor said that, and thought that was terrible, as opposed to "Oh right, I'm now learning I just have to suck it up and whatever happens and the show must go on"... It's a very different conversation that's starting to happen that feels alive and healthy," said Lewis.

"At least people can talk about it, and we're building a language as a community for how to take care of each other in the work that we want to keep doing."

By Tasnim Hossain

Share your journey with us



Sharing the journey can be many things to many people. We'd love to know what it means to you, our Mind Readers and friends. Share your journey with us by tagging your photos on Facebook or Twitter with *#sharethejourney2018*

Each Monday in the lead up to Mental Health Month in October, we release a new postcard that illustrates different ways you can share the journey. Each one shows something that you can do to help feel more connected, which can lead to benefits for your mental health and wellbeing.

You can take a look at our previous postcards on Facebook and Twitter and be the first to see each new postcard as it is released.

People in pain want their health professionals to listen and believe them



Chronic pain is daily pain which lasts longer than three to six months. One in five Australians live with chronic pain and many are disabled by it.

Chronic Pain Australia is the national voice of people living with chronic pain. Recently, through its 2018 National Pain Survey, over 1200 Australians living with chronic pain were asked what they needed from their health professionals, parliamentarians and the general community to help them manage their pain. This article will report the top themes emerging from the survey, using examples of respondents' own words to illustrate each theme.

One was the need for health professionals and governments to understand that mental health challenges and living with chronic pain go hand-in-hand.

"Increase the number of appointments available under a mental health plan to help me keep on top of the mental health issues associated with chronic pain, social isolation, and family breakdown" [Respondent #450]

Living with severe, poorly-understood pain that is disbelieved, with scarce access to specialised care can lead to despair, hopelessness and social isolation. Struggling to earn a living, losing important life roles, disrupted sleep, work and intimacy often mean that mental health and wellbeing suffers.

The majority of respondents to the 2018 National Pain Survey were female (83%) and the median age was 45.

People living with chronic pain want empathic, non-judgemental, and well-informed health professionals who want to listen and partner with them. They want validation that their pain is real, that their mental health is challenged by it and that resources for both pain and mental health are needed:

"Social isolation and mental health issues are at times just as debilitating as my actual pain but there's not enough resources for either" [respondent #235]

Pain is seen as mysterious by many who would ask their GP to:

"... help diagnose the problem. Mine has gone three years undiagnosed – having a name to it would allow me to understand it better" [Respondent #1215]

Over 75% of respondents indicated the urgent need to make medical cannabis available to people living with disabling chronic pain:

"Prescribe different pain relief as after 5 years the normal script medication isn't as effective. Cannabis oil worked amazingly well for the very short period I tried it but cost is prohibitive and supply chains less than credible ..." [respondent #1077]

However, Australian GPs struggle to prescribe medical cannabis, due to stringent federal government regulations.

“Legalise cannabis and make it easily available for chronic pain use as well as a variety of other health and psychological related problems”. [Respondent #389]

With the majority of respondents (99%) indicating that they did not think the federal government was doing enough for people living with chronic pain, the financial hardship many people in pain face repeatedly came up as a central issue as this woman living with severe pain for twenty years notes:

“I can only work casually 16hrs a week, yet I was taken off the disability pension and put on NewStart. Therefore I cannot continue a lot of my previous treatment, as I cannot afford it. I have lived with my mother for the past 20 years, as I cannot afford to pay rent to have my own place”. [Respondent #25]

Access to the Disability Support Pension (DSP) was a consistent theme. The invisibility of chronic pain leads to discrimination and stigma on top of financial hardship:

“... It is a degrading process to apply for a Disability Pension with a diagnosis of chronic pain, as it is an ‘invisible illness’ there is no ‘box’ that we fit into to apply, often resulting in rejection, more pain, suffering and poverty. Please have staff with the skills to assess the supporting documentation specific to the impact of chronic pain on the person’s ability or inability to work”. [Respondent #567]

Currently the federal government allows five allied health visits per calendar year for people living with chronic disease. Respondents feel this is inadequate:

“Medicare does not cover gym membership and supervised programs ... does not cover dietitians or massage ... Disability pensions do not cover the gap. Many of us are stuck ... Enhanced Primary Care plans are not enough ...” [Respondent #204]

Earlier this year the federal government restricted access to codeine in pharmacies and there has been much public discussion about an “opioid crisis”. This has led to distress and stigma for people living with chronic pain. Federal government is cautioned to take care when demonising medicines:

“Stop demonising opioids. It’s hard enough to get to the chemist to get medication as it is, without having to see my GP for a script for something I used to buy over the counter” [Respondent #590]

“The Federal Government should be listening to us, the people living with chronic pain. I’m sick of being lumped with people who overdose on opioids legal or otherwise. 99% of us are being punished because of the actions of 1% of the population.” [Respondent #982]

All health professionals including GPs, pharmacists, allied health and others were asked to be less judgemental of people in pain:

“Don’t judge a book by its cover – education – there needs to be more awareness about ‘invisible illness’”. [Respondent #723]

It is clear from these results that people in chronic pain continue to struggle within systems promoting stigma, poverty and disability.

What can people in pain do for themselves to protect their mental and physical health and wellbeing? Staying connected is crucial. Chronic Pain Australia runs a free 24/7 forum for people living with chronic pain. Here, people in pain are welcomed with values of compassion, non-judgement and understanding. Many forum participants indicate they have avoided suicide because of the friendship and support they find on the forum.

The Chronic Pain Australia website also has some top tips for free resources that people in pain find helpful: <http://chronicpainaustralia.org.au/documents-2/top-hits>

For more information about the National Pain Survey 2018 results visit the National Pain Week website – www.nationalpainweek.org.au.

Bob Murphy's Musings on Life, Vulnerability and His New Memoir



Image source Geelong Advertiser

Bob Murphy is one of the AFL's most loved characters – he is charming, poetic and one-of-a-kind. Bob, the son of a former priest and a former nun, was not destined to fit into the short-back-and-sides of the blokey football world. He has challenged its foundations with his alternative and soulful disposition. Since retiring last year from his 312-game career as skipper and half-back flanker for the Western Bulldogs, Bob has moved seamlessly into the media, hosting his own show on Foxtel Bob and co-hosting the Freedom In A Cage podcast with filmmaker Adrian Brown. Chatting to Bob is like speaking with an old friend, he is warm, funny and generous. His book *Leather Soul* is out now.

Martin Flanagan said 'athletes die twice' have you been resurrected as a story-teller?

(Laughs) The first time you hear that, it's a pretty memorable sort of line, you're filled with the dread of 'geeze that doesn't sound good'. After having then retired, there may be a bit of poetic licence in that, I suppose you get born again and it does feel a little like that and the thing that surprised me about writing the book is that it's my story, it's a bit of a weight off my back and now I'm much more interested in listening to other stories and telling those. I feel good, it's like shedding a skin.

Would you have been a writer or a musician or a story-teller of sorts if you weren't a footballer?

All of my family are teachers so maybe I would have just done that, I'm not sure. I'm just glad I have ended up here, I'm kind of relieved. I was a pretty naïve kid, I didn't try very hard at school and I regret that, so I'm lucky that I have landed here and I have a creative outlet and that makes me feel good.

A standout theme in *Leather Soul* is your humility, you say that you're not a champion of the game yet you have played over 300 games, you were all-Australian captain and a much loved character. Do you still feel like an underdog?

I don't know if I feel like an underdog but we are pretty hard on ourselves by nature, athletes. When I think about my footy career I mark it against someone like Corey Enright, for a half-back flanker he had the career you would have most coveted and I didn't get close to that. It's not false modesty and I know I could play a bit and I played for a long time. I don't throw the word champion around lightly and I don't put myself in that category.

You wrote that Wayne Campbell said to you that showing vulnerability shows leadership, did that conversation change you?

Yeah I think it did, often when these things happen in retrospect you think 'that was a big moment' but even at the time I remember thinking 'that's it'. I think I wrote that it was like a door opening. I just found that the

football landscape at that time was very conservative, very orthodox, it was all about 'lead by example' and 'lead from the front' and it didn't really speak to me and I found it very uninspiring. Vulnerability in terms of honesty and having honest conversations about 'this is what I have struggled with' and 'this is what we are struggling with as a group', let's help each other fix that, that's what he meant and that's the truth in it and I found it quite helpful.

You're a role model in how you are able to show emotion in the macho, male dominated world that is football. You show men that you can be a blokey-bloke while also expressing vulnerability. How can men be there for each other?

With men there is a big difference with 'How are ya?' and asking 'How are you?'. Sometimes we skim a little with 'How are ya?', but do we even really listen? You have to dig a little bit deeper sometimes. We all observe one another, there are little clues along the way, we aren't the best poker players, that's not how most of us live our lives, there's little clues in our routines, the tone of our voice sometimes and even sad eyes, if you notice something like that just ask them!

What advice would you give your younger self?

I don't like giving advice but maybe, 'she'll be right'.

Best advice you've ever been given?

Apart from lefty-loosey righty-tighty, a very good friend of mine, he gave me a quote and I know some people turn their nose up at quotes because they are a bit wanky or a bit corny or whatever, I love them! I can't remember whose quote it was 'life is full of froth and bubble but two things stand like stone, kindness in another's troubles and courage in your own' and I think that captures a fair bit.

Favourite book?

It's probably not a book that tells you anything about who I am but I buy Peter Temple's Broken Shore, I always have a copy of that in the house so I can give it to someone who hasn't read it, it's a good one, I love it.

Favourite band?

When push comes to shove it's the Rolling Stones if I'm being honest, they are such a big band. You Am I are one of my favourite bands. One of the attractions of You Am I is that they can still feel like your band, sometimes when a band gets too big they can feel like everybody's band, you could have loved You Am I for 20 years and they still feel like your band, there is something about that.

You said rock n rollers want to be footballers and footballers want to be rock n rollers, if you were in a band which instrument would you take on?

It would be an acoustic guitar with a bit of harmonica, it'd be a bit of part time acoustic and a bit of harmonica, a Ryan Adams vibe, sing a couple of songs and not be the front man. That'd be me and a few hand claps and I could definitely do a bit of tambourine.

Buy Bob's book 'Leather Soul' [here](#)

By Katie Colston

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