

FLIP SIDE

Association of Participating Service Users



Hepatitis C
and other stuff

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A New Me

When my doctor told me my blood test results were Hep C positive I was devastated. It was shortly after September 11 and my grand plan to beat drug addiction and change my life was to enrol in the army and kick butt in Afghanistan or Iraq. My solution to the news was to go right on with it and use heroin for the next couple of years. It was hard to sustain a habit as I was getting older so my next grand plan was to jump on the bupe for a few weeks until I felt strong enough to go to a detox. Three and a half years later I made it to that detox centre. I was absolutely fucked! Thirty four years old, grey, boned out and hopeless. During that detox I went to an NA meeting, not to find total abstinence or recovery but to pinch some chocolate biscuits for the girls in the unit! I heard this bloke share about using against his will and I related. He told me that if I kept going to NA that things could change for me as well. I was smart enough to listen and dumb enough to do what he suggested and today it's been nearly six years since my last detox and I am nearly five years drug and alcohol free.

I was clean about two years and got an opportunity to treat my Hep C with Interferon. I went off and had my blood test to determine my genotype and viral load. Worst news: genotype 1, a really high viral load. This meant twelve months of treatment with a 50-50 chance of a cure. The doctors thought I had caught it around ten years earlier. I was lucky though, my body showed few signs of the virus but as my viral load was high the doctor said soon I would start to develop problems.

I started on the treatment in February, as an ex IV drug user the idea of injecting myself weekly was freaking me out so my doctor did the first couple. I was so sick after my first injection. I remember thinking if it's this bad for my whole treatment I won't make it but it got better. At the three month mark when they did another blood test to measure if the treatment was working I

had achieved RVR. That means rapid viral response, the virus was undetectable in my blood. I could have wept with relief but big boys don't cry. The result increased my chance of success from 50-50 to around 95 per cent. Finally the odds were in my favour. All I had to do was complete the treatment. The next nine months or so were challenging but I did it. I was over it by my last treatment. Now I had to wait six months for my final blood test. If this blood test came back 'Hep C undetected' I would have been successful in defeating the virus. It was a nervous six months but finally I received my result. It was the best news; I had cleared it, I was Hep C free. My life had changed, it was impossible to process the news, it was too big, I went home and lay on my bed and wept with relief.

I guess big boys can cry!

Jason

Monsters

It all happened so innocently, hanging out not knowing the consequence of using dirty needles, I now have Hep C, swelling and pain from the liver for the past 15 years and it will get worse.

Having a heroin addiction, and hanging out not having clean needles, sharing unsterilized injecting and drug equipment. Prevention kits on Hep C in fit bags could have saved me from the monsters attacking my liver today. As a new user at the time I didn't know what Hep C was until I was positive. I was angry at the time and thought it was a death sentence, as I knew very little about this subject (until I did some research), but the mental trauma I suffered was another matter.

I am now drug free, but suffer every day with pain and discomfort, from the monsters who continue to eat away at me. My fear is one day I could die, and at times it feels like a death sentence.

At the time I didn't care and didn't know much about Hep C; when you're hanging out you don't think of the consequences until it is too late. At the time all you want is a hit to stop the pain. I have survived and fought my addiction, but if I had more information in the fit pack, maybe I would have thought about it twice, when I didn't have clean tools.

Given that you may never recover from hep C, I have gone for treatment but the whole process for me was not worthwhile, so dropped out of treatment, and manage it through healthy eating, water, exercise and regular visits to the doctor.

It sometime makes it hard that society does not understand hep C, and treats you like you have AIDS and you are contagious.

I have a wonderful supportive husband, who understands me when I say 'stop the car, I need to walk around', as I know and feel it when the Hep C is active and eating away at me. He never judges me and how I got it. All I know is he loves me to death, and supports me when I get sick, tired and snappy; he just goes for a walk. Again I'm always on the lookout so I don't infect him with Hep C.

Today was no different to 20 years ago, very little awareness and education programs that if you want to use do so safely; what is out there is not enough.

For now the monsters are eating at my liver. I am in pain as we speak but I try and block it out but for now the monsters are more powerful and I hope one day I can have a vaccine to give me a quality of life.

My last words to you, if you are going to use do so safely, get info on Hep C, use clean instruments and never ever share needles. Go the extra mile to be safe because at the time it won't matter coz you're too busy getting a rush, but one day it could well be the end for you. Don't go there as I have and am trapped with the monsters slowly eating away at me. Take care always my friends.

Elena

Grateful To Be Free

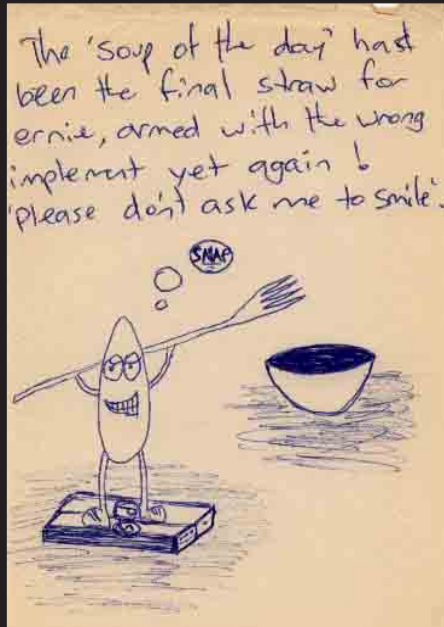
I started using heroin when I turned 18, in June 1978. I would only use every now and then, but in those days our ignorance was about as ignorant as it could get. Needles were hard to come by and we often used needles that we shared. We were a closed group, well we thought we were, so we didn't even think about hepatitis. That is, until two of my friends ended up in the Fairfield Infectious Diseases Hospital with jaundice; they were bright yellow. We thought it was a bit funny because it didn't happen to us, so I believed I was OK. My friends recovered, so I thought no more of it. We had all shared needles together many times.

In the early 1980s, the AIDS virus was becoming a major fear for us all. By then, my heroin use had become a daily affair, and needles were still difficult to obtain when you needed them. There were a few chemists around, but scoring was so haphazard that plans never eventuated. Sharing needles still continued, but with an element of fear because of the AIDS virus.

In 1991 I travelled to Thailand where I was arrested for heroin use, and put in jail for 18 months in a Bangkok prison. AIDS was a major fear, but the pain of being in that prison and the availability of heroin made it impossible for an addict like me to abstain. I became very depressed and had no self-care in regards to using heroin in there. It didn't take all that long before I was sharing needles.

I eventually ended up back in Australia where I stopped all my drug use and swore off it for good. I had an HIV test and amazingly I didn't have AIDS. I was so stunned and elated that when the doctor was telling me I had Hepatitis C I thought, 'that's not a problem'. As least as I didn't have AIDS.

So for the next three years I didn't use. I knew I had the hepatitis virus but didn't really know what it was all about, so I didn't worry about it. I was just content



to be back home and AIDS-free. Doctors didn't seem too bothered about explaining it very much, so all was well. This was late 1992. I relapsed in 1995.

In the year 2002 I got clean from my drug use again. This time I had a lot of fatigue. I hoped that by eating a good diet I would get better. I was a vegetarian and believed that with no alcohol, plus good food I'd get better. I also started taking Chinese herbs to help. I spent over \$5000 over four years on the herbs, but I didn't get better. I just progressively got worse until I only had a few hours of energy a day. I tried different diets and I believed that a lot of my fatigue was anxiety related, which wasn't all that wrong.

When I saw people I knew clear the Hep C virus by using the Interferon therapy, I decided that I'd give it a try. I'd heard stories that it would make your hair fall out, and did you more harm than good. Even my doctor advised against it because my viral load wasn't very high. But I had no energy and I was sick and tired of being sick and tired.

So I went on the combination therapy for Hepatitis C. My genotype was Type 2, which I hoped was a positive indicator that the therapy could work for me. I started the drug program in April 2007, and finished it in October of the same year. I found the reactions to the drugs difficult at times but I kept my focus on what I was trying to do. So I used the program of constantly reminding myself that it was OK not to feel so good. When I went out I would allow myself to change my plans with people, places and things so that I didn't become stressed. This was really important to me. I suffered mild depression and restlessness for months while I was in treatment. When I heard that other people had stopped the treatment because they couldn't handle the side effects, I fully understood. It wasn't an easy program to do well, not for me, anyway. But I also met people that were studying at uni or held down jobs while having treatment. I doubt I would have been able to do that. However I didn't find it unbearable.

I felt grateful that I was able to access the treatment through public health. I'd corresponded with people in the US who couldn't afford the treatment so I was grateful that I lived in a country where I could receive free treatment. I've personally known four people that have died from Hepatitis C so I realise that if I lived elsewhere that would probably be my fate.

I've been clear of the Hepatitis virus for over a year now. I am feeling a lot better and my health is improving all the time. I'm really glad I persevered with the treatment even though it wasn't always easy. I feel that I've closed the door on that part of my life and now I can open others. When I meet people that are considering treatment, I tell them that it's not difficult if you prepare yourself, keep life simple and it will be OK.

It's a great feeling to be free of it.

Pete

Not So Hard

Hi, I'm a fifty four year old man who is nearly finished the Hep C interferon treatment. I have type two Hep C which has a success rate of 90% of being cured. At the start of my treatment I was concerned about all the negative side effects that can happen, which I heard from people who had been on treatment. The side effects while I'm on the interferon are: loss of sleep pattern, a bit of depression and some joint pain. My doctor at the Alfred said I could take an antidepressant and a pain killer if needed. I did that and it helped me a lot.

I am now clear of the virus but still have to stay on treatment for another two months.

Tony

To The Street

(For the Homeless)

When the daylight dims in the busy town
and the sky looms overhead
One will turn his damp bed down on the
cold hard ground instead
God help him and I hope maybe someday
he'll find what he desires
I listen to him and he says whatever my
heart requires.

Now I think to myself if my chances were
slim if ever a speck of grey
Take me back I'd be just like him with a not
a great deal to say.
Because what's the point when you already
know the price that you have paid
Life can be dull and awfully slow when we
lie in the bed we've made.

And if anyone matters I humbly regard
that fate is a player indeed
People are strange and life is hard for those
who don't succeed.
God help them and I wish them all the best
this Christmas I repeat
When the daylight dims and the sun's in
the west my prayers go out to the street.

George Hall

Grey Ghost

We'd been clean over a year and married for slightly longer. My husband was always tired. His doctor suggested he go on treatment for Hepatitis C as fatigue is one of the symptoms. Although I had Hep C too, it didn't seem to be affecting me. I was frustrated with him being so tired all the time, the way he wouldn't get out of bed in the morning. It seemed like a good idea.

There was a trial on at the Alfred hospital where a new type of interferon was being tested. Interferon and Riboviron were given in three different doses and being compared to the current interferon. My husband was randomly assigned to the highest dose of the new drug. The trial involved a lot of pre-trial measurements on his health and emotional wellbeing, then the doses began and were to last for 48 weeks, nearly a year.

Interferon comes in an injection which you can give yourself. We were both clean and didn't want injecting equipment in the house so he got the hospital staff to inject him every two weeks.

At first there wasn't much difference. Then the side effects crept up on us. I say 'us' because it happened to me too.

He started to lose weight and didn't feel like eating. He used to be a chef, ate pretty healthily; meat, salads, fish. Now all he could stomach was chocolate and white bread just to give himself some calories. His beautiful black hair fell out in the shower. He was breathless and coughing all the time.

Trips to the toilet were more frequent and I was asked to buy softer paper. My husband was still working, three to four days a week but eventually he couldn't work at all.

My tired husband got more and more tired until you could only call it fatigue. Unable to engage in much conversation he stopped socialising. He was put on antidepressants although he wasn't depressed; he just didn't have enough energy to laugh or smile. He became a ghost, a grey ghost, there but not there. His eyes were vacant. When our friends did see him, they were shocked. People suggested that he stop the treatment but we had come this far, and Hep C could kill you; surely it was best to keep going?

I missed the man I had married, I wanted my husband back. He is not the sort of man to complain, but I think this time he was really too sick to know how sick he actually was. I am the sort of person to complain. I went to the doctor with him for the first time and explained all his side effects. The doctor suggested Immodium for the diarrhoea, Pholcodiene for the cough. Opiate based medicines? We were both recovering addicts, was this guy insane? Keep strong opiates in the house?

I asked if he could go down to the lowest dose of the treatment. No, he could only go down to the middle dose; that was protocol. I asked if I could read the trial protocol. No, that was confidential! The doctor would do what was best for the trial, not what was best for the patient. I was a doctor myself, that's



not what we were taught.

My husband was too sick to go on with the treatment, or at least I thought so. I told him I wouldn't support him being on the treatment anymore. It was the wrong thing to say and he has never gotten over it. He felt abandoned at his worst moment. I just wanted him off the drugs that were making him so sick. He wonders if he ever had cancer, would the treatment be too hard for me, would I abandon him then too?

He went off the treatment against medical advice, with all the scare tactics of what Hep C can do to you and how the treatment won't work if you stop too soon. We'd seen some stats on the net about if you respond to treatment in the first six months, then you're likely to be cured. It worked! All the follow up tests show he is cured; he doesn't have Hep C anymore. He's clear. Very gradually his health improved and slowly we worked at rebuilding our relationship. He never quite got rid of the chocolate habit and his hair is not as thick as it used to be, but otherwise he's well. He's still tired though; I guess that had nothing to do with the Hep C.

A couple years later when I was pregnant with our son an obstetrician suggested that I should go on treatment myself after the baby was born. She was quite serious and worried about me as I'd had the disease for over 15 years. She'd obviously never seen anyone with treatment side effects or looked after a baby before. Sometimes I wonder about doctors.

Anon

The Worst

My initial consultation with a gastroenterologist to begin this treatment was gobsmacking. He did not bother to introduce himself and managed to go through our meeting without making eye contact. I made sure I did not see him again, explaining why to the practice nurse. I was advised to use anti-depressants for the duration of the treatment as the 'drugs lower serotonin levels' often producing depression, and to see their psychiatrist. I had already been using anti-depressants for four months but the psychiatrist prescribed another type so I had to change to the new one over the next four to six weeks.

This was seen as a significant problem by the nurse practitioner when I went for my first interferon injection a few weeks later; she wanted me to delay treatment for 1-2 months until stable on the anti-depressants. I insisted on going ahead as planned as I had rearranged my life and wanted to get on with it. This was not a good decision in hindsight. I was already very dizzy with optical illusions from coming off the first anti-depressant and was not ready for the effects of the interferon.

Within two hours of the first injection a cold feeling descended down the bones of my body and a deep chill took hold of me. My teeth chattered and I went to bed with backache, headache and shivered for eight hours. I woke to a malaise, a sort of paralysed feeling of not wanting to move and needed pain relief for 24 hours. I felt a weakness with aches and pains in various places and was unable to read or concentrate. Although this was the worst episode, these symptoms persisted over the entire six months of treatment. I soon developed painful inflammation in my joints and an anti-inflammatory was added to my daily drug selection. Within a few weeks my skin had dried out and scabs developed up my very dry nose / sinuses and over my very itchy scalp. A variety of creams and washes were prescribed, none of which helped much. My mucous membranes had dried out, swallowing was difficult and constipation was horrible. Hive like sores appeared on my face and arms and I felt extremely allergic.

Not enjoying the taste of food – dry mouth and nothing seemed to satisfy, I started to 'treat' myself to coffee and cake each afternoon to celebrate getting through another day. This was another mistake as persistent joint pain, lethargy and ever decreasing haemoglobin (iron levels) meant little activity. So with less exercise and more cake led to a 20 kg weight gain over the treatment! I was only sleeping four hours a night, constantly aching, headaches, nausea, daily nosebleeds and frequent sneezing which sent my head spinning. Depression had also taken hold as I was still in changeover of anti-depressants and what the nurse had feared came true.

At this point, my partner / carer took off and I was so angry

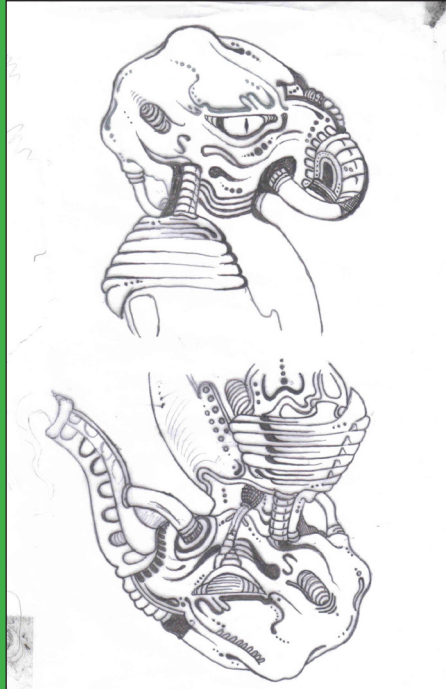
that I sharpened my biggest kitchen knife. Fortunately friends came and cleared my house of knives as I had become homicidal and soon were to become deeply suicidal. I experienced a very 'black night' and made early morning calls to the drug company responsible for these 'diabolical drugs' and this 'barbaric treatment.' Needed suicide watch for next 24 hours and my anti-depressant and pain medication was increased. This was the worst time. I put more supports in place (used the Enhanced Primary Care Plan from GP) and braced myself for a very draining, painful and difficult treatment phase.

Clearly I was unfit for work so started to borrow against my house to pay the bills. Although chills, sweats, insomnia, itching and pain persisted, I took one day at a time.

By week 18 my body hair was thinning and eyebrows were disappearing! My hair was actually standing on end with spiky bits sticking out! I was feeling very weird, listless and ill. I was feeling really irritable now, antisocial and contemplative. I was unable to do much, breathless, pale and very unwell. At week 20, I couldn't take much more, still 4 weeks to go. Was prescribed Benzos (Temazepam) but ignored this as a poor suggestion. Feeling angry, empty as a shell and as fragile as tissue paper...in fact, I had had enough of this. Managed to negotiate a reduction in interferon dose for the last 4 weeks as I had shown a reduced viral load since week 12 and the 'treatment was working well' – I was clearing the virus!

Amazingly I completed the 24 weeks and survived. Gradually symptoms reduced and haemoglobin increased. By six months post treatment I was still feeling shattered but had to get back to work – dept required it and the psychological benefits were needed. Unfortunately the joint pain settled into fibromyalgia (contracted connective tissue creating stiffness and pain) and a brain fog persisted for over 12 months. It was a traumatic treatment and the long term effects are still with me but it had the desired effect – no detectable virus.

Rose



The Hard Road

So you want help! Like so many other beautiful human beings, I walked the road of addictive despair seeking help for my illness. My journey started with the belief that I was mentally deficient because I couldn't understand why I kept walking down the road of self destruction.

My poison was anything that could numb the effects of being alive, in what I believed at the time, was a fucked existence in a fucked world. My poison of choice was ice/speed which really didn't help my mental outlook on humanity.

My search started by going to a psychiatric clinic asking for help for my mental state of mind and my drug addiction. The reason for this is that the legal system had deemed me mentally unstable and a potential threat to society. After asking for help, I was told that I was too drug affected to be helped by that organisation and told to go away. I then went to an AOD organisation which told me they

A Country Town

I grew up in a small country town about an hour out of Melbourne. My family has a strong background of addiction but not such a strong history of tackling it. From my Great Grandfather on my father's side to me there is a line of addiction that as far as I know has not really been broken till this day. I grew up in a culture of drinking and fighting, and whether it is in my DNA or just from being around it from birth it seems I was destined to 'give it all a go'. So from a young age I was up for trying anything that came my way. I was educated at private school so I was well aware of the end result but I guess I was always just that sort of person who would try whatever was offered.

I.V. drug use was just about unheard of in the early 80's in this town and I can remember one occasion when we got busted at the local caravan park. When about 50 syringes fell out of the sky light during the police search the caravan park owner broke down crying at the sight of them. We couldn't understand

could not help me because I had mental health issues which they could not deal with.

So here I was, looking for help, and being rejected by everyone that I thought could help. The ignorance of these facilities seven years ago was dreadful. How many other good souls suffered at the labelling handed down by beurocratic experts?

My desire to be freed from the bondage of addiction had me persistently knocking on the doors of different institutions, until thankfully I was accepted as a client. The road to recovery had finally started after 12 months of hell!

That was 6 years ago. The moral to this story is that, if you want help and certain services are labelling you into different categories, don't believe them!!

Persist and keep trying, there are many services out there that DO care, and genuinely want to help.

Peace to all those that are walking the road.

Frank

what the big deal was. Clean syringes were nearly impossible to get, so when we could, we kept a stock pile. We broke in to the local doctors so often to take syringes only, in the end they left the window masking taped so we could get in and out. Early harm reduction ay! I also recall a very helpful pharmacist who was having staff drinks on New Years Eve when we arrived late at the chemist. He had no syringes to sell so he made us up an old glass syringe {blue lady} so we too could celebrate New Years.

There was nowhere to go if you were in trouble or wanted help to stop this destructive behaviour. One friend who reached out for help in 1989 went to the local doctor who just shook his head and said "I don't know what to do with you, do you think some pills might help?" Great, we didn't know what to do with ourselves and they didn't know how to help us. Footscray was the closest doctor who would prescribe pharmacotherapies and no chemist in the town would dispense it. So your only real choice was to go to the city where you could really give your habit a run for its money.

Thank God things have finally changed in the country! It's not great in the town I am talking about but it is much better now. A least now the Community Health Centre has a focus on addiction, a local doctor has chosen to specialize in drug and alcohol problems. There is a counselor available at the local hospital once a week though she is always booked out. A clean syringe program now runs and you can go to the same local hospital that used to tell us to go away and it will now supply you with clean equipment after hours. This alone is a giant step, although it's hard to go somewhere to get a syringe when you know the person behind the counter probably knows your Mum.

Alcoholics Anonymous has always been there but the addition of Narcotics Anonymous is another good incentive for a small town that is slowly trying to come to terms with its bored youth, unemployment, and an ever changing culture that most country people find hard to understand.

APSU Member

The Farm

I waited 8 weeks to get into Windana TC. I had to detox for 10 days at the detox in St Kilda before I was allowed to enter "the farm". Once I arrived, I learned that there were 5 houses at the farm for residents and I would be placed into house 4 (women only) and assigned a fellow house mate or "house buddy" to show me the ropes. I was to share a room with this person, go to work with this person and learn the rules of "the farm" from her. I was also shown the house chores and cooking roster, meaning yes I was to cook at least once a week... living skills was something forced down your throat, rather than educated.

I was also assigned an "intensive buddy" who would show me how to complete my paperwork and make sure I followed the rules to then be allowed privileges such as "leave". I learnt that there were 4 phases to the program: "Essence" for the first 6 weeks or so, then "Intensive" for however long it took to get ready for "Extended" or the "Integration Program (IP)". During the "Essence" phase I was encouraged to simply follow all the basic rules and not take too much on, and to ground myself with the earth by spending 4 days a week in the dirt, gardening in the beautiful self sustaining garden supervised by a wonderful horticulturalist named Wendy.

Weekends were my own, to do with what I wanted as long as I did not leave the farm boundaries, or took a senior resident with me if I did, to go bush walking or what not.

Wednesdays however were different altogether and I hated them until the day I left the farm. Wednesday's were community day, where every resident sat in the rec hall on uncomfortable chairs, under horrible UV lighting, for 8 - 12 hours discussing community business, such as who was going on leave this weekend and where to and why, or who stole a tomato from the kitchen (to try to

stamp out anti social behaviour), these days were long and drawn out and in some cases very, very upsetting. Then, following that awful experience, we were all forced to stay in the rec hall all night as well to play games with each other and bond, I say forced, because these were the rules, and if you chose to not follow the rules, you were asked to leave, potentially ending your recovery and your chance at life.

Each afternoon there was counselling group therapy in the form of classes or circle talks, learning about grief and loss, pain management, relapse prevention and so many other invaluable tools, confidentiality, honesty and trust was required of every person, and the intensity was extremely high.

The turn-over at the farm was high also, with residents getting asked to leave, or self discharging for various reasons once or twice a week.

All residents were required to be up at 6.45am weekdays, clean their own room, make bed etc, and complete a rotating house chore (bathroom, vacuuming, mopping, kitchen, porches, laundry etc) and present for morning physical activity at 7.45am, run by another resident or group of residents (netball, basketball, bushwalking etc) lasting 45mins. You could then go back to your house and put on the last finishing touches, making sure it was perfect, for it would be inspected by another team of residents later. Then on to morning meeting, where you learned what you would be doing that day, and each resident made a daily affirmation to the rest which they would be asked to report back on during a debriefing session every weekday at 4.30pm following 30 mins of quiet reflection back at your house.

After approximately 8 weeks, I was moved into a co-gender house, "house 2" where one half of the house was female, and the other male, with very strict boundaries as to where we could go, i.e., not into a

boys room... but also no other resident could enter the residential hallway at any house. Visiting was encouraged, as social networking was a giant part of recovery and learning how was hard. I was now living with members of the intensive phase and quickly learnt that it was not a party house, but a house of very intense work on oneself. I spent many nights in deep conversation with other members of the house learning more about myself and them, delving deep into wounds never healed in my own psyche.

After four weeks, I graduated the essence phase and moved into the intensive phase myself, taking on a lot of new very intensive group therapy with my new peers, and taking on a new work allocation. I was responsible for the animals on the farm, 4 goats, 2 alpacas (nasty creatures), 1 cow, 1 sheep, 20 chickens, 5 ducks and 5 geese. I spent my days cleaning stalls, moving animals to different pastures and milking cows and goats, cleaning up after chickens and geese and loving every minute of it. I even helped those 4 goats deliver most of the 6 babies they had in the spring and spent my days rolling around in the sunshine with those new babies teaching them the rules of the farm. It was such an amazing time of my life, I learnt so much about myself; I learnt how to truly love again with those tiny goats.

Unfortunately I also used my job allocation to isolate myself and used old behaviours to keep the other residents at arm's length never letting them get too close, eventually leading them to turn on me and kick me out at four and a half months. This was for being dishonest with them about where I was spending my leave time off the farm on one of those fateful community Wednesday's, where I was then escorted off the farm with nowhere safe to go, left in a hotel in Frankston for 4 days until I could get into another rehab (very lucky timing? I was planning to go there when I got kicked out).

Luckily I had very stubbornly decided that I wasn't going to let their neglect be my downfall, and although I haven't received so much as a phone call from them since. I have now been sober and clean for 18 months, and loving every day of my new life, even learning to love a man and live peacefully with him for over 6 months now thanks to what I learnt at the farm and the subsequent treatment.

I am very grateful for the clean time the farm afforded me, however I felt that, had I lived there any longer I would have found it too difficult to reassimilate with the outside world, as it was I needed a community based rehab program to teach me how to live in the community again. However the life skills and tools I learnt there helped me get clean and stay clean. I think if the program was shorter and more intense and the staff was more involved, the program would have far better outcomes. I have kept in contact with many people from the farm, but I am the only success story I know unfortunately. Many complaints I hear are that the farm wraps you in cotton wool and then releases you to a very harsh and mean world inducing you to drink or use again. Most of these people I have kept in touch with through regular maintenance meetings of NA or AA.

I was fortunate to be a part of the SHARC peer helper training learning how to get my foot in the door to this sector, now I'm studying full time mental health and alcohol and other drugs, going for a diploma in Dual Diagnosis. One day I'm going to make a difference to the treatment options available for those of us who need it. Never close the door on anything that works.

Michayla

Association of Participating Service Users (APSU)

APSU believes that individuals who use alcohol and other drug treatment services are the reason the system exists; their needs, strengths and expertise should drive the system. APSU is run by people who use or have used services users, for people who use or have used services.

We invite you to join us in having a say. We need your help to give us all a fair go. If you would like to become a member, (at no cost), please fill out the form below.

Membership Application

I wish to become a member of APSU. I would like to:

Receive the quarterly Flipside newsletter
Be sent information about how to become involved.

Name _____

Address _____

Phone _____

Email _____

Signature _____ Date _____

Are you: service provider _____ service user _____

family member _____ other _____

CONFIDENTIALITY STATEMENT

All personal details obtained by APSU will be kept confidential and will only be used for the purposes outlined above. Personal details will not be given out by APSU to other members.

Mail to:

**Association of Participating Service Users
140 Grange Road, Carnegie 3163.**