

FLIP SIDE

The Association of Participating Service Users



C H A N G E

No. 35 Spring 2013

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"Everything changes, nothing remains without change." (Prince Gautama Siddharta, the founder of Buddhism, 563-483 B.C.)

The change is inevitable, whether we do the same thing over and over again, or we decide to break the cycle and change. And sometimes to change is the only way to remain the same.

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Metamorphosis: it is happening now

Change, more like the beginnings of my metamorphosis! Why, because I am thirty-nine years old and for the first time in a very long time, I am writing this on the day I have been sober for four weeks. I have completed a ten-day residential alcohol detox program, attended drug and alcohol counselling sessions, participated in group meetings and am about to embark on a six-week non-residential alcohol rehabilitation program. So, why is this change? I have transformed from an inebriate, to a sober, functioning woman, who is clear-headed and consciously looking at her life and learning who she really is. I don't always like what I learn about myself, but I have also been pleasantly surprised.

It is scary too, like a leap into the unknown. I don't know what I will uncover deep in my psyche and how I will handle what I do discover. The best bit though is that the possibilities are endless! I'm stronger and eager for change and feel empowered now that I am sober. I don't pretend that I have a magic wand that makes the uncertainty easy, but I suddenly have the strength and belief in myself that I will survive whatever life throws at me. Rather than wishing life is easier and blaming the bad things on other people or forces beyond my control, I now own my own actions and beliefs and the consequences they bring.

So, why am I sharing this with you? Because I thought I was 'doing OK'. I called myself a 'functioning alcoholic'. I could still do the washing, cleaning, shopping etc, but now I realise I didn't do them very well. And I was missing out on life. I was argumentative and could have permanently ruined my relationship with my boyfriend. But I chose to sober up and change my life. And I want you to know there is help out there. It is not always easy to find, but there are amazing people and organisations out there willing to help you change in the ways you want to.

My life is now full of dreams for the future. It is still a day by day, hour by hour

struggle not to drink, but the reasons for change far outweigh the reasons to stay the same. The satisfaction I get from discovering new things about myself and the world around me, and working through them and experiencing them fully, is better than any 'buzz' I got from alcohol.

With the love and support of my family, friends and amazing professionals, I strive forward into my new, changing life.

I recently read this affirmation; "Happiness is a habit I am developing."

That says it all I think!



*Rebecca
(Recovering alcoholic)*

The ghost bus

In the mid 1980's there was a bus that drove up and down Smith Street Collingwood. The route itself was a short continual round trip. Everything about the bus seemed normal at first glance, but if you saw it often enough you would notice a couple of things. Nobody could hail from designated stops. People could get on but at the most unlikely places, and you know, I don't remember seeing any one get off.

One day I was halfway across a pedestrian crossing when I saw the bus nearing and, as a joke, I hailed it. To my surprise it pulled up right next to me, the doors opened and I got on. As I approached the window to pay my fare I noticed a large sign obscuring my view of the driver which read simply ...You'll Pay Later...

I turned down the aisle. The bus was empty. Strange, I thought. I walked about halfway down and shuffled across a bench seat to be next to the window. Having nothing planned I thought I'd go for the ride. Leaning back in my seat with the sun on my face I soon dozed off.

Waking sometime later I looked out the window to get my bearings. It was Smith Street still, or again, and there walking along the footpath with their mum were a couple of schoolkids I'd say hello to when we'd see each other. I also noticed a change in the street-scape - new shops - that was quick, I thought. I also realized I was feeling sick and my head ached. So leaning back again I thought another 'forty winks' would fix things. Upon waking my health was far worse and looking out the window we were still in Smith street but were passing a shopping complex that couldn't have been there before. I was confused. Just as panic was about to set in I saw the kids walking along, but they looked different, taller and older, and no sign of their mum.

I didn't like looking out the window. It made me uncomfortable. Then a thought came to me, the driver, you can always talk to a bus driver. I sidled out of my seat and was aware now my bones ached and my muscles were cramping. Clinging to each seat as I made my way forward and reaching the drivers booth I called out,

"How long has that shopping centre been there?"

"Since 2002' he replied

"No, I mean what's going on?"

"Nothing, nothing at all."

That voice I thought, there's something about the voice. I tore back the sign masking the driver and what it revealed froze the moment.....It was me.

Russell C

“As I approached the window to pay my fare I noticed a large sign obscuring my view of the driver which read simply
which read simply
...You’ll Pay Later...”



Jungle Boogie

by Lisa

Vibrating limbs, sweaty
palms

Moving away from qualms
Chattering teeth, shaky jaw
Escapism on the dance floor
No such thing as a little
mongrel

Not when you're king of
Club Jungle

Off your face

Addicted to base

Off your dial

Charmed by a smile

Off your Ek Zed

Tuned right into being off
your head

Now can't shake the monkey
off my back

Jungle boogie no more

Withdrawals on the dance
floor

Speed psychosis attack

Quick - bring the jungle
boogie back!





One's too many & One hundred's not enough!
by John La Mude
(street lamp made from recycled materials)

AOD sector reform

Victoria's alcohol and other drug (AOD) service system is undergoing a major reform. All existing treatment services are being recommissioned and the future AOD services are likely to be quite different from the ones we know. Sam Biondo, VAADA EO, gave us this brief summary of the new service specifications recently released by the Department of Health.

The recent release of a 'Call for Submissions' on the delivery of selected alcohol and drug services in Victoria goes one step closer to the re-development of the State's alcohol and drug treatment system. The following outline draws on some of the material contained in the official tender document and gives a flavour of the significant changes being sought.

Services such as counselling, care and recovery coordination, non-residential withdrawal, catchment based intake and assessment and catchment based planning function are all included in the first stage of recommissioning. Other services such as youth focussed AOD and residential withdrawal, and residential rehabilitation will be recommissioned next year.

As part of the reformed AOD treatment program, Prospective Service Providers will be required to:

- Commence service delivery at the agreed scale and coverage on 1 July 2014
- Work collaboratively in the catchment, and adjoining catchments where relevant, with other services that have a shared responsibility for people with AOD related issues
- Demonstrate a commitment to include consumers and families/significant others in treatment planning and service development
- Meet accountability and reporting requirements
- Develop an information system with the capacity to share client information across treatment modalities, between service providers and with intake and assessment information
- Ensure continuity of service for all existing clients and actively support clients who will need to transition to altered services as a result of recommissioning
- Work with other service providers to effect a smooth transition to new service delivery arrangements

Tender specifications require that AOD treatment services should have the capacity to address all harmful substance use and reduce the harms on individuals and their families/significant others, including dependent children. There is a requirement that services in each catchment should be responsive to changes in AOD trends and shifting patterns of use over time.

Importantly, access to services will be based on a level of assessed clinical need, with priority given to those identified with the highest need. This will include people who fit in any of the following categories:

- Have dependent children who are reliant on them;
- Are in contact with the justice system;
- Have a history of long-term homelessness;
- Are Aboriginal;
- Have a co-existing intellectual disability or acquired brain injury; and/or
- Have a mental illness.

The tender of services calls for a significant shift in the ways things are done. Centralised screening and referral as well as intake and assessment will be new features as will new funding models, geographical regions, care co-ordination functions and a raft of other systemic reforms. The system is expected to be functional from 1st July 2014.

Sam Biondo
Executive Officer
Victorian Alcohol and Drug Association



Remembering Verushka

by Wendy

What made you go there instead of your bed?
You looked like you were sleeping but I know you are dead,
sitting spread-eagled on a public toilet seat,
dried blood on your arm, cold vomit on your feet.

You smiled all the time, you said you were fine.
But the pain you were numbing pushed you over the line.
I just can't believe that your life was in vain.
So young, so much living when free of the pain
- But nobody tells you how hard life can be,
so you thought maybe death was a chance to be free.

Cos it's hard when you're down and living on the street,
everyone sneering 'no shoes on her feet'.
Such a disgrace the junky, mum, whore,
not the sort decent people ever let in the door.
But you - you were beautiful, not a drug wrecked whore.

And for just a short time I had the pleasure to know,
that beautiful smile, always free with the hugs.
I swear I believed you would kick all the drugs.

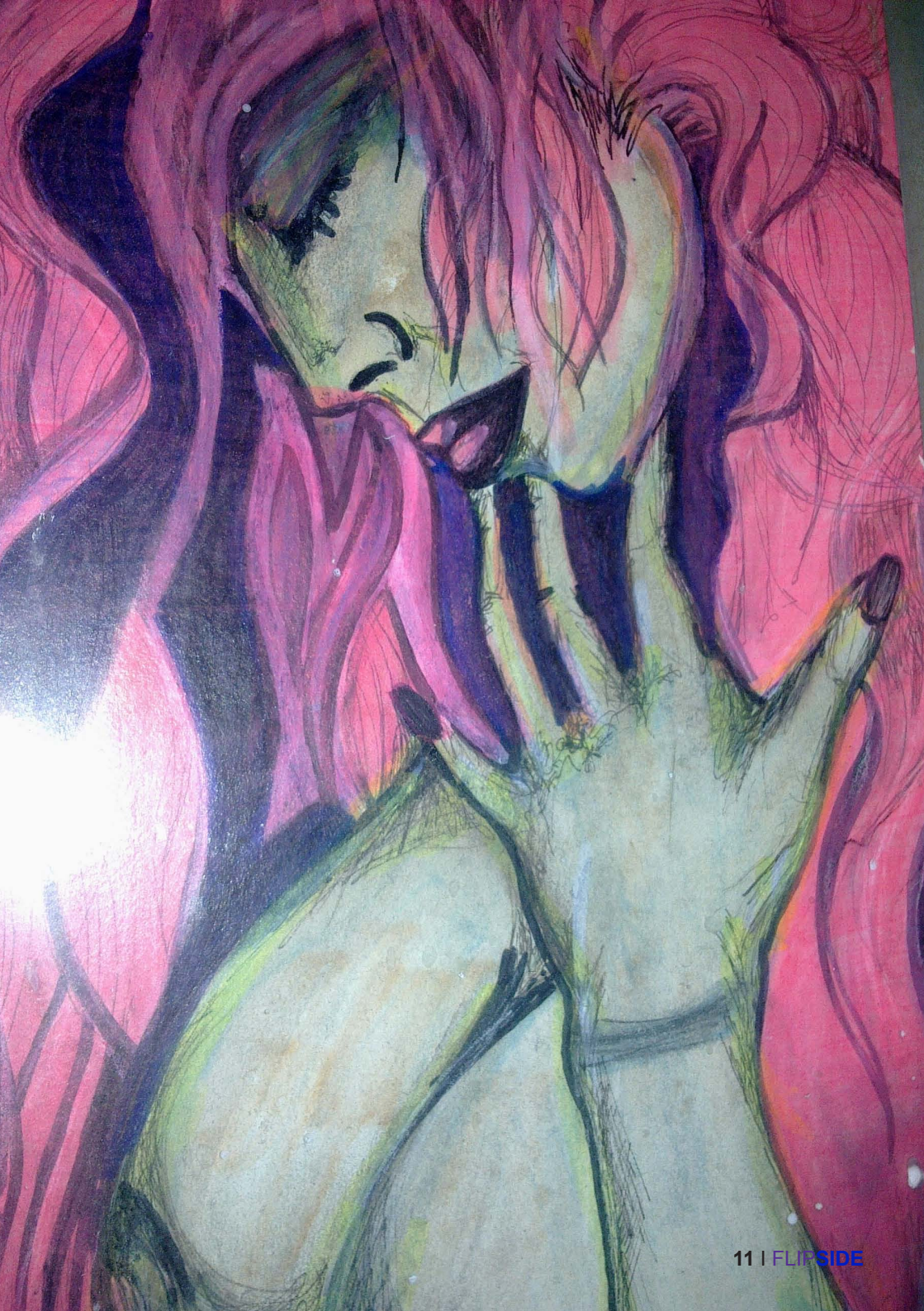
I'm a little bit angry, I need you still here,
It was often your words that kept me from fear.
Eyes so full of life, how could I not have a clue
- that you my dear girl were so close to the edge.
You went into rehab, you lasted a while,
but then all of the problems started to pile.

Your beautiful body you sold on the street.
Only heroin can turn woman's flesh into meat.
Smiling at strangers paying for lust,
for a hit up your arm of that precious white dust.

How could it be that a girl so brave,
gave all that was good just to be a slave?
Did you think you were stronger- that you had control?
Not now my dear, it took body and soul.

Alone in a toilet, girl with gold hair,
you had no one with you, no one to care.
I just can't believe that I'll see you no more,
you big, bright and beautiful blonde headed whore.

But you're not really gone and you are not really dead.
My sweet dear young girl will always live in my head.



My story of change

So I'm talking to my kid's dad tonight. He's getting out of the psych ward tomorrow. A week ago I found him at his house zonked out on his couch. A wise and supportive friend had come along and noticed immediately the smell of gas that filled the house. I was pre-occupied by the scene in front of me. The house looked as though it had been ransacked by elephants. Pills and papers of all descriptions were strewn across the floor. Food and unknown sticky liquids were generously distributed over a variety of surfaces. A chainsaw sat on the couch surrounded by kids' toys. Could it be that only weeks ago he was running around, smiling encouragingly as he coached my son's under 10's footy team?

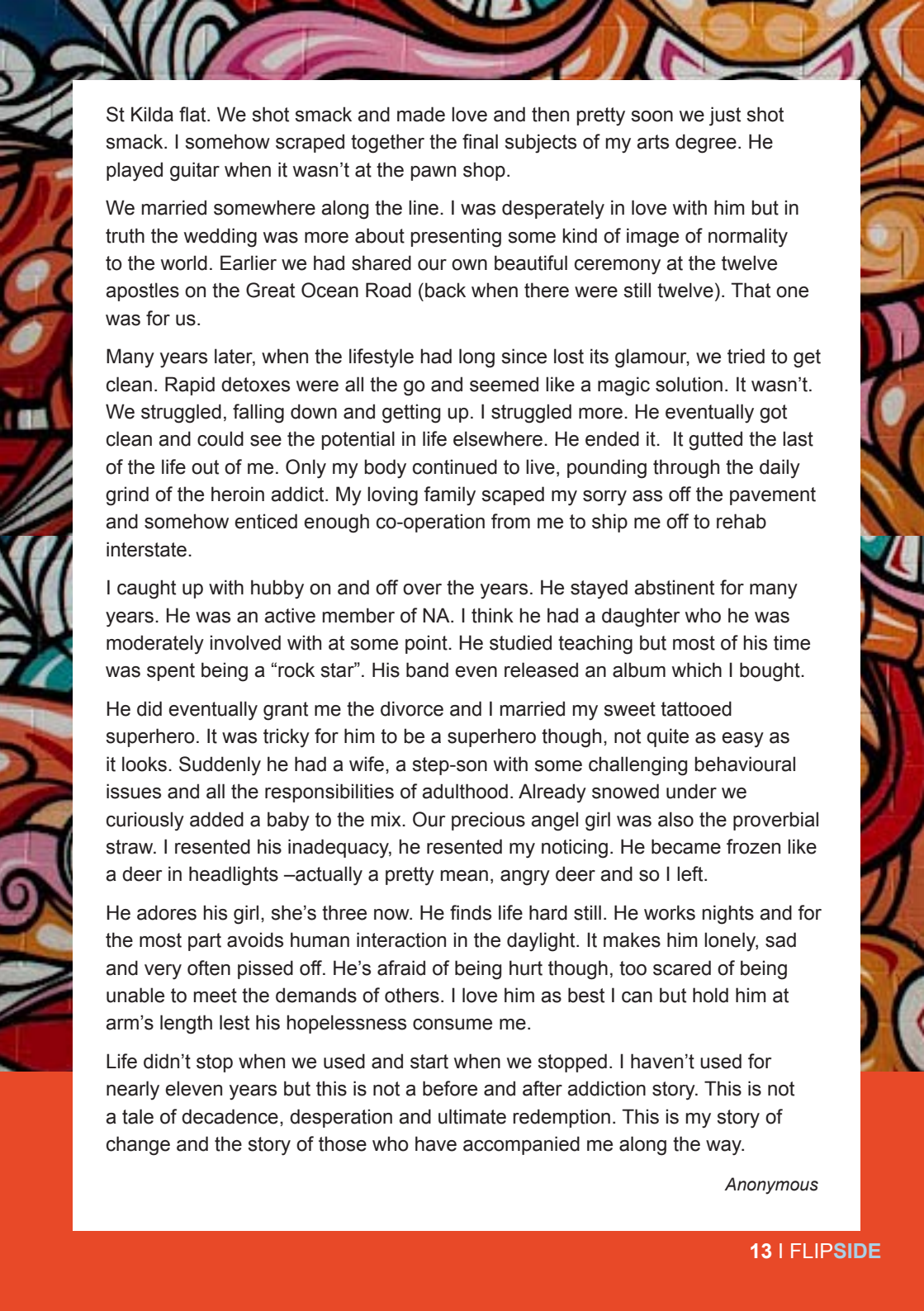
He stood up, disoriented. I'm pretty sure he didn't know who I was, just as well probably. I hurried to find pants as he was wearing only a hoodie, back-to-front and food stained. My friend had called an ambulance. They turned up along with two fire trucks, because of the gas, and a police van. I stood crying, helpless and overwhelmed on the front porch as they took him away.

I met him in rehab. Our son was born about a year after I got out. It was a "surprise". We tried with our limited resources to cobble together a family. We failed. He turned back to the booze and then the rest. I left shortly after. It was a struggle for the next couple of years. His use escalated, his mental health deteriorated. Aggression turned to violence and an IVO was granted. He disappeared for about year. I was glad.

While he was gone I met a guy. He had been clean about a year when we met. I was 34 and I hadn't used substances for about 5 years. He was sweet and kind; big with lots of tattoos. I felt safe again. He was my superhero. The first time we spoke about marriage, he asked me if I was married to my son's dad. I told him no but that I had been married once before when I was 25. He asked me when I'd got divorced.

"What's that, you say? Divorced, you ask.... Um, well". Yeah you see we never got divorced. Before I packed up and went to rehab I organised all the divorce papers, filled them out, and got all the certified documents together and so on. All good to go I left the complete set with hubby and instructions to get a copy of his health care card and send it in the stamped addressed envelope that I'd provided.

I found out a couple of years later he never quite got around to it. That seemed about right. He sold speed, that's how I met him. I was about 21. He introduced me to cocaine, to the needle and ultimately to my great undoing, heroin. I loved him. It was all very Dogs in Space, Nick Cave, and Rock 'n' Roll in our grungy



St Kilda flat. We shot smack and made love and then pretty soon we just shot smack. I somehow scraped together the final subjects of my arts degree. He played guitar when it wasn't at the pawn shop.

We married somewhere along the line. I was desperately in love with him but in truth the wedding was more about presenting some kind of image of normality to the world. Earlier we had shared our own beautiful ceremony at the twelve apostles on the Great Ocean Road (back when there were still twelve). That one was for us.

Many years later, when the lifestyle had long since lost its glamour, we tried to get clean. Rapid detoxes were all the go and seemed like a magic solution. It wasn't. We struggled, falling down and getting up. I struggled more. He eventually got clean and could see the potential in life elsewhere. He ended it. It gutted the last of the life out of me. Only my body continued to live, pounding through the daily grind of the heroin addict. My loving family scaped my sorry ass off the pavement and somehow enticed enough co-operation from me to ship me off to rehab interstate.

I caught up with hubby on and off over the years. He stayed abstinent for many years. He was an active member of NA. I think he had a daughter who he was moderately involved with at some point. He studied teaching but most of his time was spent being a "rock star". His band even released an album which I bought.

He did eventually grant me the divorce and I married my sweet tattooed superhero. It was tricky for him to be a superhero though, not quite as easy as it looks. Suddenly he had a wife, a step-son with some challenging behavioural issues and all the responsibilities of adulthood. Already snowed under we curiously added a baby to the mix. Our precious angel girl was also the proverbial straw. I resented his inadequacy, he resented my noticing. He became frozen like a deer in headlights –actually a pretty mean, angry deer and so I left.

He adores his girl, she's three now. He finds life hard still. He works nights and for the most part avoids human interaction in the daylight. It makes him lonely, sad and very often pissed off. He's afraid of being hurt though, too scared of being unable to meet the demands of others. I love him as best I can but hold him at arm's length lest his hopelessness consume me.

Life didn't stop when we used and start when we stopped. I haven't used for nearly eleven years but this is not a before and after addiction story. This is not a tale of decadence, desperation and ultimate redemption. This is my story of change and the story of those who have accompanied me along the way.

Anonymous



From discovery to recovery

The day of discovery was the first time I found drugs in my 13 year old child's bedroom, which took me on my own journey of recovery.

This is my story.

In the first few years all we did was put all our focus on our son and his drug taking. I made his problem my problem. Because, as parents, we fix things, that's what we do. Our life was going round and round in circles with the same thing happening over and over.

We were all having such strong reactions with tempers flaring, but nothing was working. We were living from one drama and crisis to the next. Each time was getting more serious and I started to question myself at some of the bizarre things I was doing.

Then, one day in desperation I looked up Family Drug Helpline. They were fantastic, very supportive and listened to my woes. I was referred to a support group in my area, but initially I was too scared to go to the group because I felt like such a failure in the parent stakes.

I felt guilty that somehow I have caused this. I didn't want to talk about it. I didn't want people to think bad about my child. I was so overwhelmed by this situation that I was crying every day.

When I eventually did go to a support group, I realised I wasn't alone. I was shocked at how many others were living with these sorts of issues.

I learnt it wasn't my fault.

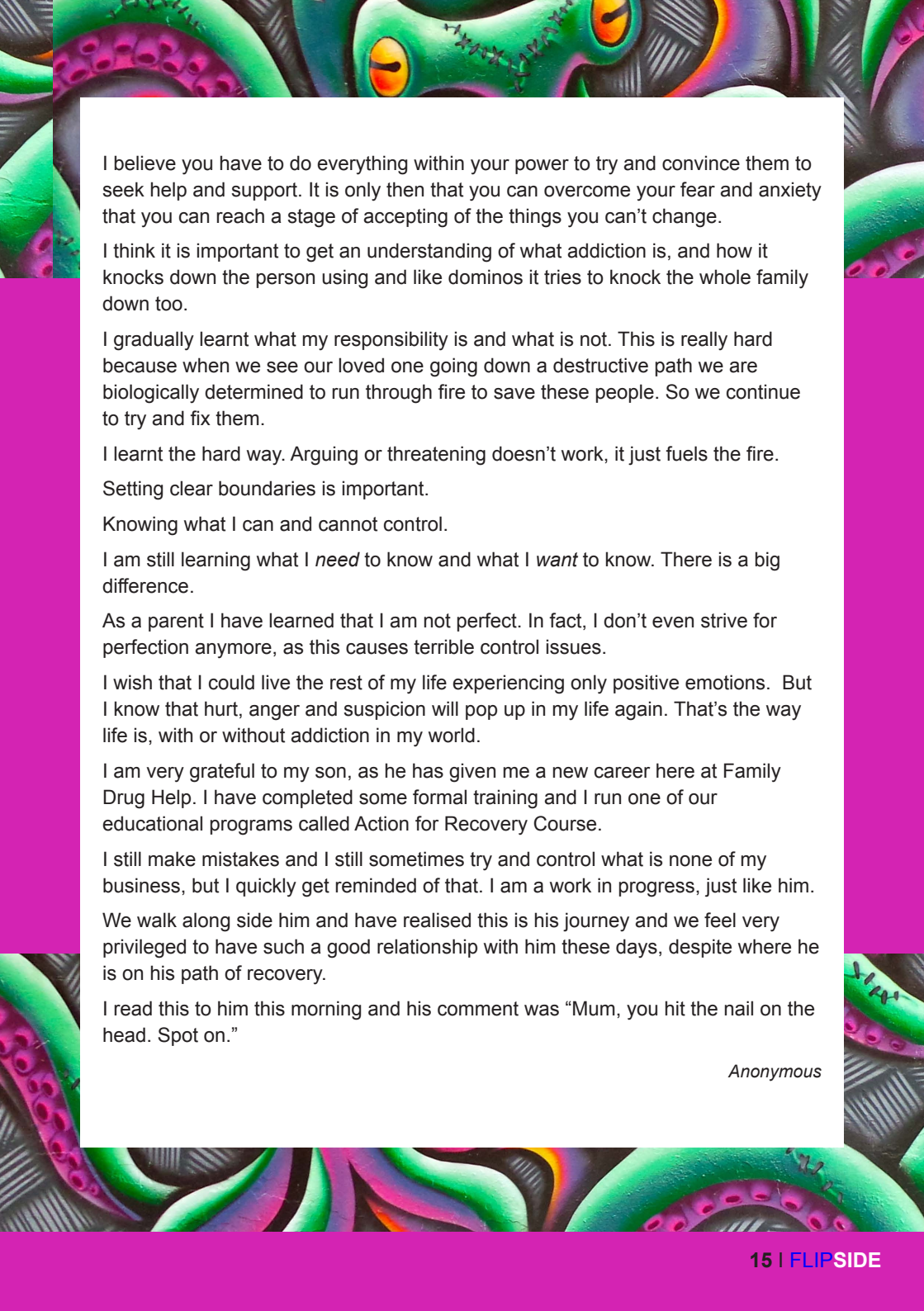
I listened to others' stories, some were worse than mine. But these people seemed to be coping quite well unlike me at this point.

I learnt that "letting go" wasn't loving less.

I learnt not to forget about other members of my family.

I looked forward to going along to the group. Not only was I meeting my new "friends", I knew I would learn something positive. In the safety of the group I was able to learn through observation and sometimes I even participated.

We also had lots of family and individual counselling over the years. I found that support and information helped me enormously.



I believe you have to do everything within your power to try and convince them to seek help and support. It is only then that you can overcome your fear and anxiety that you can reach a stage of accepting of the things you can't change.

I think it is important to get an understanding of what addiction is, and how it knocks down the person using and like dominos it tries to knock the whole family down too.

I gradually learnt what my responsibility is and what is not. This is really hard because when we see our loved one going down a destructive path we are biologically determined to run through fire to save these people. So we continue to try and fix them.

I learnt the hard way. Arguing or threatening doesn't work, it just fuels the fire.

Setting clear boundaries is important.

Knowing what I can and cannot control.

I am still learning what I *need* to know and what I *want* to know. There is a big difference.

As a parent I have learned that I am not perfect. In fact, I don't even strive for perfection anymore, as this causes terrible control issues.

I wish that I could live the rest of my life experiencing only positive emotions. But I know that hurt, anger and suspicion will pop up in my life again. That's the way life is, with or without addiction in my world.

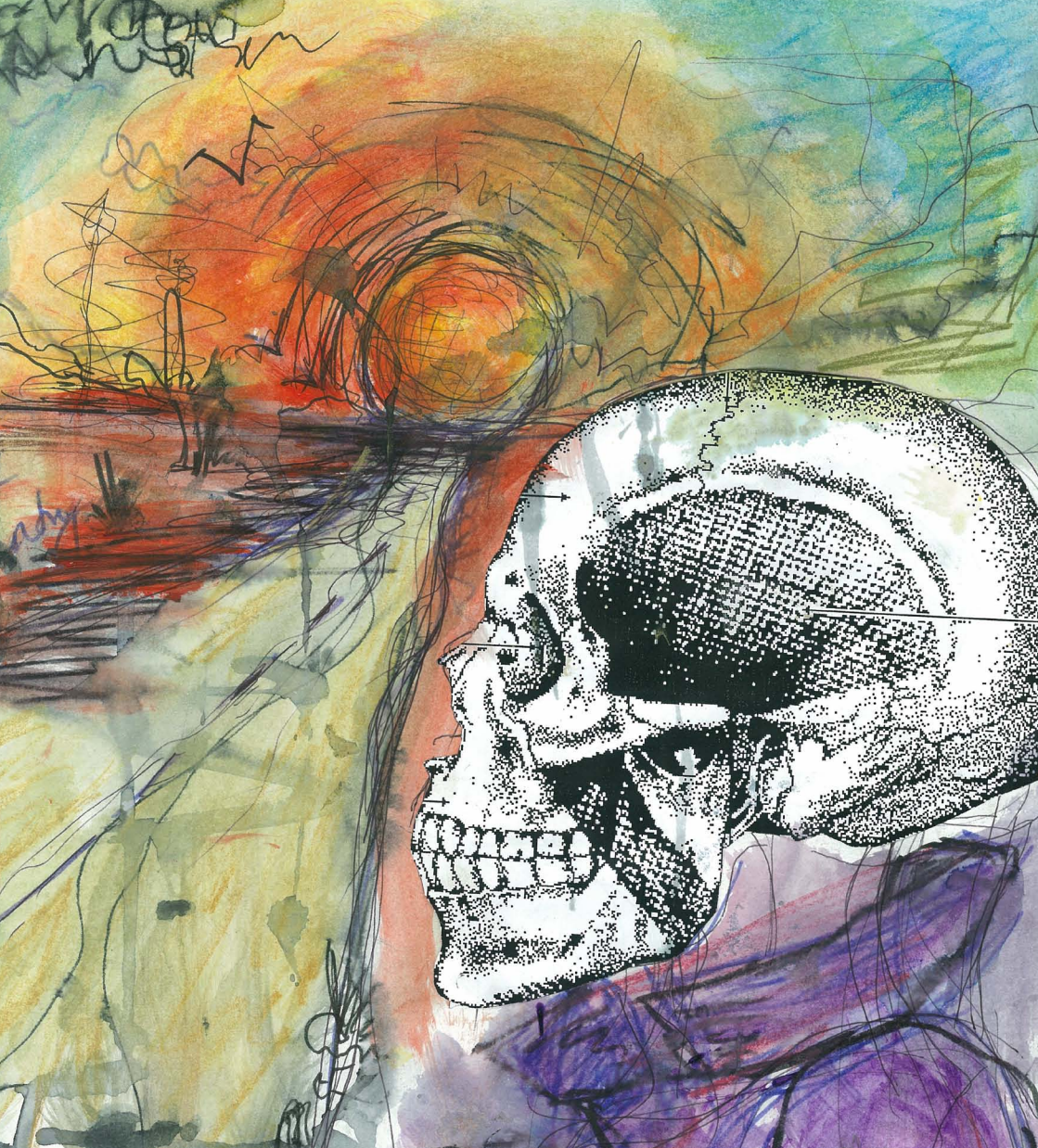
I am very grateful to my son, as he has given me a new career here at Family Drug Help. I have completed some formal training and I run one of our educational programs called Action for Recovery Course.

I still make mistakes and I still sometimes try and control what is none of my business, but I quickly get reminded of that. I am a work in progress, just like him.

We walk along side him and have realised this is his journey and we feel very privileged to have such a good relationship with him these days, despite where he is on his path of recovery.

I read this to him this morning and his comment was "Mum, you hit the nail on the head. Spot on."

Anonymous



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Self Help Addiction Resource Centre

Handwritten text in purple and black ink, including the name 'Michelle' and the year '2011'.