

# FLIP SIDE

The Association of Participating Service Users

It's the little things...



No. 36 Autumn 2014

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## Art:

Front cover by Jarrah

p 7 *Melbourne Graffiti* by  
abubillamusic.com

p 11 No title by Jarrah

Back cover *Fern* by Becc

All other illustrations are photographs  
of street art around Melbourne taken  
by APSU.

Flipside No.36 Autumn 2014

Editing and layout: Edita

Proofreader: Elzara and Edita

**Contents: Thanks to those who  
contributed artwork/photos and to  
all those who contributed articles,  
stories and poetry.**

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# EDITORIAL

Many of you know about the AOD  
sector reform, and some of you have  
been involved in the consultations  
with the department on this issue.

The way drug treatment services in  
Victoria are funded and delivered is  
currently undergoing major reform and  
recommissioning. One of the results of  
this rethink is that the funding stream of  
peer support has been decommissioned  
across the state, making way for a  
new model of care called recovery  
care coordination. This new model  
does not necessarily recognise the  
value of peer support and it is only a  
very small amount of dollars in each  
catchment allocated to this new activity.

APSU's Peer Helper Training was  
supported by the peer support funding  
stream. APSU and SHARC together  
are working hard to impact where  
we can, and make sure the needs of  
those who use the services continue  
to be met. Whilst Peer Support dollars  
make up a small amount of APSU's  
funding, it is the little things that in this  
case will have a big impact. The loss  
of the Peer Helper Training and the  
tremendous value peer helpers bring  
to the sector will be largely missed.

We will certainly keep you updated as  
things progress around this issue.



## From little things big things grow: democracy through consumer participation

For me, one of the greatest joys is witnessing people who use Alcohol and other Drug (AOD) services stepping up and contributing their ideas, experiences and expertise and, in turn, the changes in direction made by service providers and policy makers when exposed to this perspective. It is this joy that keeps me energised as a practitioner of consumer participation. For some it maybe be considered as an unusual way to find joy, but when you consider that consumer participation enables power to function amongst those who are mostly deemed as powerless as well as the consequential changes taken up by service providers and policy makers, then perhaps this bears some understanding.

As a result of this precious acquisition of power, people who use AOD services are able to contribute their vital perspective not only to service provision, but also to policy, research, education and training. It is a vital perspective because it is one of a person who is not invested in keeping the status quo such as keeping a source of funding so that he or she can remain in a job; it is perspective from those for whom alcohol and drug use is not just a job, but part of their everyday life.

Whilst facilitating the participation of people who use services, I have been fortunate to witness many a lightening moments. These occur when a person who uses AOD services makes a statement or several statements that lead to becoming an essential component of a government policy or a procedure tied to service provision.

During the development of the Blueprint for AOD treatment services (this seems such ancient document considering the current and total reform of the Victorian AOD sector), numerous focus group participants described how after an aspect of treatment, whether that be withdrawal, rehabilitation or counselling, they were left to their own resources when seeking further help. This was a hindrance to quality of life of not only people who use Victorian AOD services, but their family members and friends.

I will never forget the reactions of the department representatives. One of them told me years later to what extent these comments impacted on his participation in policy making. I believe up until this day that this was a major impetus to the Victorian government seeking to reform the services, so that people are continuously connected to services when needed.

Policy involvement is only one of many exciting aspects of consumer participation. The

development of people as he or she becomes more experienced with the practice of consumer participation is a process that gives me immense satisfaction in witnessing. Whilst managing the Association of Participating Service Users for five and a half years during the mid noughties, I had the good fortune to take part in delivery of the Peer Helper training, which was completed by over seventy people during this period. Over a third of this group went on to further their education and training after completing this vital program.

I consider advantageous to the AOD Sector to provide education development opportunities to people undertaking peer work. After all the peer perspective has been vital to the policy that drives alcohol and other drug practice today. Whilst on the board of Harm Reduction Victoria I obtained immense satisfaction when participating in governance amongst other drug users, some of whom have been advocating for harm reduction strategies since the days of the grim reaper advertisements. The discussions during those meetings were often controversial, dynamic and passionate, and cut through the bone to issues that in other forums may be circumnavigated. This magnification would not only expose the tension between recovery and harm reduction as example, but also the challenges that irked the organisation as a drug user organisation during this time of conservative governments.

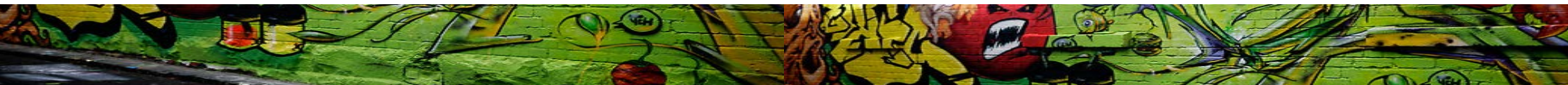
Currently I am facilitating Consumer Participation Practice at UnitingCare ReGen and already the people who have completed the consumer participation training offered by ReGen, have gone on to be strong contributors in not only the service provision, but also policy development within this organisation.

As their success builds, the energy that it produces has its own drive with management and staff facilitating consumer participation without much input on my part. This is an inspiring domino effect that has enough force to keep on creating opportunities for people to participate including further education and training pathways.

That's not all. Staff, no matter the position, readily give of their time to participate in the activities that resource the people who use our service to be better able to contribute. This includes staff from outside such as the Association of Participating Service Users and Harm Reduction Victoria. I have been very moved by the drive not only from the organisation that I work for, but also from these vital peer based services

I understand the importance of voting, but it is this aspect of democracy, consumer participation, that I find truly fulfilling. It changes people, systems and shifts power, so that all can contribute and advocate for the advancement of our services. These are, after all, for every one of us.

*Regina*



## Little decisions

Once I had finally accepted that the reason I smoked dope every day was not from choice, but because I was addicted, I looked up NA online and printed out a meetings list. I then drove around with that list in the glove box of my car for 2 weeks, each day on my way to work saying to myself 'I'll go to one of those meetings tonight'. I've always been a persistent character so even though it took me a couple of weeks to get there I didn't give up on the idea and I finally decided to walk into my first meeting. I intended on only listening but once I'd heard a few people share I felt at home, so I decided to raise my hand and I asked to share too (!)

With the help of a sponsor I began to try – I went home from the meeting and looked around my lounge room, freaking out in the inside – wondering how it would be possible for me to spend time away from the bong and TV. I immediately turned around and walked out the door! Thankfully I decided to take my dog for a walk instead of visiting my dealer. Then I had a hot shower and something to eat and drink, and smoked a cigarette (or three). I decided that I was making myself crazy worrying and just went to bed. I continued spending my time like this – and as soon as I felt the sense of being at a loss as to what to do next, I'd walk my dog again or (as I went to more meetings and met more people in recovery) I decided to start making phone calls. In those first 90 days life was a succession of small choices between meals, meetings, dog walks, hot showers, phone calls and naps.

Usually, unless she wanted something, when we were hanging out at home my dog would ignore me and sit in her bed and sleep or chew on a toy. However I think she was happy about my recovery, because she started sitting down next to me and wanting more pats.

I was enjoying these changes. Each time I experienced myself doing something different, each time I noticed a flower, played with my dog or had a chat with another dog walker, I felt good about myself. Watching myself trying to get clean and then feeling awakened by new experiences gave me a huge sense of hope – this felt good! I decided each day to keep on trying and I continued to seek out ways to spend my time. That's when I picked up some old novels I'd always wanted to read – I still consider that *The Count of Monte Cristo* helped me get clean :)

Unfortunately there were times when I decided "stuff it" and I picked up drugs again. I wish I hadn't let myself make the decision to pick up the first one - coz it was all downhill from there. By my forth relapse I truly struggled to come back. For me, much of the process of coming back to recovery after using was deciding to delay – when my mind was shouting at me to pick up somehow I managed to decide to wait an hour – wait til after lunch, til half time of the meeting, or wait til after the next dog walk or phone call. Now thank goodness it is very rare that I consider picking up and I'm grateful for all of those little decisions which saw me create a healthy lifestyle for myself, and become happy without using drugs or alcohol.

*Anonymous*

## How long

*by Ant*

Moon's on the rise  
Sunset's in the west  
I best be moving as I need to rest.

The claws of a cat have scratched my arm  
And a white lady's mending the pain with her charm  
How long does it take?  
How long does it last?  
This feeling I'm feeling is so unreal.

She's waiting by the door  
With her offering me more  
Her sweet sweet taste keeps me safe and warm  
How long does it last?  
How long does it take?  
Until I die by the needles final mistake.



courtesy of [www.abubillmusic.com](http://www.abubillmusic.com)

## A little something I learned from a soft toy

When I first thought about this I thought about the beautiful little things that I love, that make me feel wonderful, like the gorgeous sunrises I can see often, walking on the beach, the feeling of sitting on a couch with my family and my dog, all watching TV (dog too!!), being organized (for a change), not being late (also for a change), helping someone that I love fulfil their dream, helping someone I don't like achieve their goal (even harder).



However I think the biggest little thing that makes me happy, that doesn't cost me anything, that I took so long to get a grasp on, was the attitude of acceptance. I learnt firstly that it doesn't mean that I condone the situation or behaviour, but it means that I can learn to let others and situations evolve in their own way and shape, without my judgement, intervention or interference. I am a family member and have dealt with addiction in my family on many levels and over many generations. I am the daughter of an alcoholic mother, I am the ex wife of an alcoholic husband and the mother of an addicted son; this little change of thinking, the ability to accept the situation or person has made me the happiest of all. I am an artist and I paint pictures, and I know that the eclectic range of colours and textures I use helps create an amazing bright vibrant piece of work that speaks to me and others. That is how I see all my family members and people in my life now. They are all vibrant and textural in their personalities, in their lifestyles and interests and they all add to my world in amazing ways, as I do to theirs. By accepting others, I have learnt to accept myself.

I was once given a soft toy by a relative that reflected physical attributes that I didn't like about myself. They thought it was very funny. I was shattered at the time and took it to heart. As I learnt more about the things that would make me happy, and as I mentioned, "acceptance", being one of them, I began to see how gorgeous this soft toy was. What I had considered "ugly" became "beautiful" and it made me realize the transforming and powerful effects of true acceptance. It's one of my favourite old soft toys today.

It makes me very happy to have a productive and happy relationship with those that want one with me. That little word "acceptance" has made all that possible.

Anne

APSU believes that people 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 service users for service users and has an active member base. We invite you to join us in having a say. APSU membership is free, confidential and open to anyone interested in voicing their opinions and ideas on the issues facing service users today. We need your help to give us all a fair go. To become a member please fill out the form below and post to: **140 Grange Road, Carnegie VIC 3163** or fax to: **03 9572 3498** or go to: [www.apsuonline.org.au](http://www.apsuonline.org.au) to register online.

## MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION

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

- Receive the quarterly APSU FLIPSIDE magazine
- Be sent information on how to become involved

I am a:  Service user  Service provider  Family member  Other

How did you find out about APSU? \_\_\_\_\_

Language spoken at home: \_\_\_\_\_

Cultural identity: \_\_\_\_\_

Age:  16-25  25-35  36-45  46-65  over 65

Other issues:  Physical disability  Mental health  Visual  Hearing  
 Speech  Acquired brain injury

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City/Suburb: \_\_\_\_\_ Postcode: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_ Mobile: \_\_\_\_\_

Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## A little list

Below is a list of the tried and true. A group of actions so to speak that helps empower and regain connections. While we are in addiction mode these little things tend to fall away. It doesn't seem so important at the time because the big crappy things are swallowing all our time and energy. Taking time to attend to the little things helps rebuild a strong foundation. And with a strong foundation we can tackle all things big and small.

- ⌘ going for a walk
- ⌘ eating chocolate
- ⌘ growing something yourself
- ⌘ read a good book
- ⌘ engage in some mindfulness
- ⌘ make or bake something
- ⌘ chat with a neighbour
- ⌘ get or lend a pet
- ⌘ laugh out loud
- ⌘ write a letter
- ⌘ yoga

Another last but not least tip, SMILE.  
It costs nothing, is easy to do and a wonderful thing to share.

*A happy APSU member*



## Consumer participation in Victorian AOD sector

There has been an increase in consumer participation activities in Victorian alcohol and other drug (AOD) sector in the last few years. Here is a brief overview of some of the existing or currently forming consumer bodies:

**The Eastern Metropolitan Region Dual Diagnosis Consumer and Carer Advisory Council (EMRDDCCAC)** was established four years ago to collaborate with AOD and mental health service providers in the Eastern Region on the dual diagnosis related issues.

Contact: [Gavin.Foster@easternhealth.org.au](mailto:Gavin.Foster@easternhealth.org.au)

**Southern Region Community Advisory Council (SRCAC)** is the result of collaborative work of some AOD services in Southern Metropolitan Region. SRCAC has been formed in 2012 and is today well established. SRCAC aims to work in partnership with AOD service providers in Southern Region to enhance service delivery.

Contact: [contact.srcac@gmail.com](mailto:contact.srcac@gmail.com)

**Consumer Participation Practice at UnitingCare ReGen** (formerly Moreland Hall) is aims to increase the practice of consumer participation. This initiative began in the second half of 2013 and has thus far completed two rounds of consumer training.

Contact: [RBrindle@regen.org.au](mailto:RBrindle@regen.org.au)

**Nexus Consumer and Carer Advisory Group** is currently being established. This Advisory Group will collaborate with Nexus Dual Diagnosis Service and other service providers in Melbourne's North-West on the dual diagnosis related issues.

Contact: [Christine.Rampling@svhm.org.au](mailto:Christine.Rampling@svhm.org.au) or [Kevan.Myers@svhm.org.au](mailto:Kevan.Myers@svhm.org.au)

**Turning Point Consumer and Carer Advisory Council** is currently being established and will comprise people with experience of alcohol and drug and/or gambling issues, either directly or through a family member or significant other. This Council will work with Turning Point to incorporate the needs of consumers in the organisational planning.

Contact: **Jay 9418 1035** or **Melissa 8413 8511**

If you are interested in getting involved with these or similar AOD consumer bodies in Victoria, e-mail [ekennedy@sharc.org.au](mailto:ekennedy@sharc.org.au) with your name and contact number and we will get in touch with you for any future opportunities.

## Heroin's sister

by Anonymous - courtesy of [www.siblingsupport.com.au](http://www.siblingsupport.com.au)

I've never understood the people who didn't want to live  
The people whos days seem so forced that they rather not breathe  
The ones who cry all day  
And sleep instead of live  
Until I became Heroin's sister  
I became addicted to saving a sinner  
Fighting to be heard through Heroin's haze  
Clawing at steal needles and toxic baggies trying to dig deep enough  
To find my brother T  
To find the innocent sparkle in his eye  
That he only has when he's not chasing a high  
Trying to search long enough to save him from the streets  
To save him from the devil he has inside  
But success is never mine I can never stop him in time  
And no matter how hard I try drugs are always first  
And love is last in line  
So forgive me brother I swear I tried  
But You have to stop the devil inside





## Cacti, Purdie, jellybeans...

At times when I am struggling, depressed and unmotivated, activities which would be automatic for most 'functioning' people do not come easily for me. Brushing my teeth, taking a shower – managing to accomplish any kind of activity, feels impossible. During those days, small steps like catching up with emails or doing a household chore do make a big difference to the way I feel – it might be small but it is still an achievement of sorts. My self-talk is mostly negative at those times, but every so often I will manage to focus on something I love and value, such as my little nephews, and for a little while I feel some happiness and relief.

I love plants, but have never taken a huge interest in trying to grow them. During my recovery though, I developed a passion for succulents and cacti. I found an amazing succulent stall at Vic Market and I started to collect them. They are all so different and unique, some look almost out of this world. And they are the only plants I can't kill. I love the fact that some forms of cacti appear almost ugly-looking, until in Spring they just burst into blooms of colourful flowers, some actually bigger than the plant itself. The flowers often only bloom for a day or two, like most things in life they are only transitory. When I am out in the backyard having a cigarette and dwelling on my worries, I'll try to take a moment to stop and focus on the beauty of my plants, and for a little while I feel at peace.

I am on pharmacotherapy and am lucky enough to have a great pharmacist – I have heard many people talk about being treated poorly by their pharmacy. At Christmas, my pharmacist gave all his clients a box of chocolates. It made my day. It is something that he doesn't have to do, and it shows that he values his clients as human beings.

I have a bird bath in the backyard and it attracts so many different birds, all jostling for a position at the drinking hole. They take turns jumping in for a bath, flapping water everywhere and then sitting on the fence to dry off. I love animals, so watching them gives me a lot of pleasure – I feel like I've done something small to make their day easier, especially in the heat of summer.

My partner and I have a gorgeous 15 year old cat called Purdie. We adopted her from Lort Smith Animal Hospital when I was 20 years old - I feel like she and I have done our growing up together. I believe animals feel emotions the way humans do. Purdie shows embarrassment if we laugh at her, guilty behaviour when she has done something wrong – and she definitely shows us love. When I am feeling down or upset, Purdie senses it and will come to sit on my lap or rub noses. These small acts make me feel so comforted and less distressed.

The following are some more examples of little things which have made a difference for me:

- ✂ At the supermarket checkout, realising that I was 10 cents short for bread and the woman behind me immediately offering to help.
- ✂ Indulging in two Magnum icecreams after a bad day.
- ✂ Getting a kiss or a hug from a family member who I know finds it hard to show physical affection.
- ✂ Receiving something, such as a card, that someone has made themselves.
- ✂ Making up with someone you care for after an argument
- ✂ Watching my nephews so excited to see me when I go to visit.
- ✂ Every so often, jumping on a swing....
- ✂ The purring of my cat.
- ✂ Listening to the rain as you drift off to sleep
- ✂ The symmetry of nature
- ✂ Finding a special shell at the beach
- ✂ Hearing a song on the radio that you haven't heard since you were little
- ✂ Receiving a letter from a loved one, or a parcel in the post
- ✂ Finding an object from your childhood which you had completely forgotten about
- ✂ Remembering the people you have lost, in some small way that means something
- ✂ Staying at your parents, or the home of someone you love most, snuggled up in bed, knowing they're just in the next room
- ✂ Writing lists
- ✂ The smell of a new book
- ✂ Posting your opinion or giving feedback on a website. It may be a small act but can feel empowering.
- ✂ Signing a petition for something you care deeply about.
- ✂ Telling those close to you how much they mean to you
- ✂ Licking postage stamps – there's something satisfying about it. Or is it just me??!
- ✂ Being granted an extension on a bill or an assignment
- ✂ The joy of stationery – especially when it's colour-coded
- ✂ Buying yourself a nice journal
- ✂ Non-crowded or empty public transport
- ✂ For comfort – orange flavoured Starburst lollipops or chemist brand jellybeans (the best jellybeans invented).

Jay Bee

# A little nap

I am 44 years old and I have just purchased my first brand new bed.

I can remember us kids getting new beds when we bought a house when I was about 8 years old. The whole family got new beds. The bed head had a light in it and I would set up house for baby Jesus, Mary, Joseph and an assortment of animals and wise men. Occasionally Barbie would visit the holy family. Barbie would take Mary out in the town to visit such hot spots as lego medieval castle or back to the Barbies 3 story mansion. Mary was always returned safely, back in front of the bed light, her virtue intact.

Over the years I went through an assortment of begged, borrowed and stolen beds. There was the futon bed of nails period of the late 80's, the "Look what I scored" mattress on side of road period and the dead relative hand me down period. Each bed as shit as the last. At one point the bed I had was sooo bad that I slept on the couch for 12 months instead.

The only near death experience I have ever had was the night I slept on a water bed. I was drunk and staggered into a stranger's bedroom and passed out on said waterbed. I woke up in the middle of the night and thought I was on top of an iceberg. I have never been so cold, hung over and miserable in my life.

On the occasion when I would frequent a hotel I would find myself going to bed early to experience the bed. The crisp sheets, no lumps or bumps or dodgy springs and the obligatory mint on the pillow. That and the mini bar was my idea of heaven.

At one point of my life I was forced to make my car my bed. In fact it made my lounge room, dining and kitchen. But that was long ago and these days the mini bar stays unmolested.

Pre purchase of our new bed my partner and I slept on his deceased parent's bed. I argued with my partner because he couldn't understand why I would want to spend money on a new bed when this bed was perfectly fine. The bed wasn't too bad but I couldn't shake the dead parent thing. My girlfriend bought a new bed. It was one of those new beds with an added topper. As soon as I lay on it I realized that I had been living like a cave woman. This was hotel comfort times 10. The decision was final.

One week later our new bed arrived.... in the plastic! As the delivery men began to remove the old bed I stood poised and ready to leap on any paraphernalia that had made a home underneath. Fortunately it was just a sock cemetery.

For my first night in the new bed I put on the brand new linen, showered and shaved my legs and put on my holiday nightie. I would like to say that I slept like a princess, but I actually slept like a log. I lay in my bed on cold rainy nights and feel overwhelming gratitude for the warmth and safety. Sometimes I jump into bed during the day just to snuggle and embrace the comfort.

To me having a brand new bed is one of the little things that make me feel good.

EJ

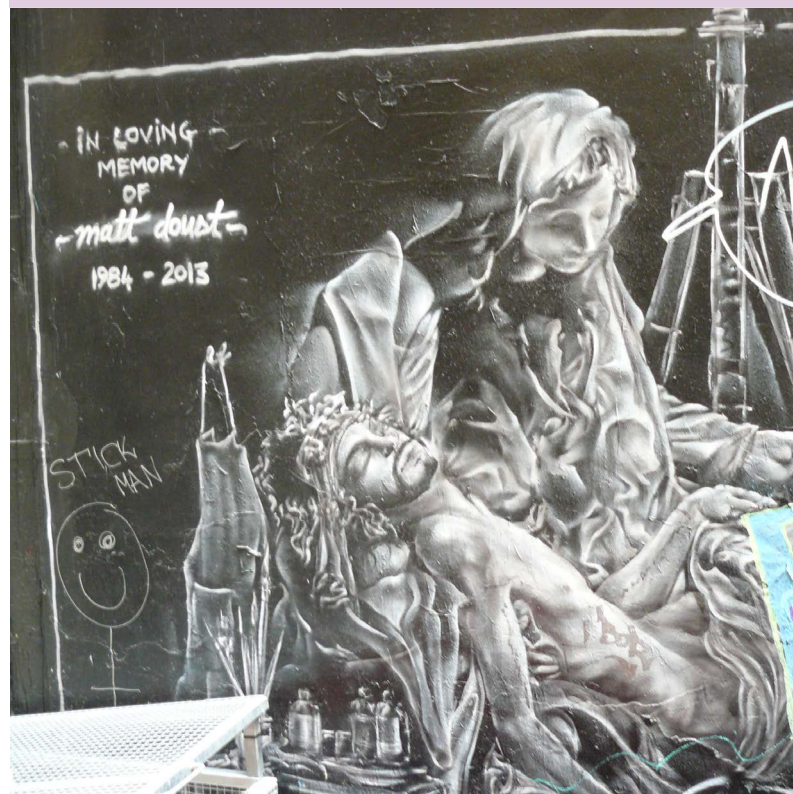
# What's up at APSU: Family participation

APSU has received a philanthropic grant to develop a manual for family participation in the Alcohol and Other Drug (AOD) sector, to complement *Straight from the Source*, a practical guide to consumer participation, which has already been successfully disseminated across the Victorian AOD sector.

We are asking family members of people eligible for AOD treatment services to participate in focus groups to be held over the next couple of months. We are defining family member as any person identified as significant by current or past clients of an AOD treatment service.

We would like to enquire about the experience of being a family member involved with AOD treatment services. We would particularly like to have discussions with family members about family inclusive practice and family participation in AOD services.

For further information contact Kathryn Wakeling, APSU Family Project Worker at [kwakeling@sharc.org.au](mailto:kwakeling@sharc.org.au)



"I wasn't a painter anymore, I was a human being that was addicted to something other than creating and for a time that made me feel alive."

Matt Doust  
1984-2013

Street art from  
Centre Place,  
Melbourne CBD



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Email: [apsu@sharc.org.au](mailto:apsu@sharc.org.au)  
[www.apsuonline.org.au](http://www.apsuonline.org.au)



Self Help Addiction Resource Centre

APSU is a service of sharc