

FLIP SIDE

The Association of Participating Service Users



Opportunities

No. 42 Spring 2016

INSIDE

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If you have any original articles, poems or artwork that you would like to see in Flipside you may submit them to:

apsu@sharc.org.au

or APSU 140 Grange Road Carnegie VIC 3163

phone: (03) 9573 1776

ABN: 18052525948

Editorial

Opportunities are a form of social capital. People from all over the world leave their families and their countries looking for the opportunity. Australia, indeed, was built by people who came here looking for the opportunity to improve their lives and the lives of their children. We still pride ourselves on being a country that gives everyone “a fair go” and equal opportunity. But what can be said about opportunities and drug use?

The relationship between drug use and opportunities is complicated. Drug abuse is often found in disadvantaged communities that lack the opportunities to improve their lives. But drug abuse also causes the lack of opportunity. Legal issues and general stigma associated with drug use prevent people from accessing education and employment, and consequently from the opportunity to achieve fulfilling and meaningful lives.

At a more personal level, drug abuse can be associated with missed opportunities. Drugs become a comfort zone, a safe and familiar place, a shelter from the big chaotic world out there. Even when one becomes aware that this habit has developed into a problem, change of lifestyle can be overwhelming. Opportunities have little value if we are not ready for them. But it can also be hard to find the opportunity for change, because the public treatment system is under-resourced and private options are too costly, because one might have lost the support from friends and family, because one’s social circle is built around drug use...

Some contributors to this edition have defined themselves as the lucky ones, because they found the opportunity for recovery. Some have found different kind of opportunities in unexpected places. Their stories are about journeys with happy endings. We hope that they will provide comfort to those who are still waiting.

Edita



Working for \$5/day

The recent changes to welfare payments mean that many on Newstart are now required to work for their benefit. The number of working hours depends on the beneficiary's age and it may be equivalent to full-time; for me it was 15 hours per week. This worked out to two full-time days per week, which is paid \$20 a fortnight or the equivalent of \$5 per day. Though financially this wasn't in any way an incentive, the opportunity to have something to do on a regular basis was somewhat of an attraction. What it was that I was to do was another question entirely.

I have struggled for over 15 years with a bipolar disorder and substance abuse issues, so the importance of being active, doing something on a regular basis that has meaning, has been a real challenge. I have struggled to complete a post-graduate qualification and as my Work for the Dole (WFD) period was approaching I realised that I was not going to be able to find the work experience placement I required to finish my studies, so I could not use this as a WFD activity and instead I was going to have to complete something organised by my Employment Service Provider (ESP). For those who have had experience with an ESP you may feel, like I do, that their role is really just to 'tick the boxes' and that any work or study that you want to do is really for you to work out, which left me with some apprehension in regards to what my WFD activity may entail. Thankfully, I was pleasantly surprised. I was given the choice between working on a community magazine, or gardening at a caravan park some 30 minutes away by train. I chose the magazine.

The magazine was aimed at those seeking work and was being made for a community group that provided training opportunities for adults who may require extra support before entering the workforce, or really for people like me. The articles were researched, written, edited and designed by WFD participants, which meant that we had control over everything, from the pictures used to how the article was designed on the page. As someone who had experience using MS Publisher, I found it a fun challenge to increase my skills in graphic design plus I got to write, which is something I had been doing for a long time, both academically and recreationally. In fact I write to help make sense of the thoughts and contrasting emotions that I often have trouble balancing in other ways, so for me writing has been a great tool in making sense of what is going in my head, and now I could do it for money! Thankfully, this wasn't my main incentive.

As the weeks passed I began to gain more and more confidence in my ability to meet the requirements of the program, as even though I had been studying at university and had worked within the last two years, I continually suffered from anxiety and depression with many of my issues being around a perceived lack of talent or skill, so much so that I often

thought so little of myself and my life that I would frequently think about ending my life. I have a young son, who lives with his mother and the support of family and friends, but all of this was not enough for me to want to keep on living. Yet the opportunity to do something meaningful, to have regular activity, had changed things to a degree that I now no longer thought of suicide as frequently and was also able to better manage my depressive episodes, something I did not at all foresee. I regularly see a psychologist and psychiatrist, as well as take medication, yet at times this does little to help me deal with the issues I constantly struggle with. Having an outlet like writing or music has been of great assistance for me and I'm grateful that I have found this out as I know many struggle to find such outlets.



So, I was now involved in regular activity and feeling better about myself and it was at this time that I received a call from my university offering me a placement opportunity with a Men's Health program being run by the Western Bulldogs, called Sons of the West. Although I still held doubts over having skills in the area of my study (counselling), I knew that this was an opportunity too good to pass up and with the confidence of the WFD program under my belt, I decided to say yes. So began my journey with Men's Health. I am now set to continue my placement next year after a successful first year of the program in my home town. I am the program counsellor and have had the

opportunity to speak with many men about issues they face in their lives, as well as being in the position to soon create and run a small group program looking at assisting men with depression issues. If I was to look 12 months back, I would never have envisaged any of this being possible. That said I still fail to give myself the credit I deserve for making the changes to help this come about. Some habits are hard to break and so I still struggle with my bipolar and substance abuse issues, though again to a lesser degree. I feel grateful that for only \$5 per day, paid to me, I was able to make progress that had eluded me for some time. That's an opportunity I never saw coming.

Brendan Johnson

The boy that turned wolf

by Jarrod Maskiell

At first I heard was in a park,
I saw your poor young tortured heart.
Day had faded light grew dim,
and yet still air surrounded him.

The hour saw a belled was tolled,
Despite how late it grew not cold.
A lucky glance saw moonlight strike,
a boy turned wolf in one small bite!

Terror now upon my face,
the boy turned wolf began to chase,
left and right my muscles ached,
the boy now wolf kept up the pace.

Closer now the bell to me,
it echoes here,
it tolls for thee.

I trip and fall,
my end I fear,
to be consumed alone out here.

I close my eyes,
I turn to fight,
but the boy turned wolf was gone from sight.

I retraced my steps from tree to tree,
my mind now fraught with things to be.
Tonight I'm spared as the bell tolls three,
But the boy turned wolf will come for me.



Paint by numbers

“Luck Is What Happens When Preparation Meets Opportunity”

This quote, attributed to Roman philosopher Seneca is one of my favourites. I was never prepared. I would not study for tests, I would not go to bed at a reasonable hour, I would not put money away, I would not pack my bags the night before. I lived in constant anxiety because of my lack of preparedness. I was offered plenty of opportunities earlier in life, but I was never prepared and could never meet expectations. I would have flashes of brilliance followed by spectacular crashes. My foundations were a mixture of sand and water. My castles would sink. I thought I was just unlucky. I came into recovery from drug and alcohol addiction carrying a bucket of wet sand in each hand. I was told that a good recovery is built on a solid foundation. I found people who had the formula, the missing ingredients. Slowly I rebuilt from scratch.

Opportunities came quickly...I let them pass. My mother offered to pay for me to go to France as a reward for my newly found sobriety. I said no because I still had work to do. A reasonable job offer from family friends, no, still more work to do. My mentor told me to take the offer of a cheap car from my mother. She said “allow your mother to show you her love...it's important to her”. I took the car and it made life a bit easier. I needed to be told when it was okay to take advantage of an opportunity....I did not need to punish myself or deny myself gifts of love.



My foundations were solid. I could now experiment with the architecture. I was never a natural at life.....some people seemed to be able to produce Rembrandts. My life is a paint by numbers. Only others, like myself, can tell.

Gradually I knew what I was prepared for and what I wasn't. My life grew and grew, and every now and then an opportunity would present itself. Why not? Why not me? I will have a crack. I am prepared to succeed and I am prepared to fail...either way it is an opportunity. Finally, I am one of the “Lucky” ones.

Emma

The opportunity of a lifetime

I had stopped drinking and was attending group sessions at Delmont Hospital a couple of times a week, but I was a long way from recovery. Like most, I had relapsed several times and was struggling to accept the fact that the booze was controlling my life, not me. One day a guy in my group talked about how lucky we were to be given the opportunity to make a fresh start, unlike most people who didn't suffer from an addiction. From my miserable perspective at that time I thought he was talking crap. I sure didn't feel lucky. And I didn't have any sense of me making a fresh start any time soon, if ever. It was many months down the track, when I first felt a glimmer of hope, that I remembered his words. And the more I got into my recovery the more sense they made: the opportunity to make a fresh start. The opportunity to rebuild relationships and get a life. The opportunity of a lifetime.

I thought it would be interesting to find out if other people had any ideas on the topic and a Google search of 'Recovery' and 'Opportunity' revealed that several had. It begins with how you define 'recovery', and for me the following definition is as good as any I've seen; 'A deeply personal process of changing one's attitudes, values, feelings, goals, skills and roles. Recovery involves the development of new meaning and purpose in one's life.' (Antony, 1993). Several other definitions emphasize the fact that recovery is ultimately about having a satisfying and fulfilling life **as defined by each person**. It is, most definitely, 'a deeply personal process.'

So where does 'opportunity' fit in this process? According to a group of London-based psychiatrists (NHS Foundation Trust, 2010), recovery involves three core concepts; hope, agency and opportunity. Hope is a central aspect of recovery and recovery is probably impossible without it. It is essential for sustaining motivation and supporting an individual's expectations. Agency refers to people gaining a sense of control over their lives. Opportunity links recovery with the wish to participate, to be a valued member of a community and to have access to the opportunities that exist within that community.

It's true, I believe, that it's only the fortunate few in most communities who are given the opportunity to wipe the slate clean and get a genuine second chance. Among them are those of us who are given the opportunity through recovery. An opportunity of a lifetime.

Alex A.

Antony, W.A. 1993. Recovering from Mental Illness. *Psychosocial Rehabilitation Journal* 16. 11-13.
Recovery is for all. December, 2000. A position statement by consultant psychiatrists. NHS Foundation Trust. Mental Health NHS Trust.

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** 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: _____

23 years

Never thought the “opportunity” would arise. My gorgeous son, our beautiful first born son had been in active addiction for 23 years. So many lost opportunities, so much grief and despair on the part of his family about where he was at and what could have been. The only person I know intimately that has been to jail. So much grief and despair for him too.

Once I found out that my mother had died of addiction I started researching, and researching and wanted answers as to why. Lucky for me the opportunity arose for me to seek help from a spiritual source called “a 12 step program for families – Al-Anon”. I resisted this opportunity vehemently. I wanted clinical answers and the last thing I wanted was a program to look at the “family disease” of addiction.

Fortunately for me my pain was great enough to send me off to this program, and believe it or not, I began to feel so much better. How did it work? Who knows? But it worked for me. I loved going to the meetings and began to pray ... Oh no! Dare I say it? I prayed for my beautiful son to have the same relief and peace I was beginning to feel. He told me NA and AA were for wankers. He was OK.

In recent months the Crisis Assessment Team were called to our home because of his psychosis, he had lost touch with reality because of his ice addiction. His arms scarred with injecting trails and his eyes lifeless with no hope of change. I loved him so, but was unable to reach him.

So much has happened for me because of this wonderful family recovery program that gave me my life back. One of those opportunities was to train and educate in many areas of addiction and healing. I have since worked in many detox units, mental health wards and recovery services. I found a creative talent in art and I also found my zest for life. My son continued to struggle. I was given the opportunity and gift through my program of recovery to still have a close and loving connection with him, aside from his active addiction and lifestyle.

The biggest opportunity of all arose in recent months when he was introduced to a wonderful rehab in the spiritual heart of Victoria that had a program that was so tailored and suited to him. He accepted it with open arms, and along with that came the opportunity (compulsory) as part of the rehab to attend 12 step meetings. He now attends regular meetings as part of his recovery program.

With the lightest heart filled with gratitude I can say he is now nearly 90 days clean for the first time in 23 years. Opportunities arose from the most unlikely places. I have never given up hope. It's a day at a time. What great days they are.

Anonymous

Rewriting my story

by Cina Loren

I'm rewriting my story
Cos once I had a story that never worked for me
That made me stuck, stuck in all my false hope
Trapped in denial
In so many lies
Running from my past
Running from my family, from who I am
Trying to be someone who I'm not, who I never could be
Never wanted to be
Trying to block out my expectations
Cos I always had to block shit out heavy
Or get knocked out
Just to get by
Just to survive
Cos I couldn't deal with all that shit
Weighing heavy on my shoulders
Living on the run always
In my heart I felt
I had to live in all my hopes and dreams
At least 20 years in the future
Just to get by
Just to imagine escaping
Just to imagine living, a chance at life
To mentally live in what my life would be like to be free
Blessed with opportunities
15 years has gone by
And here I am



Still living in all my hopes and dreams
Taking up these opportunities
Changing the game
Still here, at least twenty years in the future
But living in the moment, making my dreams reality
Cos all we really have is this moment
And all our memories
And every time they tell me I'm setting myself up to fail
Every time they tell me I'm incompetent, non-compliant, a fuck up
They only make me more determined to prove them all wrong
So tell me I can't, tell me I won't
No matter how hard I try
Possible will always be impossible to you
And just so you know
Every time you tell me, that I can't, that I won't
You're only making me more resilient
You're only making me more strong minded
Igniting my strength, my determination from my heart
Even when everything is falling down around me
Even when I feel trapped in my life and my body, like I'm living in a prison
No one can break my spirit
Or destroy my hope
No one can tell me who I am, or who I will be
And for where I am now
And for all I have survived
I know I will not let my past define my life or my story
Cos I'm witnessing flowers blooming, breaking through this concrete
And transformations from larva, to caterpillars, to butterflies, emerging from their cocoons
As I continue to love fearlessly, I respect this is not where my story ends
This is just the beginning of my story.

Excited for the future

When I was young, there was nothing scarier than being told that I could do anything I wanted with my life. I lacked direction. The world scared me. I had no self-worth and no matter how much others believed in me, I could never believe in myself.

I felt crushed by the weight of expectations and decisions I had to make. I gave up on myself. When I found drugs and alcohol, I found purpose. The insatiable need to figure out how to get money, where to get drugs and how to get more consumed me and gave me the direction I had been seeking.

Drugs took away the voice in my head that told me I wasn't good enough and replaced it with an inflated ego and sense of self. I no longer felt weighed down by expectations and confusion about where I was going with my life. I found an identity in being a full time drug addict.

But what I was yet to realize, was that the drugs would eventually turn on me. All the relief that they had previously given me wore off and the self-loathing voice in my head was back, louder than ever. I lived in gut wrenching fear and was in a constant state of anxiety. My lifestyle of using and finding the means to get more drugs brought me a life of shame, isolation and a disconnection from the world that was so great that I almost forgot about the girl I used to be and that the world was far bigger than the four walls that I was perpetually trapped in.

I remember the exact moment I realized drugs and alcohol were not my solution anymore. This was even scarier. Life scared me. Drugs and alcohol scared me. Death seemed like my only option.

But by the grace of God, I found recovery. I am one of the lucky ones. I have purpose in my life today. Those that have walked before me have shown me that the direction and purpose I had been searching for can be found by making a conscious decision to help another human being on a daily basis.

Through this, I built enough self-esteem to start looking after myself, to start believing in myself. Sure enough, by acting like a decent human being, the voice in my head was silenced. With support of others, I have been able to achieve things I never thought possible. In my recovery, I have climbed mountains. Literally.

I have learnt to trust others and have positive connections with other people. I am employed. I am a positive contribution to society. I have learnt that making mistakes is okay, and instead of throwing in the towel out of fear of failure, I take risks. I have the courage to front up and participate in my own life no matter what. As a result, I have been blessed with endless opportunities and all of the things I threw away out of fear, have come back into my life along with so much more.

I sit here today clean, happy and connected with the world at my feet. Instead of being afraid, I am excited for what the future may bring.

A year ago, I would've done anything to just be 'normal' but now I want to push the boundaries of life and live a life beyond my wildest dreams.

Because these days I believe I CAN.

Anonymous

Dear Money

Dear Money,

What is your fucking problem?

You're never there when I need you, but when you come back it's always for a short time.

I obsess about you and what amazing things we could do together. Although when I think back you've never really given me true happiness, but somehow you've brainwashed me to think that you're the solution to all my problems.

Go fuck yourself!

I love you!

T.



Dear Sharon

by Craig R

To a lady who gave me gold,
Someone so strong and proud.
A daughter that I have to love'n'hold,
For Sharon's spirit shines through till the end.
Just how do I say goodbye,
To say that I cared, that I did.
Even though she got scared.
When everyone wanted me to fry.
By her side right or wrong.
I try to be strong,
My battle for Sharon goes on.
I will never forget you ever,
No one please live with regret.
As Sharon Giordmaina we will
never forget.....

In memoriam Miriam Clarke

Our dear friend and colleague Miriam Clarke passed away on 29th September this year. Miriam had worked as an APSU project worker from 2006 until 2011, and had continued her collaboration with SHARC and APSU after that in various casual positions. She had worked on many projects over the years, but a definite standout is the 2010 publication "Straight from the source". This consumer participation manual for the AOD sector will remain a valuable resource for years to come.



Miriam held a medical degree. She did not practice medicine, because things in life don't always go as planned, particularly in the AOD world. So the world had missed out on a good doctor, but had gained instead a gifted advocate.

Miriam had a strong sense of justice. She was a fierce advocate for the rights of AOD consumers, and was also passionate about First Australians' and refugees' issues. She struggled to accept the things she couldn't change, but definitely had the courage to change the things she could. She would grant her maximum commitment to any issue that she'd put her mind on.

Miriam loved gardening, chocolates, pinks and purples, fuchsia flowers and long conversations about the meaning of everything. She could get very stubborn when proving her point of view, but she also had a great sense of humour, which made sharing the office space with her fun.

Above all else, Miriam loved her young son and her husband. Pregnancy and the birth of Jethro brought a whole new level of happiness into her life, and being mum became her primary role.

To those who knew Miriam and would like to make a contribution towards her son Jethro's future, banking details for donations are: BSB 063-139 account 1036-2112.



140 Grange Road, Carrerige VIC 3163
Ph: 03 9573 71736 Fax: 03 9572 3488
Email: apsu@sharc.org.au
www.apsozimbabwe.org.za



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Self Help Addiction Resource Centre