



Names and images have been changed to protect privacy

Legacy of support

When Katie* joined Jesuit Social Services' Connexions program in 2016, she was struggling with an alcohol problem and mental illness. She was disengaged from work and learning, and her relationship with her family was strained. To cope, Katie was self-harming and drinking to excess.

"But with help, Katie was feeling ready to address her emotional difficulties", says Becky Halliday, Katie's counsellor at Connexions.

Connexions was founded by Jesuit Social Services in 1996 as Victoria's first dual diagnosis service – engaging young people with concurrent mental health and substance abuse problems on pathways to improve their lives. "For the people we work with, a regular appointment at the same time and place each week doesn't always work.

"So if Katie wasn't feeling up to coming here to visit me, because of how we work - mobile, flexible, proactive - we've been able to continue our work together", says Becky.

With the support of Connexions, Katie is making many changes in her life. She's reconnecting with family and now regularly

goes to the gym. Her anxiety has subsided and she is learning to control her alcohol use, and no longer drinks on a daily basis.

"Katie's been able to develop positive relationships with other services. I've seen huge improvement in her managing lots of areas of her life: in education, housing, in social interactions with family and friends," says Becky.

Katie has also started on a pathway towards employment. She is enrolled in an aged care course and is volunteering at an animal shelter. Ultimately, she wants to work with vulnerable people to share some of her own experiences.

Becky says it's been a privilege to get to know Katie and be part of her journey. Through Connexions, she says, Katie has gone "from strength to strength".

**Not her real name
Photo credit: Fiona Basile*

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Supporting those on the margins



For many of us, Christmas is a time of great joy; of reflecting with loved ones on the year's blessings and taking time out from our busy schedules to spend time with family and friends.

However for many of the people we work with at Jesuit Social Services, the festive season is one that exacerbates feelings of social isolation and loneliness. For nearly 40 years we have worked at the hard end of social justice with people who often experience multiple and complex forms of disadvantage, including people who have had involvement with the criminal justice system, people experiencing barriers to employment and people with mental health problems.

Your ongoing support is crucial in allowing us to continue this work with those on the margins.

This issue of our newsletter focuses on our work in the mental health and wellbeing space, including our Connexions program. Connexions was founded in 1996 as Victoria's first dual diagnosis service for young people experiencing both substance abuse and mental illness.

As you will read, the Connexions model is successful in part due to its flexibility which allows staff members to form trusting relationships with vulnerable young people in comfortable community settings.

Katie's story shows how Connexions has assisted her on positive pathways towards re-engaging with family, education, employment and enjoying making her own contribution to society.

The newsletter also features stories about our other mental health programs, including Artful Dodgers Studios and Support After Suicide, and news about the recent Great Australians Gala Dinner which raised money for this work.

On behalf of everybody at Jesuit Social Services, I wish you a safe and happy Christmas. In 2017, Jesuit Social Services will celebrate its 40th anniversary. We look forward to sharing this exciting milestone with you.

Julie Edwards CEO, Jesuit Social Services

A place of possibility

When Kris was referred to Artful Dodgers Studios in 2014, she saw a hive of activity and opportunity.

"It was a very welcoming, colourful space. Somewhere that anything was possible."

Established by Jesuit Social Services in 1996, Artful Dodgers Studios is one of Victoria's longest-running community cultural development programs.

The Studios engage at-risk young people through art and music projects, with the aim of increasing their artistic and employability skills, social connection and self-esteem.

"When I first walked in I thought, 'OK, I have to be here to make art, I have to be really driven.' But it's not about that. It's a place you can go to be yourself," says Kris.

The Studios' flexible model lets participants choose where, what, when and how they engage – a choice that's integral to young people's sense of ownership and empowerment.

Kris says this flexibility allowed her to accomplish things in other areas of her life, too.

"If there's anything else going on, you're open to talk about it and try to work through it. People are there to talk to."

Key to Artful Dodgers Studios' success is the ability of staff to develop trust and to model positive, healthy relationships. This includes helping participants negotiate social interactions outside the studios.

"I feel a bit reserved going out to places by myself. Staff go to a lot of art events and I would have been intimidated to go by myself. It's really nice to have people to go with."

Kris says working at the Studios has increased her confidence to cope with other things in her life.

"I've moved house a lot, and changed TAFE courses and friend groups a lot and Artful Dodgers has been a constant through all of that. It's been great to know I have something to rely on. It's definitely a backbone."



Kris from Artful Dodgers Studios. Photo credit: Fiona Basile

Improving mental health services benefits the whole community

Almost one in five Australians will experience a mental illness over any 12-month period; and one particularly vulnerable group is people who come into contact with the justice system.

Research by Swinburne University shows that more than 30 per cent of people taken into police custody across Victoria were receiving psychiatric treatment in the community at the time of arrest, and almost half (49 per cent) of prison entrants have a diagnosed mental illness (AIHW). This is compounded by the fact that around half of all prisoners experience two or more forms of disadvantage such as unemployment, homelessness and drug and alcohol problems.

Poor mental health is not an excuse for committing crime, though it does help explain why some people act in ways that can have serious consequences for themselves and the broader community.

People who commit crimes need to be held accountable, but we must do all we can to ensure our mental health services are accessible and effective in order to give people the help they need before they reach the acute end of the criminal justice or health systems.

Based on our hands-on experience through services such as Connexions and Artful Dodgers Studios, we know that engaging people with mental health issues, especially those who lack the support of family or peer group, can be challenging. The recent recommissioning of mental health services in Victoria (in 2013 and 2014) was strongly challenged by Jesuit Social Services at the time because we understood the changes would see the most disadvantaged people in the community miss out.

An independent review of the new arrangements (DHHS, 2015) confirmed our concerns, finding that the reforms led to: a 20 per cent reduction in the number of people accessing mental health and drug and alcohol services; increased delays and blockages in referral pathways; and increased barriers for vulnerable groups being able to access services.

Jesuit Social Services garnered support and stayed faithful to our way of working, continuing to deliver community based

services built on an approach that works people's strengths, that is accessible and empowers people to understand and make choices about the options available to them.

A recent 30-year draft plan from Infrastructure Victoria offers several positive recommendations to help address some of the challenges that remain for the broader mental health system. The plan features a range of short and long-term infrastructure recommendations that span among others, the state's health, transport and justice systems.

Recommendations include a growth in mental health and alcohol and other drug (AOD) rehabilitation services as well as new or expanded forensic mental health facilities within the next five to 10 years.



Responding to the draft plan, Jesuit Social Services' submission called for: ongoing investment to strengthen mental health services in the community; better integrate mental health, housing and employment services; and provide coordinated support for people with co-occurring mental health and drug and alcohol problems.

If we can more effectively help people address multiple and co-occurring issues such as mental health, homelessness and substance abuse, we will ultimately move towards creating safer and more cohesive communities where all people can be active participants and reach their full potential.

Creating hope and community after suicide

When Alex Aulich's husband Damien took his life in 2008, Alex was overwhelmed by grief.

"My reaction was a common one: interrogate the past, your relationship, everything. The overwhelming feelings for me were horror, self-blame and shame," she says.

At the time, Alex was seven months pregnant with the couple's first child. She gave birth to daughter Esther in January 2009 and felt the support of loved ones.

"I had unconditional support from family and very special friends, they gathered around me and baby Esther. Naturally, those who loved me wanted to find hope, but the pain wasn't lifting," she says.

More than a year after Damien died, Alex discovered Jesuit Social Services' Support After Suicide program. Since its inception in 2004, Support After Suicide has provided specialist services including counselling, home and group visits and an online community to people left behind after the suicide of a loved one.

Alex recalls that her first visit to the program, and the opportunity to meet others who had lived similar experiences, brought relief.

"In these support groups, people were brave, generous and equally scared. While everyone's story differs, bringing people together with the common experience of suicide bereavement creates a community and together a community can generate hope."

Alex says the support of the program has enabled her to talk to Esther, now aged seven, about how her father died.



Alex's husband, Damien Hill

"I have been able to help her to manage her grief as it ebbs, flows and surfaces in our day-to-day life. I want to teach her that communicating is important even if we don't feel like it."

Support After Suicide was recently re-funded for a further 12 months, and Alex hopes it will continue to support people bereaved by the loss of a loved one long into the future.

"Support After Suicide needs to be here to help every survivor on his or her journey, because thankfully that person has reached out for help, answers, respite, community and a place of safety."

Giving gratefully

When Chantelle Bazerghi decided to become a monthly donor to our Support After Suicide program, helping other people learn about the service was front of mind.

"Support After Suicide is a totally specialised service – it's completely unique, and I hope that more people can access it," she says.

Since its inception in 2004, Support After Suicide has provided specialist services including counselling, home and group visits and online resources to people bereaved by the loss of a loved one. Chantelle says these supports are vital to help people navigate the complex grief and trauma associated with suicide.

"We spend billions on other prevention methods, but the money spent on suicide prevention is shockingly low. Being able to access a service that's free means it's available to everyone."

Chantelle believes that improving public awareness and discussion about suicide will help to remove stigma and misunderstanding – and ultimately save lives.

"Anything we can do to allow people to talk about suicide and to understand it better is going to prevent deaths.

Support After Suicide got me through the hardest time in my life after losing my mum. I honestly don't know how I would have ever reached a point of acceptance otherwise.

"As things went on, I wasn't just surviving. I was coping. And then, I was living again.

"I believe this service is rare and has the possibility to truly save lives. It's invaluable."

Donations from people like Chantelle help to increase the reach and recognition of our programs in the community. To discuss how to become a regular donor to Jesuit Social Services, please call Michelle Intveld on (03) 9421 7617.

Great Australians Gala Dinner 2016



Entertainment at the Great Australians Gala Dinner

Jesuit Social Services was proud and grateful to be the charity partner for the third Great Australians Gala Dinner, held at Melbourne's Grand Hyatt on October 15.

The event, which raised money for our mental health work, was attended by dozens of Great Australians including famous faces from the worlds of entertainment, sport and literature, among others.

Some of the Great Australians in attendance included Olympian and former Senator Nova Peris, television personality Ray Martin and award-winning author David Malouf AO.

Guests heard from Support After Suicide participant Alex Aulich (see story on page four), who shared her story of losing her husband Damien to suicide in 2008 and how the program had helped her and daughter Esther navigate their grief.

"The small team of dedicated professionals and volunteers at Support After Suicide are humble and do incredible work. I have found it a safe and supportive place at all times," she said.

The event also featured entertainment from artists including Normie Rowe, Wendy Matthews, James Morrison and Kate Ceberano as well as live and silent auctions.

We thank all the Great Australians, guests, speakers and event partners Incognitus for their generosity and support.

Jesuit Social Services expands into Darwin



(L-R) Fr Mauri Heading SJ, Project Coordinator Jesuit Social Services Kurt Noble, then General Manager Northern Territory Jesuit Social Services John Adams, CEO Jesuit Social Services Julie Edwards

We recently expanded our presence in the Northern Territory with the opening of a new office in Darwin, joining our team of staff in Alice Springs.

Kurt Noble (pictured) is currently working out of the new office to establish a youth justice group conferencing program.

Jesuit Social Services already provides group conferencing in Victoria. The program is effective in reducing reoffending rates based on restorative justice approaches and we look forward to growing this work in the Northern Territory.

We are also pleased to announce two new staff members who will be joining us in the Northern Territory. Jared Sharp will commence in the role of General Manager Northern Territory and Elizabeth Flynn in the role of Manager, Practice Development Northern Territory.

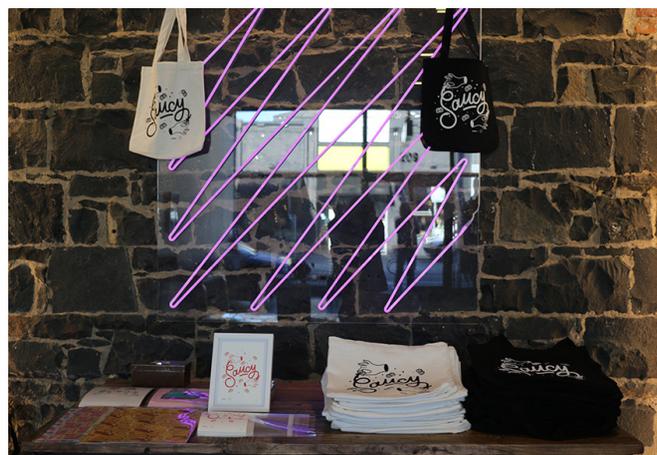
Senior staff including CEO Julie Edwards and Executive Director of Advocacy and Strategic Communications Cath Neville recently met with key stakeholders including the Minister for Territory Families, Dale Wakefield, in Darwin to discuss our work with remote Aboriginal communities in the Northern Territory, plus our other work in Victoria and New South Wales.

We look forward to continuing these meetings and growing our work in the Territory, in order to fulfil our vision on building a just society where everyone has the opportunity to flourish.

We are actively seeking financial support to help us make a real difference in the lives of Aboriginal people and communities.

To support our work in the Northern Territory visit www.jss.org.au/donate

Charity partnership with Artful Dodgers Studios



Limited edition tote bags

Jesuit Social Services has partnered with new social enterprise *Totes Making a Diff* to raise funds to support vulnerable young people.

The partnership will see a series of colourful tote bags featuring designs by professional artists sold online. Fifty per cent of all profits will be donated to Artful Dodgers Studios, which has worked with vulnerable young people since 1996.

Artful Dodgers' staff member Paulie Stewart says it is a partnership "made in heaven" – given that the studios is a safe space where young people can develop their artistic skills while being supported to address issues in their life which can include drug and alcohol problems, homelessness and mental illness.

To purchase a bag, visit www.totesmakingadiff.com

It's ok to talk about suicide

We marked World Suicide Prevention Day, observed on 10 September each year, with a community awareness walk along Melbourne's Yarra River.

The theme "It's ok to talk about suicide" was chosen to create awareness about suicide and bereavement and to ensure that those left behind are aware of the support services available to them.

A group of Support After Suicide staff and volunteers participated in the walk.

Program Manager Louise Flynn explained that the aim of the walk is to reduce the stigma around suicide and contribute to prevention by ensuring that those bereaved by suicide are supported to deal with their grief and confusion.

For more information on Support After Suicide visit www.supportaftersuicide.org.au.



Participants leave messages for loved ones
Photo credit: Compassionate Friends Victoria

Our 40th Anniversary

Since 1977, Jesuit Social Services has been working with some of the most marginalised people in our community. Our approach of 'living with one foot raised' means that we have one foot grounded and one foot raised, ready to respond to new and emerging needs in 2017 and beyond. We are committed to building a just society, now and into the future.

We look forward to sharing more about our 40th anniversary and our history of 'living with one foot raised' with you over the coming year. You can keep up to date with celebrations via our newsletters, website and social media.



Save the date Annual Dinner 25 March 2017

We ask you to save the date for our 2017 Annual Dinner and help us celebrate 40 years of standing in solidarity with those most in need. The event will be held at the Sofitel Melbourne on Collins, featuring special guest speaker Senator Patrick Dodson and memorable performance by Archie Roach.

Book now! www.trybooking.com/NWPL

Young people who struggle with mental health and addiction need our help.

Please give generously to our Christmas appeal and know you'll be helping young people get their lives together, move towards a pathway of training and employment and manage mental health and addiction problems they are facing.



Help young people choose to make the connection towards a brighter future

Want to help Jesuit Social Services?

Together we can build a just society by advocating for social change and promoting the wellbeing of disadvantaged people, family and communities.

I would like to make a donation of:

\$75 **\$150**

\$500 **\$1000**

\$

Please make this a monthly gift

Please send me details on leaving a gift in my Will

Contact and payment details

Surname

First name

Address

Telephone

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Cheque enclosed **OR** VISA Mastercard

Card number

Expiry

Signature