



Artwork by Diane Owens: diane-owens.com.

See ya later, stigma!

Words by Erin Hill

Stigma. Beautiful-sounding word but terrible thing. Stigma is a pervasive, insidious, isolating thing... but what a string of letters.

And that string of letters rests like a necklace on all of us. The weight of stigma should hang around your neck and bow your head. It's too many people, too much loss. And the responsibility for reducing that impact rests on all of us. Subsequently, I present to you this:

Three point plan for kicking stigma to the curb

1. Learn about the services available in your area

Whether it's yourself or someone that you know, chances are at least one significant person in your life will need to utilise some kind of mental healthcare provider in their lifetime. (Whether the system is run in the most efficient manner, and whether the services currently available are the most effective is probably a conversation for another day.) The point is: there are services available.

At the time of writing I have personally spoken with: my counsellor (who I see regularly for subsidised visits under a Medicare-funded mental health treatment plan), a mental health triage service, who have a 24 hour crisis telephone line, a Crisis Assessment and Treatment Team (CATT) based in a hospital only one suburb away, who if necessary could come and visit me at home, and am currently in the process of being admitted into Mind's Youth Prevention and Recovery Care service (like a halfway house for people suffering from mental illness or addiction). I would strongly recommend that you go and speak with your general practitioner as your first port of call.

In a crisis there are a few numbers you can call in Australia. Look into them and save them in your phone. Even just knowing that you have those numbers can sometimes help you get through a tough night. These lines are manned (and wo-manned I presume) for a reason, there are people who can and DO want to help you. If you are hurting, you should let them.

2. Abolish the phrase 'just tired'

This is an intermediary point working towards the larger goal of abolishing 'just' in front of any feeling. But for now let's just work on 'just tired'.

Firstly, as any healthcare practitioner - and especially those working in mental health - will tell you, sleep is a really important part of maintaining your overall health. If you aren't getting enough sleep that doesn't mean you are 'just' tired. It means you are 'just' not giving your body's cells time to proliferate and repair, you're 'just' disrupting your metabolism and therefore how much energy you can make use of the following day, you're 'just' robbing your brain of a chance to store memories and assess the events of your day and process that information.

My point is, there shouldn't be a 'just' in there - sleep is really important and you should try and prioritise it.

'Just tired' means so much more than that, and maybe if we actually spoke about the things that worry us, that tire and weary us, maybe they wouldn't trouble us quite so much. This brings me to the third and most important point...

3. Speak openly, candidly and often about your feelings

In terms of our main objective (kicking stigma to the curb) this is the most powerful point I'd like to impress upon readers. The

art of actually articulating our emotions and unloading the things that weigh on our minds is the greatest advancement we can make with regard to mental illness in society. I honestly believe that.

Speaking about your feelings has a positive knock-on effect. Obviously it is good for you to speak about the things that you worry about, to get stuff off your chest. But the person hearing it, while they might offer an opinion on the things upsetting you, they will also benefit from knowing that other people have doubts that plague them too. Just knowing that the seemingly silly things you think about - as well as the big-deep-frightening things in your head - exist in other people's minds too is reassuring.

Even hearing about a third party is similarly soothing. If I said, "My friend Mavis is actually seeing a counsellor now, yeah, she's been through a bit this year - just hearing that might make you feel less weird about maybe seeing a counsellor or getting some help for your mental health.

(As it is, I don't actually have a friend called Mavis, but I am open to it. Ladies called Mavis looking for a headache for a friend.... enquire within.)

The truth is that the stigmatisation of mental illness makes people feel like they can't talk about it. So they don't, and neither does anyone else and ultimately NO ONE talks about it. So when someone has a problem - not even strictly an episode of mental illness, just an emotional situation - they feel like that isn't normal.

Well it is.

It is completely normal to feel emotional. Sadness, doubt, nervousness are all normal at some time or another. If these feelings are persistent for a period of two weeks or more then that could be an

indicator of mental illness WHICH IS ALSO NORMAL. Approximately 1 in 5 Australians will experience mental illness in any given year... so I suppose, 'you're welcome' to the four people my experience is currently sparing!

Everyone struggles with their emotions every now and then. If you speak up about your feelings you will feel better and you might just inspire somebody else to speak up about theirs. This is the best hope we have to smash the stigma that surrounds mental illness and help people access the healthcare they need to manage their illness. The services are there, all you need is the courage to ask for help.

Erin is 23 years old and has been dealing with mental illness since she was a teenager. She has been a client of our YPARC and finds writing to be a helpful tool in her recovery journey. "Finding ways to express my feelings and a positive space to funnel my frustration and nervous energy has been a huge help."

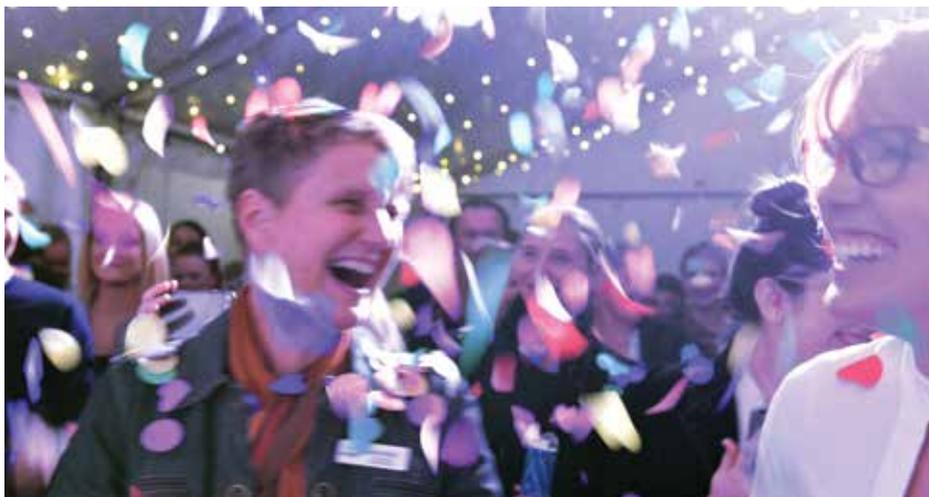
Save these numbers to your phone

These emergency phone services are **FREE** and available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

Triple **000**

Lifeline **13 11 14**

Suicide callback service
1300 659 467



The Mind
Equality
Centre: for
the LGBTIQ
community

Mighty mum

Mind client, Hannah Daniels, has won the 2017 Victorian Barnardos Mother of the Year Award.

Nominated by her son, Thomas, 11, Hannah is a superhero in his eyes. Not only does she always know how to rescue him on a bad day, but she always puts others first, even when she is having a bad day herself.

He says, "Every day my Mum does something special for other people and it makes me love her even more. She always says never stop trying. It means I don't have to be good at everything as long as I'm trying and that means a lot to me.

"I love her so much it hurts."

This is a phenomenal achievement in its own right, let alone when you consider the extent of mental health and life struggles she has overcome.

Hannah was referred to Mind's family and carer services in March 2014 and has progressed in leaps and bounds ever since.

She has become an inspirational speaker both for Mind and Tandem (having presented at the 2015 Mind Community Conference in Victoria), and has featured in podcasts for the Bouverie Centre. A single mum of three, she is also in the final stages of becoming an accredited foster carer for children whose parents are living with mental illness. "I think that going through mental illness has made me a better parent, because I'm actually able to sit down and have conversations with my boys that my parents were never able to have with me, and many other parents might also struggle with."



Pictured above L-R (standing): Mark Buljat, Mind Service Manager; Erandathie Jayakody, Mind Team Leader Consumer Carer Participation Team; Hannah Daniels; Hugo Steinbergs, Mind Area Manager (sitting): Mind Community Mental Health Practitioner, Mari Neil, with Hannah's two sons.

More impressive, still, is the fact that she is now a published author of two books - *Death didn't want me... now I have life*, and *Cracks in my reflection* - with a third on the way.

Hannah says, "There is still a war waging inside me that will no doubt start up again someday, but I am the leader of this fight now! If my demons decide to wake up to fight another day, then they better be prepared!"

"I am NOT my mental illness!

I am a warrior!

I am a survivor!

I am free to be who I am meant to be!"

You can find out more about Hannah via her website: authorhannahdee.com.au

The Mind Equality Centre in Melbourne is **now open**. This is a desperately needed service, given the alarmingly high rates of poor mental health and suicide in the LGBTIQ community.

The centre offers all kinds of support for sexually and gender diverse people, including: individual, couples and group therapy; family and relationship counselling; occupational therapy and sex therapy. While the centre is located in inner-city Melbourne, Skype sessions are available so that those in other areas (including interstate) can also access these crucial services.

Mind Equality Centre
366 St Georges Rd
Fitzroy North
Melbourne, VIC

13 000 LGBTI
(13 000 54284)

The me I am

words by Jenny Benham

Jenny is a participant at the Mind Recovery College™ in Adelaide, SA, and shares this poem about her recovery journey in the hope that it can inspire others.

Of all the things that I am and all the things
I may become
one thing that no one can ever deny is that
I am me and I am I.

I may jump puddles, I may fly
I may fall down, I may cry
Sometimes the pain's so great I just want to die

But I am me and I am I

World may be in chaos though I know not why
I may scrape my knee
I may trip and I may fall
But let me be, let me feel

I am me and I am I

Take away the shackles that hold me down
I'm not depressed just because I frown
The tears I cry, the pain within, may feel like daggers
digging in
But give me the choice
Give me the chance to hear the music and maybe
dance

I am me and I am I

If I cannot feel, if I cannot be
Where is the point of being me?
Once I was or I think I was
I don't really remember maybe it was a dream
There are shadows and mirrors without any faces
I try to hide, search for safe places
But darkness swallows my essence within

They say why play you will never win
What's the point of the struggle
Give up before you begin
I hear them echo, I hear them scream
The battles lost or so it seems but then a hint a flicker
of light
There must be hope, there must be some point
Pain is not without a cause

I am me and I am strong



Pictured: Jenny Benham

Give me space allow me to be
I may be ship wrecked, lost at sea
But even then there is a sun, a sun that shines with all its might
A sun that breaks through the pitch of night
A sun that I pray to see
A sun that holds that fragile part of me that gives me strength
the strength to be
A strength beyond all that is
This hidden strength
The strength to live
Unto myself this gift I give

For I am me and I am I and I stand tall
I stand with pride though I may not be able to fathom why
I am me and I am I and with this knowledge a tear leaves my eye
I may never know they answers, may never know why but I am
too strong to give in
Words and pills and advice too
Everyone seems to know what I should do
But I need a chance
I need to live and maybe then I'll learn to forgive all those who
took my life from me with false beliefs they could set me free
My memory's hazy, my thoughts confused but if I do not try I will
surely lose

For I am me and I am I

Please understand my reason why I want a chance to truly be
I want that chance just to be.



Pictured: David with his mum

In his own words

In a state of having clinical levels of anxiety and depression – sliding into ‘madness’ – I destroyed my career as a caring professional in the corporate world (in 2014). At some point my marriage went ‘wobbly’; I tripped up and then it all fell apart. I was also diagnosed with a chronic illness (Diabetes Type II).

In the madness, my disordered mind and the ensuing rage, I preserved my humanity by writing: jotting down what I thought and felt about the mystery of relationships, about how things change and grow. I had no idea my mind was so complicated, with past habits long covered up. I had no idea that my labour to understand the faculties of my mind would be the source of a nourishing growth.

I hope that readers might find something in my offerings that creates interest or inspires them to reflect upon the nature of the world around them and to see value in the ideas presented.

My writing explores meaning, to make understanding accessible. Though not perfect, nor to any formula, it provides a reflective, valuable piece of art – to me anyway. Getting ideas down has helped to alleviate lost thoughts in my overcrowded mind – and served as a conduit for improved personal connections in my life.

David has been a participant at the Mind Recovery College™ (Bendigo campus) and is pursuing his interest in writing by completing a Certificate IV in Professional Writing and Editing at TAFE.

Home

by David Roberts

We all have homes!
Home is somewhere?
The place where one lives permanently
Where I ‘fit’ in the world!
A house, an institution or other shelter
A building, “the roof over my head”
Is a place to call home
A fortress to outside influence or disturbance
We can defend from attack
It’s where I find asylum – a destiny safe house
A place of refuge
Where people are cared for

An asset, yes, but not in the financial sense
When it is considered property or possession
That can be bought and sold
A home is where recreation interests are played
Can buy a house, but stable homes are made
My home has soul and is inspiring
A living sculpture; monument to love
To be homeless is to be ‘roofless’
So I put a hat on my head
Keep my home under there
There is no place like home

Home is a person’s native place or own country
Designing our home makes us feel better – satisfied
We are only a caretaker of the property
The land is our ‘mother’
Not only do we live with the land
We are part of the land
Home is where our story begins
A place in which one’s affections is
Where I belong, connected
By a country road
My home defines me

Thrive

for mental health and wellbeing

Introducing: Mind *Thrive* Centres

Our brand new *Thrive* centres will provide a 'one stop shop' where you can access a whole range of services delivered by specialist practitioners.

These centres can help you with information, advice, counselling and learning opportunities. We can also link you with housing, education and employment services.

The first centres will open up in NDIS rollout areas in north east Melbourne, with more to follow in other areas soon!

The first *Thrive* centre will be located at the Collingwood Football Club Community Centre at Victoria Park:
8 Lulie Street
Abbotsford
Melbourne, VIC.

**For more information call
Mind Connect: 1300 286 463**

Contact the editor

If you are a current or former client of Mind and would like to contribute to *Write Mind* or be interviewed please contact Jess Shulman at jessica.shulman@mindaustralia.org.au or write to the address below. Copyright reserved. For permission to reprint please write to the editor.



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