

FLIP SIDE

Summer Edition #55, 2025

Grand Designs





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About Flipside

Flipside is a publication of the Association of Participating Service Users (APSU), the Victorian consumer representative body for people who use alcohol and other drug treatment services.

Flipside amplifies voices of Victorians and their family members, friends, and supporters who use, have used or are eligible to use alcohol and other drug services.

Published twice a year, Flipside is a free publication for the APSU community.

The views and opinions expressed within Flipside do not necessarily represent the views and opinions of APSU.

Flipside No. 55, Summer 2024

Front cover image: Jay Sheather, "AOD Journey"

Rear cover image: Jay Sheather – artwork submitted for APSU's 2024 Postcard reDesign project

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Submissions

If you have any original articles, poems or artwork that you would like to see in future editions of Flipside you may submit them to: apsu@sharc.org.au

or post to: APSU, 140 Grange Road, Carnegie VIC 3163

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Editorial

Hello Readers

Welcome to the Grand Designs issue of Flipside! A big heartfelt thanks to everyone who sent us their ideas and imaginings of alternate drug and alcohol service systems. Some dream big, some remind us of what needs fixing, others are excited about changes that are already happening, and at least one writer wonders if there is any point at all.

Even so, there are three common threads woven throughout these pages:

First, all of these perspectives on change come from direct lived and living experience. Our voices can sow the seeds for change, including the voices of family members, such as kids like Jamie who spent time in a rehab with his family.

Second, there is a shared belief that any process aiming to achieve positive systemic change must draw on our experience and expertise. The good intentions of policy makers and service providers aren't enough.

Third, we are already making a difference.

We are consumers who participate in the

processes of reform, we are educating people in the community, we are advocating for our rights to healthcare and compassionate treatment, and we are going into the workforce in peer roles.

This issue of Flipside also includes poems by Andrew H. and Denna H, composed during Karen McKnight's creative writing & storytelling workshops run by APSU last year. Also, Three Side of the Coin member Pauline O. shares her experience of addiction to pokies, of devastation and recovery, in A Road Worth Travelling.

We hope you read to the end of this issue to find out more about SHARC's Regina Brindle Grant Program, as well as PACE, the newly formed, first of its kind AOD consumer community forum. It's hosted by APSU and if you haven't already, we hope you'll consider joining this collaborative effort with other APSU members.

Happy reading!!

Louise & the APSU team.

About Jay Sheather's artwork

Jay uses art and design apps to create his artworks. He experiments with their functions and playing with the potential of AI to visualise concepts and spaces in intricate detail.

'The Healing Centre' (at the centrefold) is a playful artistic vision of a future alcohol and drug rehabilitation centre. You can immerse yourself in this modern healing environment that blends nature, technology, and compassion. Imagine all the re-creation opportunities we'd have access to in this space!

On the cover, Jay's artwork *'AOD Journey'* represents his personal alcohol and drug recovery experience in abstract form. This is achieved by using fluid shapes and vibrant colours that spin and crash together, elements merging into planets and atoms. Micro and macro worlds collide in this dreamlike scene, visualising change and transformation as both possible and inevitable.

Jay's artwork features on APSU's latest postcard as seen on the back cover.

About Kristy L's poems (pp. 8–9)

Kristy's poems illustrate the potential for lived and living experience, both consumers and peer workers, in driving change. Here's Kristy's statement about her poetry:

"Future Light envisions a future from both the perspective of a consumer and a hopeful peer worker. It speaks to a dream of recovery where genuine connection, empathy, and shared understanding are at the heart of every step forward. The poem highlights a world where compassion replaces judgment, setbacks are met with support, and each victory, no matter how small, is celebrated. This is a future of shared resilience, where both the consumer and the peer worker are transformed by mutual strength and humanity.

Warrior of Quiet explores the powerful and transformative potential of peer work within the AOD space. Inspired by the revolutionary impact of lived experience, the poem expresses the hope for a field reimagined by the courage and empathy of peer workers. It celebrates a future where peer-led support breaks down traditional boundaries, guiding others with authenticity and kindness. Here, the voices of those with lived experience lead the way forward, redefining what recovery can mean for everyone involved."

Future Light

Kristy L.

*In the future of healing, I see open doors,
where shame is left far from familiar floors.
Rooms filled with sunlight, compassion, and care,
a place where pasts unravel, free from despair.*

*No longer a journey of shadow and fight,
addiction won't hide in the cloak of the night.
Instead, it's a story we share side by side-
no whispered confessions, no places to hide.*

*Imagine the seats, worn but soft, at the ready,
with counsellors and peers, both grounded and steady.
No judgment in voices, just strength in their eyes,
a warmth that reminds you: here, no one lies.*

*For once, we're not numbers, not broken, not bruised,
but people with scars, and our worth never refused.
They'll see us as whole, as more than the pain,
acknowledging losses yet cheering the gain.*

*And family won't hover, filled with regret,
but stand with their loved ones in spaces unmet-
new rooms for forgiveness, not penance or fear,
where voices can echo, you're loved and you're here.*

*Advocates rise, no longer alone,
their stories the stones of a future grown
from weeds into wildflowers, breathing and bold,
so even the hurting have hands they can hold.*

*Here's to a world where addiction's no shame,
where systems don't label or pin down a name.
A future with mercy and freedom from chains,
where healing is gentle, where kindness remains.*



Created* by Louise Goebel

Warrior of Quiet

Kristy L.



Created* by Louise Goebel

*Peer workers arrive like warriors, scarred,
their battles unseen, their armor marred.
It took storms of violence to reach this peace,
to master the silence, to feel release.*

*They march through the wreckage
where others have bled,
bearing witness to ghosts, to lives once led.
They know every trigger, each lure and snare-
they've wrestled with demons and met despair.*

*No medals are worn on these warrior chests,
only the memory of nights without rest,
the scars from a lifetime of clawing and fight,
forging their spirit in fire and blight.*

*They are warriors reborn, with voices low,
speaking not in commands but in murmurs that show
that strength is a whisper, a steadying hand-
they've conquered the chaos to help others stand.*

*No glory is sought in this brutal quest;
they shoulder the burden, they give what's left.
With quiet conviction, they enter the fray,
knowing this battle in every way.*

*They're here to rebuild, to break and remake
how we care for the wounded, the bruised, and the brave.
Revolution ignites in their humble stance,
for their strength is in knowing what gives us a chance.*

*Peer workers will change the face of this fight,
from raw desperation to futures of light.
With scars as their banner, they lead us anew,
warriors of quiet-unbreakably true.*

If I Ruled the World (or at least Australia)

The Other Banksy

Those of you who know me, may know that I have some political aspirations developing as I make the shift from a service user to a service provider.

If anything, my time working in public health has left me even more discontented with how things are run these days. Mostly because now I see where the money goes and how much of it is wasted, along with the most precious resource – Time.

Perhaps if I share my perfect dream with you, it will manifest itself into reality. Much to the betterment of all Australians.

We start with a campaign won on the platform of 'Efficiency and Consequence'.

Efficiency in how things are run, and heavy consequences for entities which make vulnerable people even more vulnerable (I'm coming after you payday lenders and property managers!)

By heavy I mean heavy. We're talking any property manager found to be abusing the law will not only lose their license, but their company would be fined a cool half million, just to make sure the board members work to keep their staff honest.

In terms of efficiency, we start by recruiting priorities experts. Ideally one for every

major project, plus an officer for each level of government, from city to state to federal. Why do this? I believe it should only take 3 conversations for an issue at ground level to reach the top. This ensures the messages are clear and correct as opposed to today's system where a concern gets passed between 3 departments, each with their own agendas and opinions, before being escalated to a manager (if it makes it through the office gauntlet).

But who has the appropriate motivations to ensure these efficiency roles are taken on with the respect and responsibility they deserve?

Obviously folks who have been on the other side of things. Who better to cast a discerning eye over housing programs than someone who has experienced homelessness or lived in public housing? Who better to oversee mental health initiatives than someone with lived experience? This plan would also create additional learning pathways for people who want to give back, but don't want to be a 'peer worker' in a centre.

But The Other Banksy, won't all this trimming down cost heaps of government employees their jobs?!?



Not if we wisely use all the money we save to create a whole new range of programs!

Here's where the fun starts.

I propose a series of 'Locals' – not just for mental health and wellbeing.

I'm talking about Arts and Hobbies Locals with access to ceramics studios, kilns, painting supplies, clays, resins and drop-in classes where you can learn to create.

Science and Technology Locals with access to 3D printers, editing suites and electronics workshops.

Trades Locals with autobody garages, woodworking and cabinetry workshops, access to power tools.

With the Locals Program in place, anyone can discover their passions. Until now these things have only been accessible to those of us with money. Finding joy in life should not be only for the rich, it should be a right for all of us.

This brings me to my final big project. The Creation of Recovery campuses across the country.

These campuses would be built in selected regional areas.

They would offer state of the art facilities for both recovery and training.

Housing 500 to 1000 people they would be offered to folks as a three-year package. The first year spent in a sequestered residential rehab facility.

These would run similar to the rehabs we have today but with a greater focus on mental health and exposure to a wide variety of different workshops and activities so the resident can find something to care about

more than their substance of choice.

After graduating, the first-year residents move on to the integrated living community. They would be permitted to stay in these sober living units for up to two years, provided they are enrolled in one of the campus's reskilling/upskilling classes.

The classes can range from any of the 4 certificate levels up to specialised diploma courses. They would be in a building similar to a university campus but with an emphasis on peer support and community-building extracurriculars. Sports, games, music and art studio spaces would all be available free of charge as part of this plan.

The idea behind this is to not only give people a new lease on life, but also to help build connections and community so they have a network of friends established when they return to their previous cities.

The added bonus of this program is that it alleviates some of the pressure on the housing market while also producing skilled workers in various sectors, thereby increasing the standards of living for everyone involved.

There are more details to my plan surrounding security, dismissals and reintegration but I hope you get the idea.

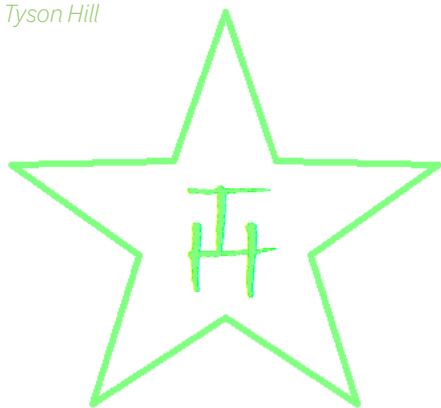
Sounds like such a massive undertaking doesn't it? I believe we're ready for it.

Don't feel like you have to wait for me to start it, if you're in a position to take on these proposals I say go for it, just find me and let me be a part of the process!

At the very least, remember the name The Other Banksy, just in case it shows up on a ballot one day.

Power to Change

Tyson Hill



If I had it my way there's a few
things I would change,
The service we work with
can feel like a cage,
There are many people with
all the right intentions,
But fewer with the power to
change the interventions,
Restraint and seclusion are
the easiest route,
But it's also the way to push
somebody around,
By taking their rights and
squashing them down,
By taking away their voice
and muting their sound,
We should lift people up and find
what happened to them,
Instead, we are failing to
treat the trauma again,
If we really do see the person holistically,
Then we need to quit being led politically,
When the workers on the ground
identify how to do better,
Then politicians should really
be reading that letter,
Change starts in the leaders and
trickles down from there,
But what we need is rapid
action and for it to be fair,
Our system is confused and
needs a few changes,
But unfortunately, it has
felt this way for ages,
Who will step up and rise to the occasion,
Will it be you or do you require
some persuasion?

'The Healing Centre'





Life living in a rehab

Jamie

When we first moved in I was nervous. There was so many people and a lot of them were scary looking. It was me, my mum, my dad and my little sister. We moved into our room on the first day and it was more crowded than I thought.

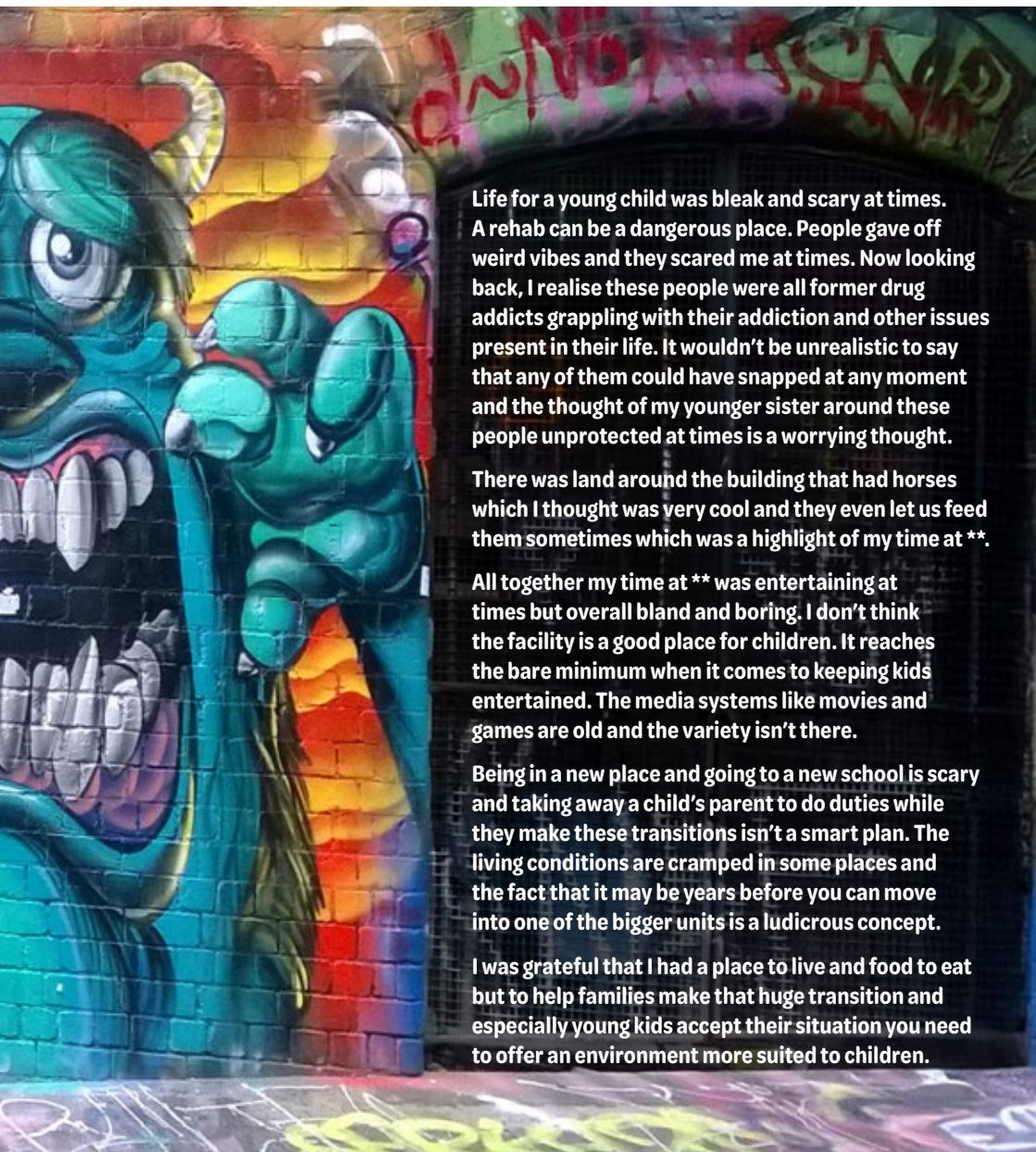
I had met some other kids that lived outside the main building that had their own little houses, in a gated community area. I was jealous and upset because to live in a place like that you had to stay at ** for a couple years which I didn't want to do.

I moved to a new school which I was already upset about but on top of this all the kids were driven to school together. I wanted my mum to take me but her and the other adults had duties within the building.

Life in the building was fun at times. I liked playing table tennis with any person that would accept my challenge. During the day my sister went to a kindergarten. I remember going there once and they were talking about body parts for some strange reason. The Workers were insistent that the kids used the proper terminology for body parts, even genitalia. I found this unprofessional for a group of very young kids.

There wasn't much fun to be had in the facility either. Entertainment consisted of old movies that you could borrow in the form of DVDs. There was an old gaming entertainment system also but it didn't really have anything that would appeal to a kid.





Life for a young child was bleak and scary at times. A rehab can be a dangerous place. People gave off weird vibes and they scared me at times. Now looking back, I realise these people were all former drug addicts grappling with their addiction and other issues present in their life. It wouldn't be unrealistic to say that any of them could have snapped at any moment and the thought of my younger sister around these people unprotected at times is a worrying thought.

There was land around the building that had horses which I thought was very cool and they even let us feed them sometimes which was a highlight of my time at **.

All together my time at ** was entertaining at times but overall bland and boring. I don't think the facility is a good place for children. It reaches the bare minimum when it comes to keeping kids entertained. The media systems like movies and games are old and the variety isn't there.

Being in a new place and going to a new school is scary and taking away a child's parent to do duties while they make these transitions isn't a smart plan. The living conditions are cramped in some places and the fact that it may be years before you can move into one of the bigger units is a ludicrous concept.

I was grateful that I had a place to live and food to eat but to help families make that huge transition and especially young kids accept their situation you need to offer an environment more suited to children.

Editor's note:

Regular readers of Flipside may be familiar with Brendan's work. A prolific contributor, Brendan can be relied on for his singular introspective take on the latest Flipside theme. Brendan found the topic of Grand Designs challenging, and why, becomes clear as he casts some doubt on the promised land of systemic service change.

Brendan reflected on his contribution to this issue which we share here with his permission:

"I hope it's not too ... negative, it's certainly not a rosy view of things, but that's often what I find I want to write about, the difficult things ... I realise that it's very difficult to find solutions to problems. Indeed, I don't really think there are any, as I'm not sure I want to be 'fixed'. ... much of my writing, my 'art' in general, is about the struggle and I guess I'm hoping that others can relate to it and also see that they're not going through it alone.

I've certainly not lost hope and I do want to continue to support changing the system in a useful way."



I've never been good at looking towards the future

I've never been good at looking towards the future. Amongst my friends, those friends that use, I'm the one who can never be trusted to hold gear or is expected to make anything last. It's become the familiar joke, that there's only one rule with biscuit and that's that there is no putting anything aside for tomorrow.

It's funny, anything, no everything else in my life is almost the opposite of this. I'll happily leave till tomorrow what can be done today, indeed that's almost a summary of my life.

He had the time to do everything in life, as long as that time was tomorrow's.

It could be poetic if it wasn't so sad, and though life has many, many sadder moments, my biggest fear is that I'll live to regret burning so much time.

I've never been good at looking towards the future. I've nothing to retire on, little to look forward to and yet, and yet, if that was really my belief then I'd likely no longer be here. You can't exist without hope and it's not that I'm lacking in 'resilience', it's that I'm lacking in anybody believing things will change much more than they already have.



Not me and certainly not anybody whose offered me help from a 'service'.

I write 'service' as it's a misnomer. Who is it that you're exactly serving?

It's not me, as surely to serve is to assist to a point beyond what I've largely achieved upon my own. You're not 'serving', you're facilitating.

I'm not suggesting services aren't of use or haven't offered some degree of support. It's more that they've failed to serve much of a use to me. I'd largely done all I could prior to their intervention. I've learnt little from what 'services' have spoken with me about, largely as they were things I'd heard before, that I'd read before, that I'd tried before. I'd not claim to know it all, far from it, but I can say that I've been offered very little that's assisted me.

What I've achieved, what anybody achieves is largely down to their effort, their hard work, their resilience. You don't 'serve' someone any more than you 'fix' someone. I write this and think of those workers who invest in their clients, who genuinely want them to succeed. And I'm grateful for their efforts and amazed by their ability to keep pushing, to keep working in what is a fundamentally difficult task.

I've never been good at looking towards the future. Though my experiences haven't resulted in change, they've not been without value. It all feels like, at times, an unwinnable game. There's no outcome to be won, what's achieved is your continued existence. I'd argue that's an outcome worth trying for, but it's neither something to hold to acclaim or to inspire. I don't inspire myself, nor does anybody hold me to acclaim. I exist. And that's an outcome that I've fought hard to achieve, though at times I've also tried to take it away.

I've never been good at looking towards the future. Like everyone, I have my own needs, my own issues, my own challenges, my own dreams, my own history. I'm no more special, no more deserving than anybody else. Maybe that's why I don't have anyone 'serving' me to achieve any of it. If I look in the mirror I see the one person who 'serves' me and the look upon their face reminds me that nothing can be taken for granted. They're unsure about what the future holds, whether they'll be around to experience it, whether they'll live long enough to regret, or live long enough to achieve.

I've never been good at looking towards the future, as the future has never been good at looking out for me.

Brendan J.

Bullies

Andrew H.

The bullies wear uniforms.

Not green, blue.

People with power over other people.

They spread rumours, lies and falsehoods. They assault. They hate.

Not green, blue.

They hunt in packs. They love it.

They tear things up, make a mess.

They take, they puff out their chests, they are aggressive.

Not green, blue.

They posture, they are unfriendly

and rude. They deny, they

question, they accuse, they

control and connive. They cheat.

Not green, blue.

They ignore and patronise. They

favour and manipulate. They search

and find nothing. They isolate and

hit. They are dangerous and violent.

Not green, blue.

They are scared and weak, they

are insecure and dishonest. They

are vulnerable alone. They are

bitter, hungover and unhappy.

The bullies wear uniforms.

Not green, blue



My first drug.



Andrew H.

I was curious about the white cans in the laundry and I decided to give one a try.

I drink three.

I feel so free, free like a tiger that had been let loose from a cage after 14 years.

I am drunk.

They put me in the shower. I am being an idiot, embarrassing myself, doing stupid things, saying stupid things.

They push the car out of the driveway.

I jump in.

Yeehaa, off I go. "I've lost it" he yells.

The car rolls over and over and over again.

It has finish in a ditch on its roof.

I crawl out.

No injuries.

I sit on the side of the road.

It's dark.

People come.

The car is a mess, a write off.

I feel relieved and want another drink from the white can.

It's okay...

Denna H.

*It's okay to take a moment for yourself,
since you give so much to everyone else.
It's okay to ask for a hand,
when the world feels all too much.*

*It's okay to live a life in your power,
because you have so many unique qualities to share.
It's okay to be authentic in your expression,
because that is how the world gets to see the true you.*

*It's okay to feel alone,
because sometimes that is better than being
surrounded by people who make you feel small.*



The journey to tribe...

Denna H.

*It's okay to feel like you don't matter,
you just don't want to make a home there.*

*It's okay to feel like you can't speak your truth,
you can write, sing, act or type your feelings instead.*

*It's okay to feel like you don't fit in,
you just haven't found your people yet.*

A Road Worth Travelling

Pauline O'Loughlin, July 2025

Taunted, rejected, divorced, alone; I was easy pickings for a predator. The predator finally showed itself when Pokies came to Victoria. Initially I was not the least bit interested but finally I was dragged under the surface into a disastrous dance with the devil. Like a speeding train on a downhill track I quickly descended into full addiction. The addiction I saw in others was not the behaviours I saw in myself.

My rational mind was hijacked by the flashing, rhythmic spinning of the reels. Concerns about my life were temporarily put on hold by the demon machines. The bright, colourful lights promised an answer to my problems but the relief was minimal, swift, and empty. The machines were not my friends, friends don't rob you of your inner worth and value.

*It's time to stand & tell
my story, to speak my truth:
NOT ANOTHER DAY,
NOT ANOTHER BET.*

What did I lose?

28 years of Self	The Respect of others
Trust	More importantly – Respect for myself

The road to recovery is not always smooth. It can be paved with relapses, fear of stepping out of your addiction into the process of self-examination. Being honest with yourself and those around you, rising the wrath of people you may reach out to.

Recognising, facing, working through uncomfortable feelings. Having the courage to risk failing but taking the challenge anyway.

Trust yourself in knowing change is possible. Don't try to solve all your issues at once. Never be afraid to ask for help.

Trust, like Love, needs to be earned and gaining them both back warrants self-assessment and kept promises.

Now on the path to recovery:

- there are calm waters where there were once turbulent seas
- there are possibilities where there once was no hope
- I accept invitations from family and friends
- I can now accept myself, warts and all

*The quality of your
happiness depends
on the quality
of your deeds.*

**Remember, it is not the Setback
but the Comeback that counts!**



PACE

APSU members have created the first AOD consumer participation community

PACE is the acronym for *Participating AOD Consumer Expertise*, and it is a community of people involved in consumer participation and who want to connect with their peers. Membership is free and open to all APSU members who are AOD consumers, including their family, partners, and supporters.

APSU hosts PACE but it's led by community members who chair meetings and set the agenda.

An inaugural meeting was held at SHARC on 25 March 2024 where participants surveyed the purpose and scope of the community, at this time called the Victorian AOD Consumer and Family Participation Community. PACE was adopted at the 2nd (online) meeting on 24 June, and consensus was built around the community's goals.

PACE was to provide a place to:

- Support the participation of consumers in all parts of the AOD service system
- Share experiences and exchange ideas about consumer participation
- Discuss, define, and build consumer participation expertise
- Come together and network in a shared movement

PACE meetings would include:

- Guest speakers presenting on topics relating to consumer participation in the AOD and allied sectors, as well the broader consumer movement
- Presentations from community members reflecting on their consumer participation experiences
- Open discussion

Mary O'Hagan was PACE's first guest speaker on 24 September, which was so fitting given Mary's leadership in the mental health consumer movement, and currently Executive Director-Lived Experience in the Victorian Department of Health. Richard Gornall, a member of the APSU Advisory Committee, also reflected on his experiences as a consumer partner at ReGen.

APSU and PACE aim to keep this community growing in 2025. The next meeting will be held at SHARC in February on a date to be confirmed.

We warmly invite you to support this unique grassroots initiative and join us in building the first AOD consumer community of its kind in Victoria.

Got a question about PACE? Don't hesitate, you can contact us at apsu@sharc.org.au



What is the Regina Brindle Grant Program?

It's a funding opportunity that recognises Regina Brindle, an innovator in the consumer movement. Regina passed away in early 2019 following a brief illness.

Regina drove the development and implementation of consumer participation in the Australian AOD sector, working to ensure it is recognised as fundamental to good service and policy development. She was also committed to equipping AOD consumers with the skills to participate in decision-making processes around AOD policy, service delivery, research and education. Regina's advocacy actively embraced the voices of family, partners and supporters alongside consumers.

Her work in this area began at APSU in 2006 where she held the role as manager until 2012. She also held a position on the Board of Harm Reduction Victoria, and was the first dedicated consumer participation facilitator at Uniting ReGen in 2013.

When asked why she took on the role as APSU manager, Regina was clear: *"Advocacy. I wouldn't have been interested in anything else."*

Regina's legacy determines the fundamentals of the program where grants are awarded to projects:

- Designed, led and delivered by consumers
- Empowering the consumer voice by inclusion, education, and engagement

The Regina Brindle Grant Program awarded its first grant in 2020, and applications are currently open for the 2024/25 Round until 14 February 2025.

Find out more on the SHARC website at:

sharc.org.au/regina-brindle-grant-2024-2025/



Regina in the early days of APSU
Photo by APSU staff



2025 grant campaign social media tile
created by APSU staff



APSU membership is free for individuals and organisations



Individuals wanting to join APSU, scan the QR code to receive:

- Flipside, our twice-yearly magazine by and for consumers
- Training to utilise your lived experience
- Opportunities for paid participation in research, policy-making and service design
- Invitations to forums and events
- Regular opportunities to contribute your voice to the debate as a paid podcast guest, magazine contributor and event speaker
- Notice of relevant employment vacancies and policy developments



Artwork by
Jay Sheather
created 2024

APSU
ASSOCIATION OF
PARTICIPATING SERVICE USERS