

Flipside



Change

WINTER EDITION #54

2024



Flipside

Flipside provides space for the voices of Victorians who use or have used alcohol and other drugs. All contents featured here are produced by people who experience or have experienced impacts of alcohol and other drugs, either directly or through someone they care about.

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



Acknowledgement of country

This publication is produced on the land of the Boon Wurrung people of the Kulin Nation. APSU acknowledges the Traditional Owners of country throughout Australia and recognises their continuing connection to land, waters and culture. We pay our respects to their Elders past, present and emerging.



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



Submissions

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Read previous issues of Flipside at:
sharc.org.au/sharc-programs/apsu/flipside/

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Photo by Dixon Banks

Change

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CHANGE.

Flipside, Issue 54 “Change”, June 2024

Editorial

Welcome to the 54th issue of Flipside. Special thanks to APSU members who contributed their words and images to help us explore the abundance of themes that come up around Change.

This is not the first time that Change has been the theme of Flipside. Back in Spring 2013, Issue No. 35 was introduced with a very brief Editorial, half of which was a quote attributed to Gautama Siddharta, otherwise known as the Buddha: *Everything changes, nothing remains without change.*

In the spirit of quoting celebrated spiritual teachers, we could also recite Greek philosopher Heraclitus (540 – 480 BCE):

There is nothing permanent except change.

But let’s turn to our very own sage from the APSU community:

Metamorphosis: it is happening now.

This was the title Rebecca, Recovering Alcoholic, gave her essay on Change in Spring 2013. That was just over 10 years ago. (If you have remained a reader of Flipside Rebecca, we hope you’re still getting a buzz from discovering new things about yourself and the world around you.)

All our correspondents in the following pages have lived through the tumultuous times. In one way or another, the stories and poems all compel us to acknowledge and pay testimony to what change feels like in our personal lives and relationships: many of us have felt the pain of resisting change, and change can be undeniably excruciating, but over and over, we discovered that change is gratifying, and worth way more than it cost.

Enjoy!



2024 *Postcard reDesign*

APSU visually defines itself as a megaphone because we stand for sharing, strengthening, and projecting a voice, and broadcasting a message loud and clear.

Back in 2021, Joanne Freedman's design (pictured) landed on the front of a few thousand postcards, with attribution to her work.

This year we were ready to order more postcards and once again invited members to help us revitalise the design by sharing a visual interpretation of the APSU megaphone. Out of all the impressive submissions from our extraordinary community, the selected design came from Jay Sheather. Thank you Jay!!

In fact, Jay submitted quite a few designs for us to choose from. We had great difficulty picking one, but the problem was solved by Cat Endersby who created a layout using them all. Thank you Cat!!

Final thanks go, once again, to Jay Sheather who generously allowed us to use not just one, but all of his artwork, to create the new APSU postcard. We hope you like it.



THE FACE OF CHANGE

Finding growth & development
in the face of change

By ZK

Change is an unavoidable part of life that can be exciting and terrifying. It makes us adapt and adjust to new situations, which can be challenging but it also gives us chances for growth and development.

As a kid I didn't notice change as much as I do now, and in ways I'm thankful that I didn't. I didn't notice how I saw my mother less over the days, I didn't notice how the people she surrounded herself with didn't seem like the best people, I didn't notice anything so I had always thought our little family was perfect, but as life continues things change.

I remember the moment that everything changed. I was fourteen and my older brother and I were sitting in my mother's bed and we asked her about different things she had experimented with in her past. She ended up confessing to the two of us how she had battled with an addiction to Crystal Meth, and suddenly I saw her in a completely different light, my whole view on her had changed.

In that split second my whole life had changed. My own mother had battled an addiction without any of us noticing, she had been incredibly strong and never looked back, she had fought to change her own life and made it into something she could be proud of.

That one conversation had changed everything. For some it could have changed for the worse but for my family, it changed for the better. We had grown closer.

I suppose it was no shock that she had battled with drugs. Our family had always viewed drugs as something not to be ashamed of, my mother had worked hard to destigmatise addiction and it worked. I no longer view people struggling with addiction as anything less than human.

Both my mother and older brother indulge in cannabis every once in a while, and as surprising as it is my teenage brother has never been



Photo by Anastasia Shuraeva

irresponsible and I believe it is because our mother's honesty with us had shaped us into something not many kids could even comprehend.

***We see the person
not the addiction.***

Today my family is close, and we don't judge people for their past struggles. We welcome change with open arms, knowing that it can lead us to greatness. Change can be beautiful, and we're grateful for the lessons it has taught us.

Somewhere in the **MIDDLE** *of Change*

by Brendan J.

Often I find myself travelling down familiar roads I thought I'd long left behind. It is deeply frustrating. I wonder when life will be different, simpler. I find myself thinking of life as something I'd rather not have to endure. It's crushing - I didn't think I'd be back here, feeling these thoughts so strongly and so easily. It creates a huge sense of unease and I'm worried, wondering if I'll make a decision I'll not be able to regret.

I pause. I think about what I'd miss, what I'd lose. I focus on the steps I've learnt to take from a lifetime of struggling. I don't feel it's working and even contemplate admission to a psych ward (something I'd thought I'd never willingly do again). I lie down and for a brief moment clear my thoughts. The cacophony diminishes slightly and I decide to sleep on it. Unlikely a moment ago, I fall asleep.

Time has allowed change. I'm dealing with many issues I've had for 30 plus years, yet I have a lot of experience in the way of some paths. My recovery isn't abstinence-based, but I'm glad I'm not currently using (that used to be my go-to response). Regardless of how I might feel, using will only make things worse – **that is change**. I know it won't ever be safe or without consequence, and so I lodge that knowledge away. I can connect to it even when I'm feeling close to my worst.

I put my work on a temporary hold, even though work has given me much meaning and I value the effort it has taken to get where I am. I'm not willing to put that at risk just to get high. Opportunities will continue to arise. Since the reforms of the Royal Commission into mental health, I have joined other consumers to offer my perspective on mental health and AOD. In order to do this work, I need to be prepared and I take pride in this. When I'm struggling and can't prepare, well, I just cancel. (It's not all or nothing, but it's pretty close.)

Yet I find little relief from not working. I lose the opportunity to shape systems that desperately need strong and informed voices. I forego the money and miss the rare interactions I have with people. I know my isolation is a problem, I need to do something about it, but I don't. I start to see my life as a series of misguided choices.

At this time of year, I spend a long time with my son, just the two of us. I spend an entire week with him - me in my bedroom barely doing anything and he in the lounge room with his devices. After two days I make myself go for a walk with him. He's seen me struggle before, so none of this is new, but he shouldn't be exposed to my inability to change. I apologise, I tell him this has little to do with him, he isn't expected to 'fix me', there's things I'll do to help get me out of this.

Time continues to pass. My son returns home. I wonder, now he's almost done with high school, if that was the last week we'd spend together. I'm close to tears as I see another wasted opportunity. It's not been a catastrophe like in times past, but what have I lost? What have I lost again?

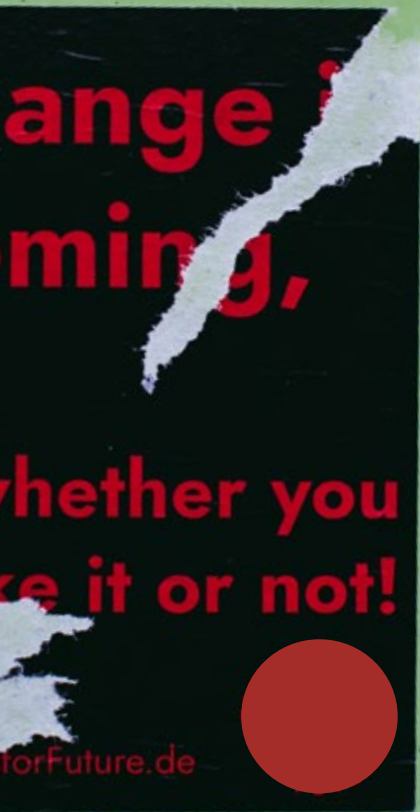
Will he value the time he spent with me? Will he see me as a failure? Though I work hard to get him to see others' perspectives, take charge of his future, ensure he's safe online, respect his girlfriend, study hard, stop being so rough with the dog, engage more with his friends, keep involved in the life of my family (and they with his), all I see is where I've gone wrong. His inheritance from me will be the knowledge that intention doesn't equate to anything until it's acted upon.

Time continues to pass. I'm slowly emerging from the hole I found myself in. I lean upon family and find, to my surprise, that time with them helps me gain a sense of the good they see in me. I spend time with my son again, and he asks me for help. This reminds me – I am valued and needed. I think of what it would mean if I left. Now I can more clearly see the impact it would have on my son, my family, others. It would be the worst thing I could ever do to them. This clarity is more real than my doubts.

I pick up new opportunities with work. I reach back out to friends. I do it all slowly. Experience has shown me that making changes fast leads nowhere good. I try reflecting on where I'm headed, but I can't at the moment. It's too far away from where I'm at. Now is the time to focus on doing what keeps me well.

I tell people things aren't really that different, I've just learned to deal with things differently. This seems an easier way to describe my recovery. But I should add - I still fall into deep holes and I still have periods where I feel unable to do anything to help myself. I've worked hard and long to achieve change. I know I've changed, I'm certain of it, and I have evidence of it. It's not simple and was never going to be.

Nor am I starting from scratch, nor am I at the bottom. I'm somewhere in the middle.



Change

by Seb

Change and pain often feel one & the same,
The cracking, reforming, recalibration of
internal workings,

Often spoken of as a phase, a miniscule
shifting of parts,

The evolution through childhood,
youthhood, adulthood,

Developing.

However, a continual process, never waning,
Addiction seen as slowing, stopping,
halting, this movement,

Like water to the stone, eroding the will,
Stigmatising viewpoints, shame, isolation,
The enemy of the individual,

Shackled.

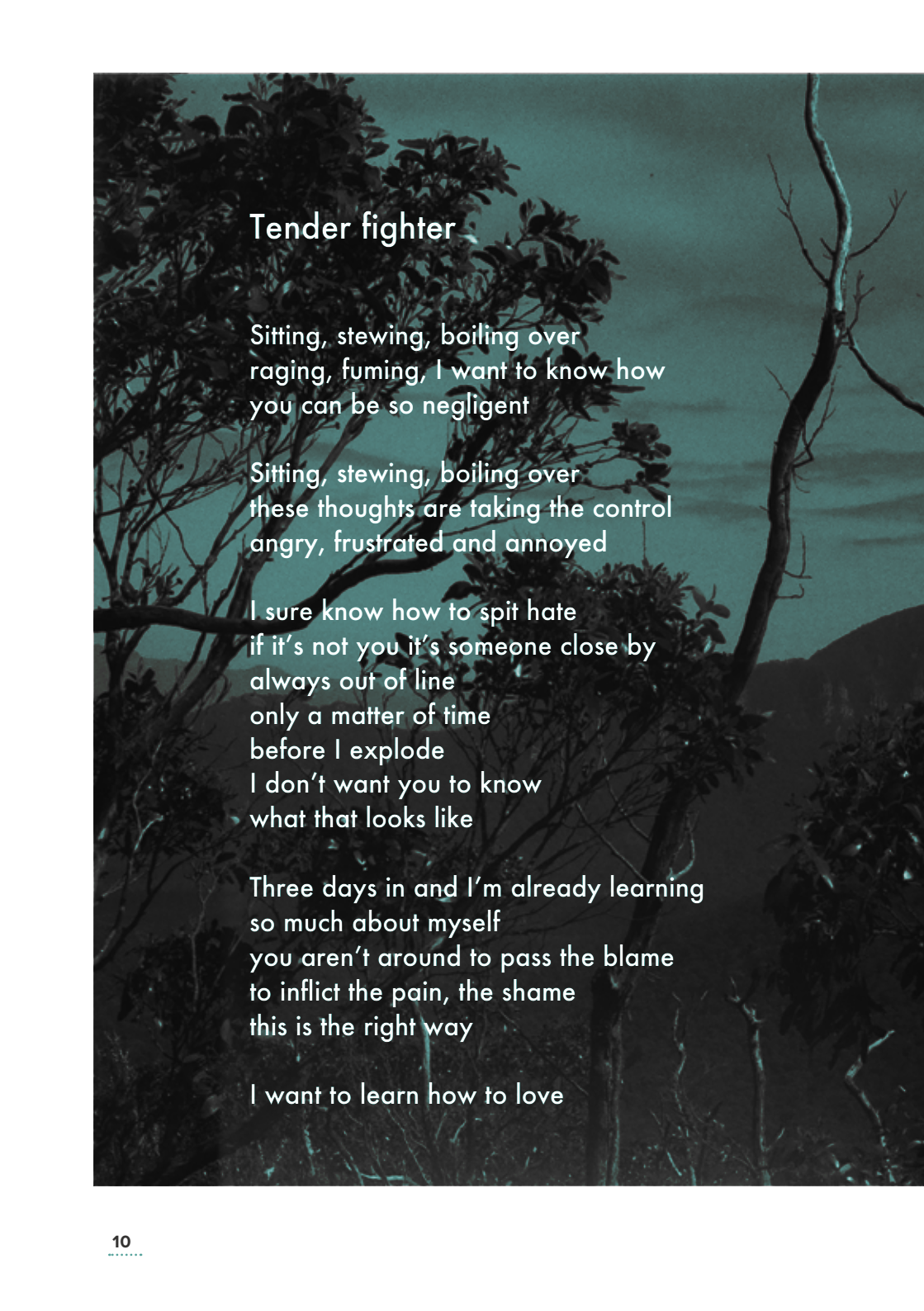
Whom without these,
May have grown, changed, seen,

Lived.

Believe that in these moments,
We are the water,
Impenetrated by the stones that are thrown,
Pushing through the rock and the hard place,
Wading through the storm,

Enduring.

Photo by Marcus Spiske



Tender fighter

Sitting, stewing, boiling over
raging, fuming, I want to know how
you can be so negligent

Sitting, stewing, boiling over
these thoughts are taking the control
angry, frustrated and annoyed

I sure know how to spit hate
if it's not you it's someone close by
always out of line
only a matter of time
before I explode
I don't want you to know
what that looks like

Three days in and I'm already learning
so much about myself
you aren't around to pass the blame
to inflict the pain, the shame
this is the right way

I want to learn how to love

You never pass a single judgement
You're always there to add some comfort

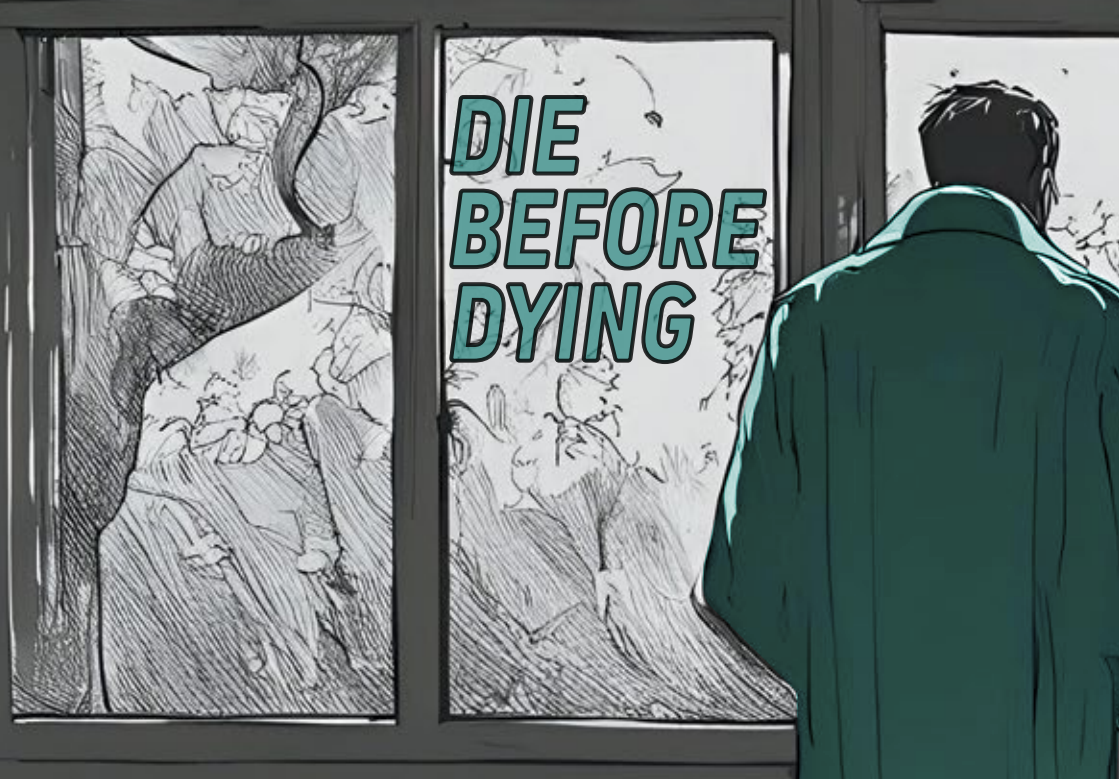
Instead of lying, stewing, boiling over
I am writing, thinking while I'm sober
these words, they can heal
it's 3am and I can hardly deal

Admiring, learning, grateful

A sigh of breath, one last cigarette
feeling inspired
to be gentle, soft
and a lot more kind

Realising that a mountain of words
is not the way
to show someone how you feel
just shut your mouth and open your ears

That is how to keep it real



By Duane C.

My bleary eyes slowly adjust to the dreary surrounds of my dingy room. My scattered mind tries to recall the antics of last night's madness inside the Brunswick boarding house.

*What did I smash? Who did I hit?
I'll find out soon enough.*

In the afternoon I get a call from the landlord. I was caught on the security camera last night pissing in the kitchen sink and stumbling about shouting obscenities as the other residents hid in their rooms. It is a drug and alcohol-free house, and it was not the first time it happened; I was given a final warning.

I think good and hard about my life at present. My wife left me, my kids don't want to see me, jobs come and go due to hangover absence, and my health is rapidly declining.

I am forty-four living in a run-down boarding house for over 50s. I have nothing in my life except for a beaten-up Holden Commodore and a reputation as a violent drunk. I am a slave to alcohol, and I justify it. My father was an alcoholic therefore it is in my blood. It's like I am trapped in a cycle that cannot be broken. Live by the bottle die by the bottle is my motto but I want to change!

One night in winter drinking McWilliams port to keep warm I have an idea. Maybe a woman can help



Image by Louise Goebel

me change? I download a dating app called Zoosk and sitting in my lonely room I enter the world of online dating. I am sick of being alone, so I create a profile and begin my search. Within a few hours I am in a polite conversation with a kind-hearted woman from Melton named Kellie. I am drawn into her by her eyes. They radiate love and comfort and I feel safe talking to her. Could she be my salvation I wonder?

Over the next few weeks, we talk over the phone both morning and night. Kellie can tell the difference in my personality each time. Shy and quiet in the mornings and outgoing and loud by the evenings.

“Do you drink a lot?” Kellie asked.

I don’t tell her the truth. “Now and again” I answer.

Two weeks later I move in with Kellie and her four kids aged twelve to twenty-two and *everything is perfect*. I only drink on the weekends, my health is improving, I got a good job as a cashier in a butcher shop, and Kellie and I are madly in love. I even have her name tattooed on both of my hands.

Then the insidious snake starts to slowly awaken from its slumber.

A few beers on the weekends aren’t enough, I start drinking on a Thursday pay night until Sunday evening. One month later I am drinking every day, and the beers

don't cut it anymore. I need whiskey or vodka straight on the weekend to chase down the beer.

Over the next year I am back to my old self. Unemployed, drinking cheap wine daily, pancreatitis has returned, and I am waking up like death every morning needing a drink as soon as I open my eyes. Kellie and I are forever arguing. She knows I am slowly killing myself and now my drinking's worse since COVID hit and the world is in lockdown.

Playing with shiny, sharp knives is becoming my favourite game because cutting kills the boredom. Tonight though, I thought up a new game. Can I out cheat death? The dog's lead and collar look inviting.

I place the choker chain around my neck and stand on the chair underneath the decking rafter with a dog lead in hand. I attach the lead to the choker chain and wrap the other end around the beam. My body tingles with excitement. Standing on tippy toes about to step forward I hear a scream!

Kellie's twelve-year-old daughter has just caught me. I untie myself and hop down upset that I have to stop. In the morning Kellie tells me what I did and that I must leave. I dress and leave empty-handed, the shame and guilt I feel is heartbreaking. I don't look Kellie or her kids in the eye as I walk out the front door, tears running down my face wondering where to now?

I am back in a cheap, boarding house, alone, sick, and depressed. I fucked up! I keep thinking of that poor little girl. How she must have felt to see a man she called dad hanging from the roof. I hate myself and I'm going to keep drinking to kill the pain. No. I can't deal with this anymore. I ring up Direct Line.

"I need help please!" I cry.

I enter a Detox Unit in St Kilda, ten days later I walk into a Rehab, Windana in Ballarat. My first ever Rehab.

I feel scared, not about being in a Rehab but that my life of drinking is coming to an end. It is the only life I know.

The older I get the more I am becoming insane. I am sick of this life of madness. I am tired of the endurance it takes.

Once alcohol was fun, not anymore. I will be dead soon if I continue to play this game.

I embrace the program with honesty and positivity, becoming vulnerable in group sessions, speaking of my guilt and shame that alcohol causes and the damage it brings until soon

all those feelings vanish. I feel like I have died before dying and now I am reborn. I have been given a second chance at life and I am going to make the most of it sober, a new beginning.

I walk out of the doors six months later a new man, I look different, I think differently.

Today I am two years sober and my kids tell me daily how proud of me they are.

One day at a time.

The Change in Me

by Kat

I no longer need to serve a 'chemical god' which has brought me so much pain and loss throughout my life.

I have slayed my inner demons and found within myself that I don't need rescuing or the validation from the so called "inner circle" of fake and sick people.

I like being in the outer circle with the few real people in my life. I have given away far too freely the space in my head and heart for far too long.

Now that I have support and have been shown real friendship it has reminded me of just who the fuck I really am and to hold my head high.

Although I may stumble and fall, I am learning how to pick myself up again and not lose hope. There is now a better path and better choices for me.

I am on my own journey of recovery and have the freedom to choose the strong people I want in my life, those I want to give my support, time and love to.

We only get one chance to walk this life, it is way too short to waste on bullshit.

To those who are my people, I thank you for being part of my journey of discovery and recovery. I hope I too can be there for you...

one of your people
to walk beside you on your journey,
have an ear to listen,
a shoulder to cry on,
encouraging words for you or just a supportive hug.

To help you find the strength within you to keep growing stronger every day and never lose sight of your dreams and who you really are.

These are the things we need to help make the changes in our life, to make it so much worth living without the comfort of drugs.



Meet the APSU Advisory Committee



In March this year APSU invited all interested consumers and family members to submit an expression of interest to join the APSU Advisory Committee (AAC).

The applications we received proved that many members combined their lived and living experience of the alcohol and other drug treatment service system, with experience working in committees and a commitment to AOD consumer advocacy.

Following our recruitment process, APSU is incredibly pleased to now be working with three new individual members on the AAC – Dixon Banks, Richard Gornall and Rowena Jonas. For the next two years Dixon, Richard and Rowena will bring a wealth of experience in consumer advocacy to their role assisting the APSU Team by:

- providing advice, guidance and knowledge
- evaluating the effectiveness of APSU services
- having input on strategic planning

- actively engaging with the APSU Community

We'd like to acknowledge APSU member James Billett for his assistance with the interviewing and selection process.

And we are also grateful for the exceptional efforts of the outgoing AAC members in their term of service--Marg Quon, Tim Freedman and Russell Chilcott.

There are also three organisational members on the APSU Advisory Committee:

- Chris McDonnell from VAADA
- Carolyn Weidner from Harm Reduction Victoria
- Chantelle Higgs from VMIAC

We asked Dixon, Richard and Rowena to introduce themselves:

a. Dixon and Buster Banks

I grew up on the east coast of Canada (perhaps never quite

completing the process), arrived in Melbourne in 2015 and quickly grew to love Australia and its host of characters.

I began navigating services several years ago which is when I joined APSU and began my journey into advocacy by participating in the Royal Commission [into Victoria's Mental Health System]. Since then, I have taken part in many projects including development of the new, peer driven, Mental Health and Wellbeing locals where I currently work as a peer navigator in Shepparton.

I'm always looking for ways to lift the world with some positive vibes and a kind word. I'm a low-key champion for stigma bashing and spread the message that 'we are more than just one thing'.

I especially love creative writing and creating colourful works from polymer clays.

b. Richard Gornall

I'm very happy to be joining the AAC and firmly believe that consumer voices are key to reducing the stigma we experience, as service users or family members.

My involvement with APSU goes back to 2011 as a founding member of a community advisory council set up to provide consumer consultation to AOD services.

Since then, in an ongoing connection with APSU, and Uniting VicTas also, I've had opportunities to apply a consumer lens to diverse advocacy projects, including public speaking, government advisory groups, panels on service provision, staff training, policy working groups, and interview panels, to name a few.

I'm also a musician and songwriter and currently a member of two Melbourne-based bands.

c. Rowena Jonas

Thank you for welcoming me into your community. I am a devoted advocate for legislative and social change by centring lived experience ways of knowing and doing.

A qualified peer practitioner, I have a range of lived experiences including recovery from alcoholism.

I bring an in-depth understanding of current and historic challenges experienced by our community, as well as the achievements.

After I finish the Graduate Certificate in Service Design (RMIT) I want to model lived experience centred design within human services.

Being connected to nature is important to me. I keep bees and chickens, grow vegs, and kayak (and I'm learning to sail!!)

Transcripts from two members

~ A year in APSU

APSU members got together to mark the end of another year last December. Dixon and Sara have kindly shared the speeches they gave that evening.

Sara

“I just wanted to say I feel very grateful and proud to be a part of such an awesome community. APSU has given me a chance to contribute my opinions and ideas to change future services and organisations for the better, by sharing my lived experiences. I get to put forward what worked for me in my journey, and what didn't, to try help services develop for the better.

I really enjoyed being able to put forward ideas toward SHARC and APSU strategic planning. I hope this can help future recovering addicts and consumer participants to have a better experience. It was quite exciting suggesting future services for this organisation. I really felt valued and important.

I personally love being involved as much as possible as I feel I'm in a sense changing history for the better. It's a really empowering feeling to be able to create the best services for my future peers to access.

Also, I really enjoyed being involved with the Mildura service which will be opening up.

I hope the positive aspects of the rehab I went to will be complemented in this new Therapeutic Community

(T/C) as it really helped me through my journey, and I hope that the new residents of that T/C will be able to enjoy their experience as much as I did by incorporating the things that worked for me, like the 'buddy system' that helped me so much for example.

Also, to be involved with the recent development of consumer participation training which will be offered to those interested in becoming a consumer participant. It was amazing to develop training! Wow what an amazing experience and a privilege.

I'm just so proud to be able to have input on all these amazing chances that APSU with my help is making to the world and the people in it! Its so powerful and fulfilling.

I'm a grateful APSU member looking forward to what the new year brings.

Thank you”.



Dixon

“When I was asked to speak tonight I jumped at the opportunity, anyone who has met me knows I don’t hate the sound of my own voice. Usually with this sort of thing I do it off the cuff but as the ideas started mulling about inside my head the words kept coming up short. So (much to the surprise of my classmates who I practiced on) I decided to write down a little something in preparation.

I think the reason this is so important to me is because of all the organisations I’ve been involved with, all the courses I’ve done and jobs I’ve worked in recent years, SHARC and APSU have been the dearest to my heart. They have been the safest of safe spaces for me. Where others didn’t quite know what to make of my intensity, these folks wanted to see more. At a time when I didn’t feel like I would ever fit in anywhere again, this encouragement and acceptance was vital in getting me from where I was when Edita[†] and I first spoke several years ago to where I am now.

What started as an easy way to make some extra coin, quickly and unexpectedly developed into me finding my tribe. APSU strives to give consumers a voice and they definitely did so with me. But not only did I find

my voice, I discovered the pride that comes along with seeing a project grow from a glimmer of an idea into a fully functioning event. I discovered the strength in being a role model and the support of a chosen family.

So, in the spirit of peer work I’d like to share an idea I’ve been pondering, perhaps an explanation as to why the peer movement has been so successful. What if resilience is a kind of spiritual antibody we develop in response to trauma, and as we heal and become stronger these little antibodies develop and enable us to handle things a little better, recover a little quicker, tackle hardship with a little more confidence.

Now what if we can share these wonderful little buggers like a vaccine? There’s no doubt we’ve all felt the energy created by a great conversation.

What if in that mingling of energies we are also imprinting the beginnings of a new colony of resilience antibodies on a person who needs them? What starts with a simple mingling of energies then builds resilience in that person until they’ve got a bold force to bestow on anyone they come across who may be in need of a little boost ... I mean, it’s just a theory, but hey who knows I could be right ... and if so, wouldn’t it be cool? Definitely reason enough to keep sharing our stories, keep seeking out those great conversations and keep doling out our little resilience antibodies (I’m still workshopping a good name so if y’all have any ideas please let me know).

[†] Edita Kennedy was the key to APSU’s development between 2011 to 2021”.



APSU membership is free for organisations and individuals



NEW! Sign your organisation up to APSU

APSU can assist organisations, projects, and professionals to explore and access the perspectives of AOD consumers, including service users, and family members, partners, and supporters.

APSU has a large membership base of people interested in engaging in consumer and family participation activities.

When you sign up to our mailing list, you receive news about consumer participation opportunities, events, training, and advocacy projects.

When you want to actively engage with consumers and family members we can offer:

- recruitment and shortlisting participants for your activities
- training and peer support for your participants
- expert peer facilitators for activities, such as focus groups
- consultancy for setting up consumer Advisory Committees and other high-level groups, including drafting ToRs and other governance tools
- organisational support and training to ready your organisation to best support consumer and family participation

APSU will use the information you provide to send you relevant news and information.



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 changes 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