

2020

A YEAR OF MENTAL HEALTH

AND WELLBEING AWARENESS



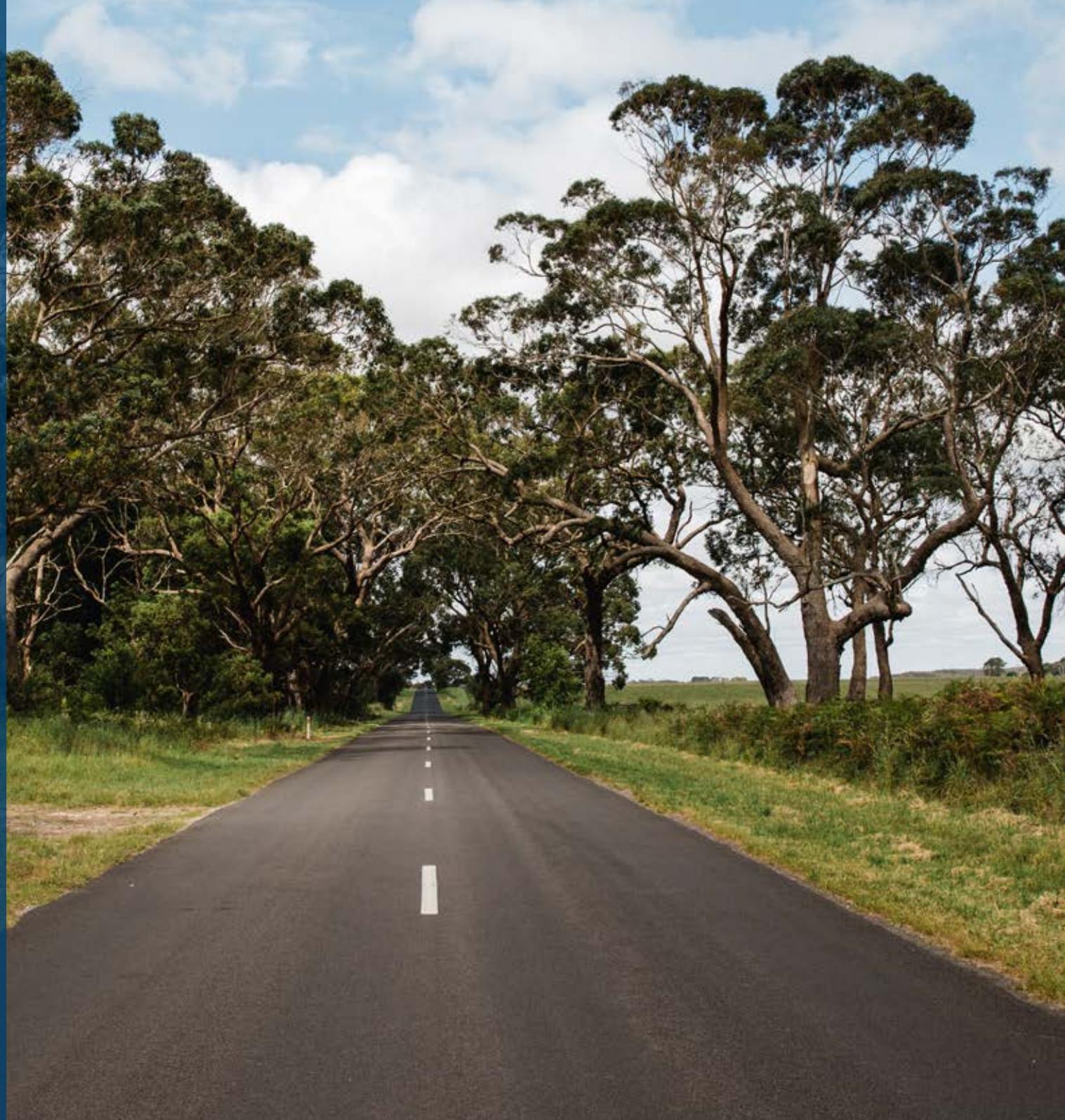
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Our deepest appreciation goes to the twelve local people who generously shared their personal stories to support mental health and wellbeing in our regional communities.

Together we hope that these stories create honest conversations and resonate throughout regional communities. They highlight the importance and positive impact of reaching out for support and are powerful reminders of hope and recovery strategies for good mental health.

Special thanks go to Rob Lang for his superb photography and the local Suicide Prevention Networks: Breaking the Silence Kingston SE Suicide Prevention Network, Naracoorte and District Suicide Prevention Network and Wattle Range Suicide Prevention Network. Plus a special mention to the coordinators of Standby Support After Suicide, Lifeboat and Ski for Life in the South East region who collaborated with us, as they felt the promotion of mental health and wellbeing is in everybody's interest and reducing stigma and prejudice might encourage people to seek help.

The collaborative project was based on a Lived Experience initiative of Sallie Jones of Gippsland Jersey, Country SA PHN and the National Enterprise for Rural Community Wellbeing – University of South Australia, led by Professor Lia Bryant and Dr Kate Deuter with stories written by Katerina Bryant.



Regional mental health supports

Free mental health supports for you to talk through your concerns and worries are adjacent. A referral from your GP may be needed for some services. Make sure you ask your GP for a double appointment, so you have the time to talk through your concerns.

MURRAY MALLEE GP NETWORK

Region: Murray Mallee

- Support, counselling and psychological therapies

08 8531 1303

www.mmgn.org.au

COUNTRY AND OUTBACK HEALTH

Region: Eyre, Upper North and Yorke Peninsula

- Support after a suicide attempt
- Support, counselling and psychological therapies

08 8621 3800

www.cobh.com.au

HEADSPACE

Region: Berri, Murray Bridge, Port Augusta and Whyalla

- Youth mental health service 12-25yrs
- Alcohol and drug services
- Family and youth counselling

www.headspace.org.au

ABORIGINAL SOBRIETY GROUP

Region: Berri and outreach locations

- Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander specific mental health services
- Counselling and support for individuals and families

08 8580 8700

www.asg.org.au

FOCUSONE HEALTH

Region: Riverland

- Support, counselling and psychological therapies

08 8582 3823

www.focusonehealth.com.au

MOORUNDI ACCHS

Region: Murray Mallee

- Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander specific mental health services
- Counselling and support for individuals and families

08 8531 0289

www.moorundi.org.au

MENTAL HEALTH EMERGENCY 24/7

Region: Country SA

- For assistance in a mental health emergency
- Assessment and referral to acute response teams where appropriate

13 14 65

www.sahealth.sa.gov.au

STANDBY SUPPORT AFTER SUICIDE 24/7

- Support for anyone bereaved or impacted by suicide
- Face to face or phone support

SA South - 0437 752 485

SA North - 0438 728 644

www.standbysupport.com.au

HELP IS AVAILABLE 24HRS/7DAYS

Regional Access: 1300 032 186

Suicide call back service: 1300 659 467

Lifeline: 131 114

Men's Line: 1300 789 978

Poison info: 131 126

Beyond Blue: 1300 224 636

ANDREW'S STORY

“This journey made me a better father, a better husband, a better member of the community.”

Andrew's first memories are as a three-year-old milking cows and he's been farming ever since. At 30, he moved to South Australia after separating from his first wife. With the separation, his three children moved back to New Zealand with their mother and Andrew said that was probably the toughest period of his life. Later, he met his partner Kay and they've been together for 25 years and have two children together.

Reflecting on his life of farming, Andrew went from milking 40 cows as a child to managing a farm in Meningie milking 3,700 – the biggest farm in Australia. For Andrew experiencing drought is all-consuming.





“Because as dairy farmers, we love our animals; my lasting memories of drought will always be driving past my cows and they’re bellowing at you. Every dairy farmer hates that noise. The hunger. Droughts chew away at your mental health because it’s that continuous thought of how am I going to feed my animals?”

While in his 30s, Andrew remembers going back to his childhood in dreams at night; this was when his mental health started to decline. He would wake up remembering trauma from his childhood and it feeling like a tsunami. He once believed his distress was just a personal failing and felt that it was extremely important to keep it from his family.

Now, he realises they knew all along. Andrew battled with depression for 10 years.

“I understood this could possibly lead to suicide and I’ve seen the impact of suicide.”

For Andrew, his connection to his family overrode any suicidal thoughts.

“No matter how bad I am I can’t do this to my kids. They’re the most important thing to me.”

Andrew’s depression didn’t shift until a ‘defining moment’ where he realised, he couldn’t control or change the past. Now, his advice to someone else would be to see if you can understand what the underlying issue is and go to the doctor. He also believes it is extraordinarily therapeutic to talk about mental distress.

Andrew is very thankful for his wife.

“What would I be now if I had not had Kay? I have no idea, but I wouldn’t be who I am. This journey made me a better father, a better husband, a better member of the community. It was tough for me and out of it came all these positive things.”

January

SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT
			NEW YEAR'S DAY 1	2	3	4
5	6	7	8	9	10	11
12	13	14	15	16	17	18
19	20	21	22	23	24	25
AUSTRALIA DAY 26	AUSTRALIA DAY PUBLIC HOLIDAY 27	28	29	30	31	

DIESSY'S STORY

“Everyone rallied around us here very quickly.”

“Like everyone, I've got a story and there's lots of stories that loop through your life.”

Much of Diessy's story revolves around farming. Her family moved to Coonalpyn to share farm in 1967. When Di was 16 and returned to the farm during school holidays, she saw the impact of drought. She remembers the bare paddocks and thin stock, which she had never seen before.

“I was horrified.”

After her mother's death, her father sold the farm, which was devastating to her. Di continued to work in wool classing and shearing until she bought a farm with her husband, John, years later. Di still works on the farm while John decided at 60 to transition to driving trucks. As well as the farm, John and Di raised three children: Shane, Jason and the late Matthew.

“Having been through having a stepmother myself, I didn't want to make the same mistakes with my stepsons. I didn't want to force myself on them but at the same time you need to let them get to know you and trust you.”





Five years ago, Di and John lost Matthew to suicide. Di remembers the time before Matthew's death.

"The build-up of what was wrong at the time, he couldn't keep up with his workload, he was trying to keep up with a lifestyle he couldn't afford."

In the couple of months before he died, she was pruning, which is a 12-hour day, seven days a week, for three months. This time was immensely busy and stressful for her to keep on top of with everything that was occurring.

When Matthew died by suicide, Di and John found they were supported immediately.

"Everyone rallied around us here very quickly... we had enough support between our friends, family and neighbours and were comforted to know that counselling services were right there if we needed it."

The support from her family has helped immensely with the ongoing grief, and Di states there were, and still are lots of tears, which you just need to let flow.

While their family is still grappling with the loss, Di has felt comforted by the ongoing celebration of Matthew's life. The outpouring of memories has been immense on Matthew's Facebook page and Di is touched that the kids are still sending their messages five years later.

"It's wonderful because these young people are talking about it. Sharing it. This enormous loss."

In the time after Matthew's death, Di has found that the support between her family has helped with the ongoing grief. 'Lots of tears. Just let them flow,' she says as it's vital to 'talk about it to each other.'

February

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ANGELA'S STORY

“Angela believes in community and hopes to support the people around her.”

Angela, alongside her partner Ben and their two children Shae and Connor, is a third-generation farmer, living in Glencoe West with their 300 cattle. They purchased the farm together from Angela's parents three years ago, having already leased it for five years previously.

“The day that we signed the farm papers was the same day that Murray Goulburn had their clawback. So, we lost 20 percent of our milk cheque just like that,” she said.

For Angela, the everyday worries and complexities of running a dairy farm are compounded by drought. She lists her concerns off the top of her head, as if voicing a personal to-do list.





"Make sure there is enough food for the cows, enough money to pay the bills, the cows are still milking, the work is getting done right, hoping it rains so then we don't have to buy as much feed, hoping it rains everywhere else so the price of feed comes down," she said.

"It has been tough over the last few years for a lot of people, if you can't pay for the feed for the cows, the cows don't make very much milk. Even in our industry, they've had drought and water issues in Northern Victoria, people having to sell up when they don't want to sell up."

With difficult times throughout the industry, Angela believes in community and hopes to support the people around her.

"We've got friends who struggle with mental health, you know you have to give them a call and catch up. Go round and check on them."

She counts herself lucky that, as open people, they always talk in the dairy. And, while she places importance on her ability to be a listening ear and taking friends and family places to do things they enjoy, she notes it is important to make sure they're getting help if they need more help than she can give them.

For their own wellbeing, Angela and Ben travel when they can.

"We didn't go anywhere as kids... Mum and dad worked on the farm all the time."

They've gone the opposite way, travelling to Africa and America since having the kids. Getting away from the farm and the daily chores allows Angela and Ben to escape the feeling of the 'same thing every day' while enjoying time together and with their kids.

March

SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT
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8 <small>ADELAIDE CUP</small>	9	10	11	12	13	14
15	16	17	18	19	20	21
22	23	24	25	26	27	28
29	30	31				

SUE AND TIM'S STORY

*"It's not a race,
it's about getting
everyone safely
to the end."*

Sue and Tim live in Mount Gambier with their three children, Lachie, Mitch and Mia. They had always hoped they would end up living more rurally on a farm; however, the high interest rates at the time made this unachievable.

Tim works in agriculture as a consultant in a biological fertiliser business where his client base is predominantly rural farmers who have been affected by the drought. His guidance and assistance is often met with great appreciation with some people stating 'had he not turned up at that particular time, they may not be here'.

Sue wears lots of hats, works full time in adult education, studies and is the event manager for Ski for Life, an annual charity event where participants water ski 450 kilometres from Murray Bridge to Renmark. The event was founded by Bill Stockman who was passionate about doing something to bring men together to help make a difference and so the organisation is about promoting mental health, wellbeing, and suicide prevention.

Sue and Tim have been involved with Ski for Life since the beginning.





“Ski for Life taught us that everyone has a story, the event not only has a community impact, but a personal one,” Sue said.

Tim lost his brother to suicide and the Ski for Life community helped him move on, through their support and the knowledge he is not alone in this.

Sue notes there are a significant amount of community members who have lost someone to suicide or just need someone to talk to and the Ski for Life community provides this.

“It’s not a race, it’s about getting everyone safely to the end,” Sue stresses.

Sue and Tim are thrilled by the ongoing momentum and awareness the event has created over the past eight years.

“The first year there was two boats and about 18 of us. This year we had 21 boats and over 200 participants,” Sue said.

Travelling with the event, StandBy Support After Suicide provides professional counsellors for both the participants and community members and remains with participants ‘day and night’. The most significant part of the weekend centres around the memorial ceremony held at Cadell, where the participants and community members come together to remember, and honour loved ones lost to suicide.

Ski for Life is supported by the community and gives back to the community.

“We raised over \$91,000 this year which enables us to provide grants to communities for programs that support mental health, wellbeing and suicide prevention awareness,” Tim said.

“This has been vital especially for communities who are suffering from drought.”

Sue believes it takes a community to make a difference.

“If we save one life, then the hundreds of hours we put into the event are absolutely worth it,” she said.

April

SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT
			1	2	3	4
5	6	7	8	9	GOOD FRIDAY	10 EASTER SATURDAY
12 EASTER MONDAY	13	14	15	16	17	18
19	20	21	22	23	24 ANZAC DAY	25
26	27	28	29	30		

NATALA'S STORY

*"I tell everyone
- I'm always up
for a coffee."*

Natala felt the pull of the country after living in Adelaide for much of her life. As a city girl, she didn't think she'd ever come back but along with her husband, Joe, and their newborn they chose to move to Penola.

After five months of maternity leave, Natala returned to work as a Registered Nurse and found the transition from city to country nursing challenging. She was quite attached to the Burns Unit at the RAH where she had worked with a very supportive team. Natala's mental health journey began with her first pregnancy.

"I was undiagnosed Bipolar at that point, and it is believed that pregnancy really brought it to the surface, so I had all of that going in my head while being with a little baby in a town with no friends or family," she said.

Later, with a second young child, Natala experienced her first breakdown and was hospitalised. This, however, connected her with the support team that has since helped her with her journey back to wellness. Since diagnosis, Natala credits the support of her medical and psychiatric team in guiding her through treatment.





“They let me choose my medication. I’ve always had that say of how I want my care to go.”

Natala thinks of herself as ‘a lucky one’ and thanks the doctors and mental health nurse in guiding her through treatment.

“I am lucky because I know so many people that don’t have a team and they’re struggling. I really feel if it wasn’t for them, I wouldn’t be here,” she said.

Natala notes that living in the country makes it harder to seek help than what it may be in the city.

“A lot of people are on medication, but it’s too hard to access the psychological support that they need. But they go hand in hand. One doesn’t work without the other.”

While seeking help is more challenging in the country, Natala is grateful her community is there and supportive for those struggling throughout the drought.

“It is so gut-wrenching to hear and see farmers struggling in those hard-hit areas. It is a good feeling knowing that our region has the ability to help those most affected by the drought.”

In her own experience of illness, Natala recognises her husband as a wonderful support system.

“He is my rock. He knows my signs.”

She also found comfort in reading memoirs of people living with Bipolar.

“Reading has been great, reading different people’s views and how they’ve coped. Just feeling like, wow, I can connect with that person.”

Art, along with community and social connection is also meaningful to Natala in talking through and expressing her own experiences and supporting others

“I tell everyone – I’m always up for a coffee.”

May

SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT
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TRACEY'S STORY

“People often don't know what they need to know until they need to know it.”

Tracey not only works with rural communities but grew up in one, the seaside town of Beachport. She knows from experience that anything that happens in a community affects the whole community, whether it be drought or a bad fishing season.

Tracey believes her work at StandBy Support After Suicide is the perfect job for her.

“StandBy gets out into the community, we run workshops, training within workplaces and support with clients to care for a community after suicide,” she said.

StandBy is unique in that the service travels to people living in rural and remote areas. Research has found that people impacted by suicide are at a higher risk themselves but Tracey highlights that by placing good support around people, that risk can be lowered.





“There’s an assumption quite often that when someone’s died by suicide that it’s only the immediate family and friends that are bereaved but it has a wider effect,” she said.

“When someone dies in a car accident, there’s 16 lasagnes delivered in the next week, when it’s suicide, it’s not the same, because people are hesitant.”

She sees her role as addressing that by supporting the community to support each other. This is especially true around the connection between drought and mental distress. She makes sure that resources for farmers experiencing drought and distress are shared.

“So many farmers, the stories we hear about farmers who have died by suicide is not knowing anywhere to turn. If you’ve not ever talked to anyone about whatever is causing stress and worry, sometimes just saying a problem out loud lessens it.”

“Farmers work 15 to 20 hours a day, they’re not going to take time off during the day to access a counsellor.”

Tracey is quick to recommend Regional Access, the Suicide Callback Service or the Mensline, as support systems that are available 24/7. She also mentions the importance of people in the community knowing that counselling sessions are provided by these services and that these are anonymous.

“People often don’t know what they need to know until they need to know it. And then you’re in a state of crisis so it’s hard to even think about how to find it.”

Working in suicide postvention means that self-care is big on Tracey’s agenda. It is something she builds into each day.

“When I’m doing my thousand kilometres for the week, I download an audio book and I listen to that while driving.”

She especially appreciates the communities she works with.

“The fact that you know other people care about you really does make a difference.”

June

SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT
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7	QUEEN'S BIRTHDAY	8	9	10	11	12
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JOHN'S STORY

“When I talk to friends... and I mention I'm going to counselling, they're quite accepting.”

John has built his life around family. A dairy farmer based in Rendelsham, he worked on his parents' farm before inheriting it with his wife, Tracey. Like his father before him, John joined the CFS as a volunteer in 1984 and worked his way up the ranks to Brigade Captain.

At the farm, John and his family had experienced 'wet years and dry years'. After a dry year in 2006, John and Tracey only cut a third of the hay they normally cut. This was due to the dry conditions resulting in a lot of dry lightning which meant a heightened chance of fire, which creates more work and risk for the CFS volunteers.

Being a CFS volunteer has shaped much of John's life.





"My first fatality accident, I was probably 24 years of age," he said, feeling that the accidents were something you don't talk about.

"It's other people's lives that have been affected, you think about it for a few weeks, but I don't let it take me over." Tracey agrees, saying that she noticed 'he never brought it home.'

It was when John was involved in an accident where another volunteer died while attending to a bush fire that he felt he was 'struggling'.

"Experiencing trauma while being self-employed is challenging," he said, but regardless of how he felt, the cows still needed to be milked and fed.

When he got home he would need to start feeding the cows, because they never got milked or fed the night of the accident, 'nobody understands that,' John recounts

The trauma has an impact on everyday life. John would have days where he'd get up and milk the cows and then go back to bed.

"I'd never experienced anything like that before," he said.

John said his family and their support were his 'something to get up for in the morning'.

For Tracey, living through the trauma she had to manage to be there for him – 'to be the rock, to hold it all together' – alongside counselling and his passion for the farm which helped John through the toughest of times.

John emphasises it's important to find the right counsellor; one who 'understands'. John also found support in his community.

"When I talk to friends... and I mention I'm going to counselling, they're quite accepting," he said.

John has also been attending Wattle Range Suicide Prevention committee for the last year to try to understand mental health and mental illness better.

July

SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT
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RICHARD'S STORY

"I really started using music as me-time then. That helped a lot."

Richard was born in New Zealand and grew up on a sheep stud farm, before moving to Western Victoria in 1988 at age 10.

He moved around a lot growing up and his life changed forever when his father was murdered in Shepparton in 2003, causing extreme shock and distress to his family. Following this trauma, he engaged in drug use as a coping mechanism when things got bad. But for Richard, things got better over time.

Alongside counselling, he found music to be his saviour throughout life's hardships.

"I really started using music as me-time then. That helped a lot. Even just listening to music, writing a few songs, jamming with other people," he said.





For the past 15 years, Richard has managed the spare parts department at agricultural dealerships in Naracoorte and Millicent. His work sees him on the road, travelling 1,100 kilometres a week, and he has seen the impact drought and mental distress has on farmers and takes time to engage with his customers.

“Work’s not always about work. Sometimes those interactions you have with people are more important than the actual job...with the drought, there are still farmers out there who are really struggling,” he said,

When talking about people’s lives, Richard believes the value in that conversation to be priceless - ‘you can’t put a dollar value on it’.

Richard acknowledged the impact of drought for communities such as his.

“Drought is a major issue in this region, you do have dry years and that impacts the whole family operation. It can really make or break you. Some of these guys are really frazzled.”

Listening is key, Richard believes, with a palpable impact if people did so.

“If more people were willing to actually listen, not necessarily judge people or have an opinion but just listen. You might have a lot of problems going on, but your experience might be able to help other people out.”

“I’m known as quite a bright, happy, outgoing person but you ask my wife and she’ll tell you I’m one of the most anxious and insecure people you’ll ever hear.”

Richard reflects on his own struggles and believes he has learnt through his trauma and experiences.

“If you sit there and just bottle it up, it will hit you or you’ll end up with an alcohol or drug problem. After being down that dark path and not really liking yourself, you really wake up to the fact you don’t want to do that again.”

August

SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT
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JACQUI AND JOSH'S STORY

"I just let it all go, that comes from my faith."

Jacqui was born in Meningie and moved to Kingston South East as a child. She remembers the hands-on nature of their family fishing business and recalls being brought up down the beach. While there were hard times, she still wouldn't change her upbringing.

Now with husband Pete, Jacqui runs a cray fishing business in Kingston

"If it's a bad season on the land, it could be a bad season at sea. The crays can get slower, we may take longer to catch them," she said.

"Same as the farmers on the land, the expenses associated with a good or a bad season cannot be passed on. Coupled with quotas, it can be a challenging industry."

After three years of marriage to Pete, Jacqui fell pregnant with Joshua. After a difficult birth with both nearly dying during labour, Joshua would many years later receive a diagnosis of depression and psychosis. With support and guidance from his parents he sought counselling and went on to complete a personal training course, travel and eventually go back to working on the fishing boat.



Joshua's mental health however continued to decline. In his teenage years he was supporting a girlfriend as well as a mate experiencing violence. In 2011, Josh experienced further trauma. It was when visiting a family friend who was in a coma, that Jacqui noticed changes in Joshua – as he grew angry, distressed and distrustful, she realised it was all affecting him.

That same year, Jacqui was diagnosed with breast cancer.

"The doctors suggested chemotherapy, but we couldn't get through to Joshua that it was a preventative measure...not even the doctors. He felt lied to," she said.

A year later he was treated at Glenside.

Jacqui believes her faith gave her the strength to do what she had to do but more so to support the ones around her, especially Joshua.

"I just let it all go, that comes from my faith. I pray all the time and although I don't know how anyone's feeling, I try to understand," she said.

"I suppose because I don't judge anyone, especially Joshua, I'm always there with open arms."

The process of getting Joshua help was complex; as an adult he is legally responsible for his treatment. They went to doctors and made plenty of phone calls.

Joshua has been hesitant to seek help at times.

"He is a very kind-hearted man, he keeps everything internal. He won't talk," Jacqui said.

"But with the help of doctors and counsellors, he is starting to put a voice to his feelings."

For Joshua's wellbeing, Jacqui says that being on the boat is important to him as he loves it out at sea.

"It's part of his recovery along with his faith. If it wasn't for fishing, I don't know where Joshua would be."

September

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BARRY'S STORY

“When you're at your lowest you remember those who were around.”

Barry, a science and maths teacher, moved to Kingston in 2006.

“I thought that it was going to be short term but I'm still here and enjoying it,” he said.

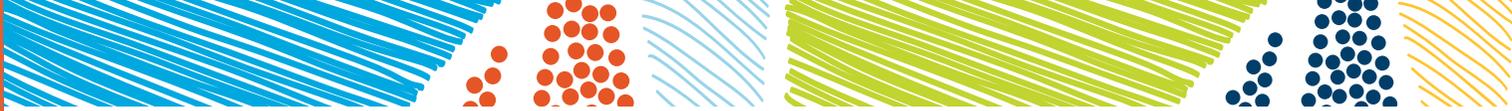
“I quickly became part of the family. As a single guy, I had never felt more connected.”

Having previously lived in Adelaide, Barry found he was quickly welcomed into the community. When the drought began, he was unaware of the extent and impact it would have for himself and the community.

“At the time, I probably didn't realise how drought affected the area was, at that point, I didn't really have anything to compare it with,” he said.

Barry credits his connection with the community in helping him navigate a diagnosis of Bipolar I disorder.





"I certainly didn't feel alone. In many ways, it really strengthened my relationships. When you're at your lowest you remember those who were around," he said.

Barry first experienced psychosis – a symptom of Bipolar – on his 31st birthday. My parents were down visiting me at the time and that night I ended up in a psychotic episode.

Barry recounts his experience, feeling 'as though I'd lost control of my mind, literally'.

"I remember my brain being on fire and then I just felt helpless as it went more and more into a loop. I didn't know what it was at the time. That was pretty scary for the people around me," he said.

"In hindsight, there was a build up over a few days with a culmination of stress and at the same time intense enthusiasm and energy...as though I'd lost control of my mind, my brain was on fire and I just felt helpless."

At first, doctors believed it was an acute stress reaction and things went back to usual shortly after until a couple of years later he had a similar episode and was then diagnosed. Barry's second episode occurred in his workplace, and his diagnosis became widely known in a small country town. For him, that made it better because it meant he could be more open about it; he didn't want to hide it. Throughout his treatment, Barry found pleasure in reading.

"Obviously the medication and the medical support has been a huge help and you wouldn't want to not have them, but I explored some things that I wouldn't have done if I hadn't had the illness and I think my life's better because of it"

Barry's advice for anyone trying to connect and help someone living with mental illness is simple.

"Just be there, to listen and to talk, but without trying to fix everything... You don't need to worry about saying the right or wrong thing - your actions speak louder than words. Just being there can make the world of difference."

October

SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT
				1	2	3
4	LABOUR DAY	5	6	7	8	9
10	11	12	13	14	15	16
17	18	19	20	21	22	23
24	25	26	27	28	29	30
31						

MATTHEW'S STORY

"I planted a fruit tree every week as something to look forward to..."

"I thought I was big and ugly enough to handle anything thrown at me."

Matthew remembers his mental health journey and the two events that had a significant impact. Within a two-month period, Matthew was first on the scene of a road fatality and later was involved in a car accident of his own.

"I fell asleep and rolled the car. None of the family were hurt, however, I had those moments where I thought I could've killed my whole family," he said.

Matthew worked within the Timber Industry and, while planning significant changes in business, he started to experience blurred vision, heart twinges and headaches. After a series of medical tests came back clear, he eventually realised these were indicators and symptoms of high stress and anxiety. It was Nada, Matthew's wife, who pushed him to seek help and see a psychologist, reasoning that he would see a doctor if he had a sore knee.





Matthew credits his recovery to his family, Nada and their three children, Jack, Madeleine and Tom.

“They were fantastic, taking it in turns to get me off the couch for a walk every night as I didn’t have the desire or interest to do anything, while Nada had me focused on the health plan components,” he said.

“With prescribed medication and a health plan from the local mental health team it had me re-focus on exercise, achievement, socialising, hobbies and doing things I enjoyed.”

Matthew lost his cousin 25 years earlier due to mental illness and found himself feeling ‘a bit the same’ but this memory kept him determined to get through it.

“I planted a fruit tree every week as something to look forward to and share with my family... when I felt bad, I’d just go outside and water the trees,” he said.

“It’s a wonder I didn’t drown them, I’d just be there looking into space. You’re there, but sort of not there.”

He’s since planted 32 fruit trees.

A further step to his recovery was through awakening his cultural heritage, connecting with the Aboriginal community and hosting the Boandik Nunga Radio program. Matthew recalls it as being one of the most rewarding parts of his self-care and wellness.

“To find out more and share my ancestry on this Boandik land is both refreshing and calming,” he said.

With Matthew’s involvement on the radio, he has created podcasts to share mental health experiences, with guests sharing the help they sought, different tools they used for wellness and continued management.

“We have over 25 podcasts covering a wide range of illnesses. Locals supporting locals by sharing their knowledge.”

Matthew has since joined a lived experienced team, who have formed the group Lifeboat SE. The group meets monthly and provides a place to discuss life issues and is simply local mates supporting local mates.

November

SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8	9	10	11	12	13	14
15	16	17	18	19	20	21
22	23	24	25	26	27	28
29	30					

SHANE AND SUZANNE'S STORY

"I look back at that year and think if you can make it through that, you can make it through anything."

Shane and Suzanne bought their Blackford farm in 2003, focused on prime lamb production. According to Suzanne, they fell in love after meeting in Adelaide.

"He was never going to leave so I had to make the decision to come here, which I did happily. I got a job managing the hotel and established my own identity," she said.

Growing up in Mount Benson for Shane meant 'we were always under financial pressure'. He worked on the family farm which meant irregular income before buying their own farm.

"In the first year we hit the ground running, we had a dream first year, our first land cheque was incredible, we thought how easy is this," Shane said.

But the drought added complications.





"Seasonal stuff. Stock prices were nothing like what they are now. It was a lot harder game to be in," he said. Financial difficulties meant stress, especially while raising two young daughters - 'our farm and what we owed on it was probably about the maximum'.

When Suzanne was diagnosed with postnatal depression, like many in the community, Shane didn't understand mental illness and felt the need to protect her from what was happening on the farm. No rainfall meant that their livestock was dying.

"I remember one day I went out I would have picked up 30 dead lambs. I felt like at the time, I've got to protect her from this because she was going through her own hell. I was trying to do as much off-farm work as well. I'd be weed spraying for the Natural Resource Management board during the day, get home and just start feeding sheep for a few hours at night."

It was only years later that Suzanne learnt of the extent Shane was struggling.

"I didn't know because he was trying to protect me, which I now have guilt about," she said.

In Shane's words, he'd get home from all this death and misery and try and put on a smiley face.

"We went backwards financially that year, after all that," he said. "You just think, what's the point?"

The ongoing financial pressures didn't shift until they decided to lease and then sell their farm. The decision was difficult.

"I look back at that year and think if you can make it through that, you can make it through anything," Shane said.

Shane and Suzanne have found support in each other.

"You are with someone because you love them. They're the people that you love the most, but it still takes so much courage to reach out," Suzanne says.

December

SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT
		1	2	3	4	5
6	7	8	9	10	11	12
13	14	15	16	17	18	19
20	21	22	23	24	CHRISTMAS DAY 25	BOXING DAY 26
27	PROCLAMATION DAY PUBLIC HOLIDAY 28	29	30	31		



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