

Connections

Broken Hill

Report July 2019 – December 2019

Service Overview

Loneliness is increasingly recognised as having a strong negative effect on mental health. Many people are more isolated in the evening and on weekends, yet most mental health programs run during the day, leaving people on their own when the sun goes down. This is a particular issue in the Broken Hill community given that there are extremely limited services available outside business hours, creating a reliance on emergency and crisis services. In order to address this issue, Mission Australia and the Far West Local Health District, in partnership with consumers and family and carer groups, co-designed the Connections program

The Connections Program is a unique service staffed exclusively by peer workers to build connections between program participants and the broader community, particularly in the evenings and on weekends. The Connections program promotes social inclusion, social skills and community participation.

Our Work

Coffee Club

Coffee Club is every Monday as part of the Connections Calendar. Coffee Club is held at the local Gloria Jeans café. Having it at a local coffee shop rather than at the Mission Australia office allows participants to become familiar with places in the community and build confidence. All participants that attend receive a free drink which is paid for by the Far West Local health district. This event is well attended each week with 20-30 attending at times. It is amazing to see the genuine connections people build with each other when having a conversation over a coffee.



Weekend Social Activities

Connections is a unique program because the program is held after hours and on weekends. Participants enjoy that they have a safe and supportive atmosphere to contact and attend during these times when other helpful support services are closed.

All activities are planned on a bi-monthly planning day with participants of the program. Calendars are then created to reflect desired activities which are aimed to develop community connections, rather than create dependency on Connections as a standalone program.

Participants are also asked to provide feedback on the program bi-monthly. This has resulted in changes to the format of the activities and processes to better respond to consumer's needs.

We have held various activities over time such as outings to the movies, Sunday lunches at local bistros and cafes, walking groups, day trips to Silverton and Stephens Creek, sunset and canapé nights, art lessons, bingo, karaoke and many more.

We also hold special activities around celebratory days and local events such as Christmas, Australia Day, World Mental Health Day, NAIDOC Week and the Broken Hill Festival.



Advice and Referral

Whilst Connections is focused on being a social program aimed to reduce loneliness we also recognise the need for further support in recovery. Peer support workers who run the connections program ensure they get to know people and connect. They are also trained in accidental counselling, trauma informed care, de-escalation techniques and are about to receive their Certificate IV in peer work.

These skills and most importantly their lived experience allow them to connect with people in a meaningful way and share their journey to inspire and assist others. Peer support workers often provide advice and referrals to participants seeking or requiring extra support or specialist services.



Newsletter

A Connections Newsletter is created by participants and peer workers which provides an opportunity for participants to share their personnel and group achievements, get to know each other and market the program to the community. Participants have become very passionate about the newsletter and are constantly planning the next issue. (The December issue is attached to this report).

Program Highlights

Mental Health Matters Awards

Mental Health Matters Awards were announced in September 2019 ahead of NSW's Mental Health Month, which is run by WayAhead – Mental Health Association NSW.

The Mental Health Matters Awards, recognise the achievements of individuals and organisations who have worked to improve understanding, awareness, service provision and the general mental health of communities in NSW over the previous year.

This year The Connections program was lucky enough to be awarded the Outstanding Achievement in Mental Health Promotion Award. The award was accepted by Mission Australia Connections Program Manager Jenna Bottrell and Senior Peer Support Worker Lee-Anne Ryan. The Ceremony was held at the Shangri-La Hotel in Sydney and whilst staff felt honoured to attend and receive the award, we wanted to be able to share it with the participants of the program.

Once arriving back in Broken Hill staff set to work on organising a celebration dinner so all staff, consumers and services could celebrate the achievements of the program together. The dinner was an absolute success and everyone enjoyed a two-course sit down meal and a night of looking back on the program since the beginning, which included a slide show presentation. The award and photos of the event now hang proudly in the Connections activity room and are a reminder of how far the program, staff and participants have come since Connections started.



Connections Broken Hill

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Kindness Rock Project

Another highlight over the last 6 months would be the continuation of the Kindness Rock Project at Connections. It started out as a small way we could give back as a group to our community whilst still having fun together.

Participants design and paint small rocks with bright colours, inspirational messages and words of hope. As a group, we then place these in various spots around the local park with a sign attached to some trees. People who find the rocks can choose to keep it if they need some hope or hide it again for someone else to find. We all love to hear stories from various people who have seen or found the rocks.

This project has the group thinking of other ways we can give back and we hope to implement some of these ideas this year.



Christmas Celebration

Christmas can be a lonely time of year. About one in four Australians report they are currently experiencing an episode of loneliness. One in five Australians rarely or never feel they have someone to turn to or talk to and over one-quarter feel a sense of loneliness for at least three days a week.

The thought of a Christmas gathering can cause an ache for those experiencing relationship breakdown, who feel the absence of loved ones or don't have the means to put a Christmas lunch on the table. For those experiencing loneliness or disadvantage – a Christmas meal can be far from possible.

The Connections Program took the opportunity to turn that around by holding our Annual Christmas Party at Grassys, Broken Hill. A traditional Christmas lunch was served, with much laughter and fun had. Participants who access support through the program had the opportunity to enjoy a festive lunch together, sing Christmas carols and enjoy each other's company.



Client Feedback

One consumer who regularly attends Connections has said that ‘Connections has helped him to make friends and feel comfortable around people again.’ Prior to Connections, he was socially withdrawn, disconnected from family and had extended stays in the MHIU.

Since starting to attend Connections, he has engaged more meaningfully with his support networks and started to reconnect with family in a positive way. He now feels confident enough in accessing social activities in the community outside of Connections.

He also said, ‘Connections has helped me understand my own identity, given me a sense of belonging and a part of something.’

“My whole life, well, my previous life, I was happily a lone wolf. However, as my new life unfolds, I have made some lovely new friendships in Broken Hill, community connections I would call them ... Every aspect, every minute of my rehabilitation path has been filled with kindness, wisdom, respect, positivity and care. ED, MHIPU, Recovery Centre and now Connections have all in their own way played key roles in establishing, and maintaining, my new life. I could never differentiate between each department and organisation. All I can say is that the good work of one was enhanced and reinforced by the next along the way...”

- Connections Participant

Mission Australia values the lived experience of the people we work with, and believes that in order to make the biggest impact we need to understand the issues that we are addressing from the perspectives of those affected, our clients. People with lived experience of a situation understand their needs better than we do and it is important that we continuously learn from them, particularly in relation to what we can do better. With this in mind, the Connections participants were invited to be a part of the **Mission Voice 2020**, which involved a review of Mission Australia’s Strategic Plan to inform the development of a new 3-5 year organisational strategy. The participants really enjoyed the process and provided valuable feedback on service delivery and design.

Measuring Our Impact

In the last 6 months, we have been implementing Impact measurement into our service delivery for Connections. Whilst the transition into the new surveys has been tricky at times, we have started to receive increased engagement in the survey and will hopefully soon have a good snapshot of how the Connections program impacts people and the community.

Peer Worker feedback for people surveyed when receiving support from Connections in Broken Hill shows:

Most participants just need a little help

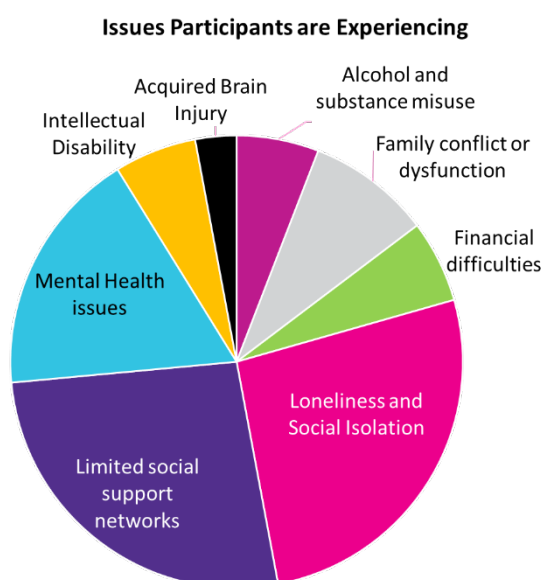
Of the ten participants surveyed, two need a lot of assistance to access community support services and to connect socially with others but most just need a little help.

Between July and December two participants experienced mental health crises and have spent time in hospital because of their mental health. Both of these individuals have been attending the program for less than a year.

Main issues identified: Loneliness and Limited Social Support Networks

Of the ten participants who were surveyed, nine are experiencing loneliness and nine have limited social support networks (eight are experiencing both of these issues).

Six participants require support with their mental health.



When asked to rate their happiness on different aspects of their life, none of the surveyed participants rated community connection and personal relationships negatively.

Despite loneliness and limited social support networks being key issues for participants, these positive responses towards personal relationships and community connection indicate that Connections may be a key driver for participant happiness in these areas.

*People who consented and completed the Impact Measurement survey as at 31st December 2019 n=10. Participants attending for less than 1-year n=4, participants attending between 1- and 3-years n=6.

Looking Forward

We have already started to plan different activities throughout the year; we are in the initial stages of planning a community radio program which will allow participants to showcase their musical skills on radio, and run peer led segments about the importance of staying connected and ways in which you can seek support.

We also plan to be a regular stallholder at the local community markets as a way to promote the program and the issue of loneliness.

The team are always listening and taking on board feedback to allow us to continue to run a successful program and find new and innovative ways for people to become socially connected and reduce loneliness in our community.

The road to recovery and support is a journey and we are thankful for the continued support from The Ivany Foundation, Far West Local Health District, our community and participants who, without their support, we would not be able to provide this vital service.

'A season of loneliness and isolation is when the caterpillar gets its wings. Remember that next time you feel alone' – Mandy Hale.

Thank you for standing together with us

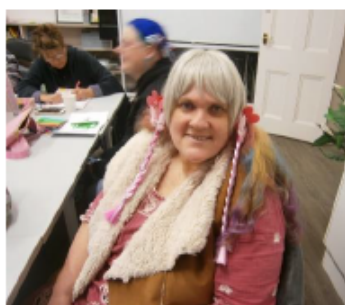
Wendy Wilson
Partnership Manager
02 9288 0028
wilsonwe@missionaustralia.com.au



CONNECTIONS NEWSLETTER

WELCOME TO THE DECEMBER CONNECTIONS NEWSLETTER

PARTICIPANT PROFILE:



1. How long have you been coming to the connections group? I started coming in August 2017.

2. What do you like about connections group? Connections is an opportunity to get out of the house and gives me the opportunity to meet new people. I try new activities that I normally would not have the opportunity to do and go visit places I would not normally be able to visit.

3. What sort of music are you into, who is your favorite singer/band? I like country music – Johnny Cash and ABBA.

4. What do you do to relax and what are your interests? I watch Television, listen to music, do craft, attend church and play with my cat whose name is Bubba Girl.

5. What is your favorite food? Fish, Chicken, Chicken Kiev and Tuna Mornay.

HEALTHY RECIPE: KETO PEANUT BUTTER COOKIES

INGREDIENTS

- 1 Large Egg
- 1 Cup Natural Peanut Butter
- ½ Cup Artificial sweetener or Honey

METHOD

1. Pre-heat oven to 180°.
2. In a medium bowl, add all ingredients.
3. Mix until well combined.
4. Roll the dough into 1-Inch balls and place onto a baking tray lined with baking paper.
5. Press down on balls with a fork twice in opposite directions – creating a crisscross pattern.
6. Bake for 12-15 minutes until golden brown.



Staff profile: JENNA

Name: Hi, My name is Jenna.

How long have you worked for Mission Australia?

I have worked for Mission Australia for over 8 years.

I am currently the Program Manager for Connections, HASI, CLS and the Alcohol and other drugs continuing coordinated care program.

Why do you like Connections? I love the Connections Program! Social Connections and community access is so important and I think it's great that we have the connections program to support with that

What is a highlight of connections? I love seeing everyone arrive on Friday nights excited for the weekend's activities and hearing about the adventures when I visit coffee club.

What is your favorite food? My favourite food is Roast Pork and I love Coffee!

Interests and Hobbies? When I am not at work, I enjoy spending time with my family, reading books and shopping!

OUT AND ABOUT WITH CONNECTIONS

Friday Night Art exhibition:

On Friday October 18, we went to a local art exhibition. There were many paintings on display and a varying range of topics/ there was one sketch that really took my interest; a sketch of a woman's face, her eyes and other facial features, that showed many emotions. That saying, "A picture is worth a thousand words", definitely went with this picture. Anyway, I thoroughly enjoyed our visit to this art expo.

- Chris C



Connections Newsletter December 2019



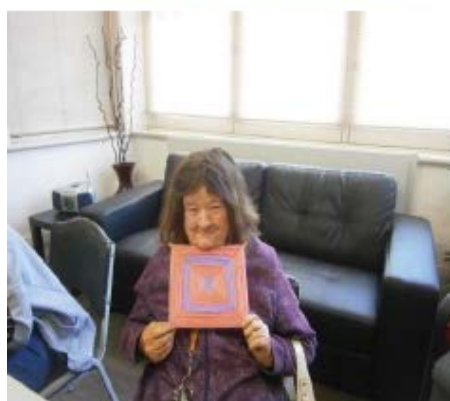
Odd Socks Day:

For "Odd socks Day", many of us wore odd socks. Some of us wore our own and some of us borrowed socks from Connections big bag of socks. We had drawing and scrapbooking whilst some of us sang songs that most of us knew – so it was like a 'sing-a-long'. We also shared a yummy meal together. In the end, it was a good night. Andy L.

Broken Heel Festival Parade

On Saturday 14 September, we went to the Broken Heel parade. The floats were great and the costumes and outfits were amazing! Definitely going again next year!

-Hayley K



HELPFUL HINTS

To prevent celery from wilting, wrap it in foil before putting it in the fridge and it will keep for weeks.

Disinfectant: tea tree oil, added to cleansers or added to rinsing water is a natural disinfectant.

HAVE A LAUGH!!

What do you get if you eat too many Christmas decorations?

Tinsellitis

-Andy L.

What do you call an outlaw who steals gift-wrapping from the rich to give to the poor?

Ribbon Hood!

SELF CARE TIP:

SIGNS THAT YOU NEED A BREAK

Take care of yourself and take a break when your body tells you to.

- Losing interest in things that you are normally passionate about and brings you joy
- Short tempered and taking everything personally
- Constantly overthinking
- Feeling emotionally overwhelmed
- Always exhausted/tired

SOMETHING TO PONDER ON

Start over, my friends. Be brave enough to find the life you want and courageous enough to chase it. Then start over and love yourself the way you were always meant to.

-Madalyn Beck

HOW TO GET INVOLVED

Connections program runs every Thursday, Friday, Saturday and every second Sunday for more information and a calendar please call Mission Australia on 0436658343 or 0459877617 otherwise call into the Mission Australia building at 146 Chloride Street.

**MERRY CHRISTMAS AND A HAPPY NEW
YEAR ☺**

Connections will re-open on the 6th of January 2020 with the first activity being Coffee Club at Gloria Jeans at 11.30am. See you there!!!

CONNECTIONS

**Reducing social isolation &
building community connections**



Do you spend a lot of time on your own?

Are you lonely?

Nothing to do after 5pm?

Then CONNECTIONS might be for you ... when other services are closed, CONNECTIONS opens!

Contact the CONNECTIONS team at Mission Australia on 8084 3700 / 0436 658 343 or pop into the office at 146 Chloride Street to find out more and get involved.