

Friends make the difference on mental health journey

Genevieve Jacobs 29 March 2019



Luke and Mohammed have been matched as friends by Volunteering and Contact ACT. Photo: Supplied.

A local community mental health program run by Volunteering and Contact ACT is helping create new connections, open up friendships and boost mental wellness.

The Connections Program matches people on a mental health recovery journey with a specially selected trained volunteer who accompanies them as they reconnect with the community, and it's been described by Volunteering and Contact CEO, Vicky Darling, as a quiet Canberra success story.

“The program’s success lies in the fact that the participant has the control in deciding what they would like to achieve by meeting regularly with their volunteer ‘buddy,’” Vicky says. “The participant can connect with the volunteer as a human being and a friend, rather than a requirement of a treatment program.

“We have a lot of data to show what a difference this program makes to people’s lives, but it’s the human stories that prove how essential this program is to the community mental health support services in Canberra.”

One such story is that of Luke, who shares in his own words the value of the Connections program.

“My name is Luke and I am 37. I have lived with a mental illness all of my adult life and having it has caused me to be socially isolated. Especially moving from Western Australia to Canberra has been difficult socially for me.

“I have felt disconnected from others and the community. Being part of the Connections program and seeing my volunteer, Mohammad, has really improved my self-esteem, confidence and perception of the world.

“I was at the point in my life that I was really needing more social contact because I lost touch with myself and the world around me, and Mohammad has been a great friend, mentor and support. He is a genuine, caring and giving person, who is great to talk to.

“I think communication and friendship is such an important thing, and that is why Connections is such an amazing program. I catch up with Mo about every two weeks and he always has a positive influence. We usually talk about our lives.

“He tells me a lot about where he has lived around the world, his career, his family and his original homeland India. He is always interested to know what I’ve been up to and is always understanding about the challenges in my life and positive about improvements I have made.”

Luke says that Mohammed has turned into a mentor who is encouraging and positive, and who gives him a sense that he can do something great with his life. “He has a calmness and seriousness in his tone which always makes me feel comfortable. I really needed a friend and he has become just that. I think Connections did a great job of matching me up with him.”

Luke first began meeting Mohammed about a year ago, not long after he’d come out of hospital and felt that he really needed help from others. Luke also sees a psychologist regularly and attends art programs, walks and social outings.

But, he says, the Connections program is unique because Mohammed’s help comes purely from the kindness of his heart, and is one-on-one. “These two things together make the Connections program unique to anything else I am doing and has been a vital part of my recovery,” Luke says.

“I am now starting a university preparation course and hopefully studying art at UC next year. I have got the support I need and feel like I am really starting to enjoy my life for the first time.”

Volunteering and Contact ACT has temporarily paused new applications for the Connections program while funding decisions are being finalised. Anyone interested in finding out more about the program can contact Connections@vc-act.org.au

Source: RiotACT https://the-riotact.com/friends-make-the-difference-on-mental-health-journey/294160?utm_medium=twitter&utm_source=ra