

Finding your own path through mental health

"There are things we can do to help ourselves when things aren't going great"

"Rebecca" was in her early teens and living in Out of Home Care in regional Victoria when it was identified that she needed support with mental health. She had experienced significant childhood trauma, including family violence and relatives with mental health issues and drug use. At a young age, Rebecca lost her mother to suicide.

She knows these are all contributing factors to her own mental health. Now 19 and having left a residential house for young people and transitioned to independent living, she has begun to address her mental health.

She is supported by headspace Albury-Wodonga. Junction Support Services staff take her to and from appointments at headspace. Health professionals are exploring possible diagnoses of bi-polar.

"I do things to help myself, like yoga, playing with my pets and walking my dog at the park," she says. Sometimes, she also self-medicates by smoking marijuana.

"I feel that as a 'kid in care', I didn't get the same treatment and mental health support as a young person who was not in care," she says.

"I would like to see this changed and for all young people treated equally.

"The main thing I would like to see changed in mental health space would be for support to be more affordable to young people who are over 18 and need mental health assistance."

* "Rebecca" is not her real name but this is a real young person's story

One in 10 young people aged 12 to 17 years have engaged in self-harm
-Beyond Blue

Worst things about being in residential care:

- Young people not getting treated fairly in the home and society
 - Resi houses are not "homely"
 - Staff don't show emotion

Best things about being in residential care:

- Activities outside such as movies, drives and laser tag
 - The positive role models you find and the connections you make with a small number of staff
- Friendships made within the houses and other units connecting with other young people who have been in similar situations



I am more than my emotions

I was born in Melbourne. My parents frequently fought after my Dad picked up a drinking habit. We had police visits frequently.

I remember hiding in my room with my 2-year-old sister trying to keep her calm while the smell of pepper spray filled the house. Dad was in and out of my life after that.

We moved a lot. Dad would promise he was sober. He would come over with presents and be absolutely awesome. Then he would drink. We had to move to escape. This happened a few times. We moved more and more rural until we settled in Bright.

Sadly, Dad wasn't my only problem. From Year 3 I dealt with bullying. I was called things like fat, emo and freak. This progressed into Year 7. I moved schools at the end of year 7 to try and escape it.

My Year 8 was spent yelling and crying over other kids making comments. I started skipping school because I couldn't deal with the other kids. I actually loved school and really wish I had the strength to return but my emotions got the best of me. I became angry and impulsive. I started becoming so overwhelmed with every little thing. I would hit myself and scream just to make my chest stop from feeling like it was going to explode. I left school.

I made some wrong decisions, got involved with some bad people and DHHS ended up involved in my, and my family's life. The stress made me and my Mum crumble.

I've always had an amazing relationship with my Mum. She's more of a best friend than my Mum. We started fighting. Even though I started seeing a youth psychiatrist, it didn't help. I didn't enjoy meeting with the psychiatrist but there was no other professionals locally. We tried NECAMHS and headspace but couldn't financially support getting to Wangaratta or Wodonga every week.

My mental health plummeted. My 3-year-old sister copied things I did during my "break-downs". This caused me and Mum to come to the agreement I couldn't stay at home because I couldn't receive the help I needed for my mental health there.

After couch surfing, I moved into the Junction Youth Refuge in Wodonga. I was there for 8 weeks. I'm now in a share house and I've reconnected with headspace. It helps to have headspace, but it's hard to build anything on a cracked foundation. I'm still struggling to find stable housing. I've tried my best to stay connected to support services like Junction but trying to stay connected has proven more stress than it's worth.

Since I moved into the Refuge, I have had 3 different case workers. My first case worker would disappear for a week at a time. I hadn't heard from a case worker in 2 weeks. And then I found out I was getting a new caseworker but not for a week. At this time, I was trying to re-enrol myself in education. It was all too stressful.

My Dad is now sober and we have reconnected. He's homeless and, since multiple operations, he has really been struggling. My Dad and I have applied for houses but with no rental history, getting a private rental seems impossible. Beyond Housing can't do much as their housing is so limited. The fact I still don't have a place to call home looms over me darker than any bullying ever did. Every day you don't know where you could end up. I want a place I'm comfortable and can focus on maintaining my emotions. I still struggle with mental health.

I'm very grateful for the support I do receive but I do believe it could be better. Support networks need to connect to more rural areas as kids there are being left behind. I would do anything to move back home with my Mum, but I can't work on my mental health or study there. I am determined to show myself I am more than my emotions and they do not control me.

Dear Diary,

I need help. I feel so stuck. Almost as if I'm glued to my bed. I feel my sense of time drifting further from me. I forget I even exist sometimes. Just drifting along...

This room feels foreign, as if I'm not meant to be here. Looking through the cupboards makes me feel like I'm going through someone else's stuff...

It feels as if every day in here I'm confronted with different faces and rules. Forced to meet the differentiating demands of the workers. The mere act of visiting my friends makes me feel wrong and constantly worry for my placement. This is all I have to survive but my friends are all I have to feel loved. I shouldn't feel like I have to choose...

Just realising I've awoken fills my chest with dread. What will today be like? Who's working? Will that other kid finally leave me alone? Will I be able to sleep tonight, or will there be more yelling?

We're never told anything until last minute. I wasn't even told I could be sharing a room with another girl until half an hour before I left the house. to have my 2 approved nights out.

I thought I was going to come home to a stranger in my room. Those 2 nights were filled with so much anxiety. Will I get along with her? Will she be the type of person I want in my life? Will I ever be able to sleep again? I couldn't even enjoy seeing my siblings and friends.

I came back to no roommate... I'm suffocating in my own emotions. My bucket is full and with the slightest ripple, I feel as if I'll spill. I guess that's why I sit here. Stuck. It's safer than spilling...

D
D
P

M
a
y

2
0
2
0