

'Leap of faith' transforms lives

Resident shares mental health 'road to recovery' as South East Junction anniversary celebrated



CHARLOTTE VARCOE
JUNCTION DIRECTOR

A LEAP of faith to seek support from The South East Junction has helped transform the life of Mount Gambier resident Bronnie Leibhardt and now she is paying it forward.

Ms Leibhardt credits the mental health organisation with playing a key role in her "road to recovery" and to highlight her personal development Ms Leibhardt now volunteers at the facility.

The junction celebrated its 10th anniversary yesterday with a function at Mount Gambier City Hall, where Ms Leibhardt spoke about her own journey - sparked by a conversation with a counsellor.

"I was very nervous about going because I have high anxiety and when I first went to the junction I was scared," Ms Leibhardt said.

"Once I got there and met everyone I felt at home because everyone was so warm and welcoming.

"It helped my fears disappear straight away."

Ms Leibhardt said the junction had helped her own recovery, as she was given several important roles within the organisation.

Leading the cooking program, helping with gardening and participating in the exercise groups, the dedicated volunteer expressed gratitude to the organisation.

"Helping others has helped me a lot as well," she said.

"The people there are also on their own road to recovery just like I am, so we are able to relate to each other easily because we are all doing it together.

"My roles and responsibilities are also important to me because they give

me something to do each day and give me a reason to get out of bed and the house, which I previously struggled with."

Working alongside junction coordinator Nel Jans with day-to-day management tasks, Ms Leibhardt was surprised when reflecting on her personal progress.

"When I look back at photographs over the years I find it amazing how much we have all changed together," she said.

"Before I joined the junction I was very sick and would close myself up in the house.

"I got to the point where I struggled to go to the letterbox in my front yard, let alone to a group of people."

Describing her commitment to the junction as life-changing Ms Leibhardt said her self-esteem had grown and lifestyle choices improved.

"I stopped reverting to drinking and drugs as a coping mechanism," she said.

"I stopped engaging with negative personalities and continue to make small changes such as eating breakfast.

"Changes like this are huge but they help me feel much better."

Yesterday's speech allowed Ms Leibhardt to take a significant step in her recovery, publicly sharing her journey.

"We attended a training session on how to get our story onto paper," the volunteer said.

"I already had half of my story out but the session allowed me to learn how to make it more meaningful and how to get all of it out in the open.

"Because of this training I feel as if I can now speak about suicide without providing

details on saying what happened and speak about it openly."

Ms Leibhardt said this would further help destroy the stigma surrounding suicide and mental health.

"More people need to speak about suicide and depression because when I was going through it nobody wanted to listen and all I wanted was to talk," she said.

"It has taken me a long time to find someone who will listen, but now I have a great councillor and mentor and feel as if I am being listened to.

"Because of this I now feel like I am a part of society again instead of being a burden."

Encouraging others who may be experiencing mental health difficulties to speak up, Ms Leibhardt urged people to never stop searching for help and to accept new challenges.

"People need to remember that as one door closes another one opens," she said.

"They need to keep searching for challenges because without challenges you stay where you are.

"People who are suffering need to know they are not alone and that eventually they will find someone who will listen and will help them.

"In the meantime if they feel as if nobody loves them, then all they need to do is look in the mirror because that person does."



ROAD TO RECOVERY: The South East Junction's volunteer Bronnie Leibhardt has opened up

