

Daniel's Story



I moved three years ago when I was 17. I have been experiencing anxiety and stress since I was a teenager. I was very anxious and shy, and I couldn't speak to people properly, I couldn't look at people. The simplest things, like going down to the shops and picking up groceries or something, would feel like running the gauntlet. It was very nerve-racking, but at the time I didn't have access to any mental health services.

I had issues with my dad, and he was always pushing me to be very perfect. He had a very narrow-minded point of view on mental health. He told me I just needed to 'man up and keep working on it yourself' and that I was just being lazy. My school work got affected and I was so anxious and nervous I couldn't ask for help. I felt very trapped.

I ended up venting about my dad to a friend's mother. She spoke to my dad, and we had a huge fight, and he kicked me out. I was in the middle of my HSC, and I had to move to my mum's house. She wasn't very financially stable, but we made do with what we had. Doing the HSC and dealing with Centrelink, attending their meetings and doing their paperwork, just ramped everything. It was really just a tense time.

My mum heard about a youth mental health service one day, through a friend, and sort of said 'why don't you try this out, it might help'. Just to have someone to talk to that isn't me because having neutral ground is really good as it's an objective opinion. That was in 2014, so I have been going there for two years.

I met Nicki, who is one of the youth workers there, right at the beginning. She and I talk and although I haven't been seeing her as frequently lately, I am still able to see her when I need to. I will go in and make an appointment, and I can usually get in pretty quickly.

Nicki was able to get me to see a mental health worker. We do the same sort of things as with a youth worker, but it's a bit more professional and the advice is a bit more in-depth. Stan, who is my current mental health worker, goes over deep-breathing exercises, but he also says 'oh, why do you feel like this?'. I've had a few issues with my dad up until recently. We were sort of estranged for a little bit, and he and Kirsty, who was the lady who worked there previously, said 'well, you've just got to sort of talk to him and approach him as an adult'. For me it was very difficult approaching my dad as anything other than someone who was very superior to me. With their help, I managed to confront my dad and just say 'this is what's been going on my whole life'. Now we're getting along, so it's really good.

"We're all equal and it doesn't matter what you identify as or who you are."

Only having 10 sessions a year is frustrating at times. Sometimes a youth worker is good, but it would be nice sometimes to talk to someone more professional, as I might have a really big thing. If I hadn't had Kirsty and Stan I don't think I could have resolved the issues with my dad quite as well.

A couple of years ago I got mugged and it really ramped up my stress and anxiety problems. I lost all my stuff which was really heartbreaking. I was still going to school at the time so that was a big thing as well because crowds really spooked me and strangers as well.

My mum had been frantic trying to get me into a psychologist, but I came to the youth mental health service the day after the mugging and had a long talk with Nicki, and she helped me through it. I am still affected by the mugging though. It makes me nervous in crowds, and occasionally I'll have flashbacks.

Nicki introduced me to a gay, lesbian and transgender group, which is now an all-inclusive youth group. We meet up every second Monday, and we'll have a chat. If someone's had family issues, or they've just had a rough week we're all there to talk with each other. Sometimes we have special guests. We had a businessman who identifies as gay and he's a part of our group, listens to us and gives us advice.

A lot of us are still in the closet and we haven't told our problems to anyone because of that, so it is good to come in and know that you're welcome, it's a safe place. You don't have to worry about being persecuted. We're all equal and it doesn't matter what you identify as or who you are. When I came out I was really nervous because I didn't know how everyone would respond. But it was really good because nobody treated it like it was a big deal, they were all supportive. I struggled with social skills but broadening my horizons and finding out I could actually be pretty good in a conversation was good. I just needed support to do it.

I like that part of the youth mental health service and I think the other part is the people are really friendly, they treat you as a person and don't put you in a box.

**Names and photograph changed to protect privacy.*

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