

TOGETHER WE ARE BEYOND BLUE

Beyond

APRIL 2020

HOW MINDFULNESS CAN HELP DURING THE CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC

Proven methods to look
after your wellbeing

LUKE'S STORY

How one man
found clarity in
the open water

SPOTLIGHT ON OUR SUPPORT SERVICE

An interview with one
of the mental health
professionals on the other
end of our support line



Beyond
Blue

Welcome to Beyond. Thanks for being here.

02

Welcome

A welcome to the first issue of Beyond, from our CEO Georgie Harman

04

Our response to the coronavirus pandemic

Supporting Australians through upheaval

05

How mindfulness can help during the coronavirus pandemic

Proven methods to look after your wellbeing

08

Looking after your mental health during unsettling times

Healing from the bushfire crisis

10

Spotlight on our Support Service

An interview with the person on the other end of the line

12

Finding clarity in the open water

Luke's story

14

The Beyond Blue podcast launch

Not Alone is arriving in May

15

Team Beyond Blue in action

From running to art fairs, Beyond Blue supporters are getting active



Welcome to the first edition of Beyond – your new magazine from Beyond Blue. It's here to provide you, our amazing supporters, with a glimpse into some of the things happening in our community.

The importance of our work, and people like you who make it possible, have come into sharp focus as all of us adapt to the new ways of living and working as a result of the global coronavirus pandemic, and following the devastation of the summer's bushfires.

At Beyond Blue we have had to adapt to these challenging circumstances just like everyone else. Three things have driven our decision-making: protecting our people, including our partners, supporters and suppliers; being there for the community; and looking to the future so we remain strong and ready for whatever it throws at us.

People

The health and wellbeing of our staff, our volunteers, our speakers and everyone in the Beyond Blue family is paramount.

We moved to a full virtual office in mid-March. All Beyond Blue staff started working remotely, and we focused on ensuring our services and supports – the Support Service, Online Forums, NewAccess, The Way Back Support Service and Be You – remain available and accessible to the community.

We implemented changes to ensure a smooth transition to remote working, and to help everyone cope with the challenges of isolation and juggling carer responsibilities while schools and early learning services are disrupted.



Despite these challenging circumstances, I've been heartened by the exceptional creativity of our team to make sure Beyond Blue continues to be there for the community.

Our focus on community has only strengthened

The community needs us to be doing everything we can to look after ourselves so we can continue to be there for them.

Our early move to remote working meant we were well placed to respond to the huge demand for mental health support brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic.

This led to the rapid design and deployment of a new, dedicated Coronavirus Mental Wellbeing Support Service coronavirus.beyondblue.org.au, which we're proud to be leading with funding from the Australian Government, in partnership with Medibank Health Solutions.

The free service is designed to help everyone cope with the impacts of the pandemic. From a dedicated counselling phone line 1800 512 348, to easy access to our online forums, to accessible advice and tips about the mental health and wellbeing challenges we're all confronting right now, we hope the service can make a difference.

People are looking for different things, and their needs and experiences are changing, just as the pandemic is. Right now, for many the focus is on the basics: cashflow, adjusting to living alone or living in crowded households and personal safety. So, our focus is on providing advice on:

- Coping with self-isolation and loneliness
- Dealing with the emotional impact of job loss and financial pressure
- Worries about our physical health and the health of those around us.

The service will continuously evolve over the coming weeks and months as we hear and see what people need. And don't forget that it's there for you, your families, your work colleagues and your community.

Business through the unusual and emerging stronger

They're buzz words we are hearing and seeing more of every day, but I'm seeing more agility and adaptive thinking than I've ever seen in my career.

The speed and scale at which change has happened is also quite astonishing.

For many of us, the balance of work and family life has come into sharp focus as we've been reminded of what is most important in life.

At some point a degree of normalcy will return; we'll sit in cafes and hug our family and friends; borders will re-open and we'll be reunited with loved ones.

Recently, through our services and on social media, we've started to see an increase in frustration and exhaustion about the current situation. This mirrors broader community sentiment, and perhaps how we're feeling ourselves. People want to know when they can 'get on with their lives.'

I'm one who has felt the lack of in-person human interaction. Just taking a long walk in the sunshine with a treasured friend last Sunday was the perfect antidote to some of the emotions of isolation and disconnection I was starting to feel. I was reminded that there are still things we can do, and focusing on what we can do is more helpful than focusing on what we can't.

And a necessary focus on the present also can't crowd out considerations for the future. At Beyond Blue we must keep looking forward and plan for what the community will need from us over the coming months and years.

Some behavioural and social analysts believe the future will bring a greater focus on social solidarity, and looking after neighbours and our health and wellbeing. I hope so.

And, like every single organisation in Australia, Beyond Blue is facing challenges that we've never contemplated before. We need to continue to adapt and evolve so we can be there for the community in the long term.

But what doesn't change is our need for your support. As we look at new ways of connecting with communities at a time when we're all restricted in our movements, we need your support more than ever.

I know this is an incredibly tough time, and many of you won't be able to give in the ways you have before. So don't forget we're here for you.

Thank you for your passion and generosity.

Georgie Harman
CEO



"The health and wellbeing of our staff, our volunteers, our speakers and everyone in the Beyond Blue family is paramount."

We'd love to hear your thoughts on our first issue and find out what you'd like to see in Beyond. Drop us an email at fundraising@beyondblue.org.au



Beyond Blue acknowledges the Traditional Owners of the Land in Melbourne in which our head office is based, the Wurundjeri people of the Kulin Nation. We pay our respects to Elders past and present and extend our respect to all Elders and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples across Australia.

Our response to the coronavirus pandemic

Coronavirus is causing an unprecedented and rapidly rising mental health burden on many people in Australia. Quarantine and social isolation, job, business and financial stress, and the real anxiety of such uncertain and unpredictable times are having negative impacts on mental health and wellbeing.

In response to the outbreak, a new, dedicated Coronavirus Mental Wellbeing Support Service is now available to support all Australians to manage the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The free service, funded by the Australian Government and delivered by Beyond Blue, is available around the clock, delivering clear, evidence-based information, advice and support specifically tailored to the mental health and wellbeing challenges raised by the pandemic.

Beyond Blue rapidly built and launched the service in partnership with Medibank Health Solutions. It will be continually updated with new information, other tools and support options. In addition to the Commonwealth's \$10 million, Beyond

Blue will direct a \$5 million donation by Medibank to the new service to provide as much capacity as possible.

Through a digital site, the service offers easy access to a broad range of supports from online wellbeing tips and self-help tools to phone counselling from trained mental health professionals and peer to peer support. The service will be available for as long as required.

Beyond Blue's existing Support Service will continue to operate alongside the new service thanks to donors like you. As a valued supporter, we thank you for your donations and we want you to know that Beyond Blue is here for you and your loved ones when you need us. These are uncertain and challenging times but we'll get through it together.

You can access the Coronavirus Mental Wellbeing Support Service at coronavirus.beyondblue.org.au.

Trained counsellors are available 24/7 on the dedicated coronavirus phone support line at 1800 512 348.

There are a number of different ways that you can manage your wellbeing at this time, including:

- doing your best to stay calm and following official advice.
- keeping perspective and understanding that we will get through this.
- managing stress through a healthy lifestyle that includes enough sleep, exercise and nutritious food.
- establishing daily routines.
- connecting with loved ones by phone and internet, especially if you're self-isolating.

How mindfulness can help during the coronavirus pandemic

We are living through an unprecedented and uncertain time, requiring each of us to navigate our way, as best we can, through a rapidly evolving global health crisis.

With things changing so quickly, such uncertainty and unpredictability can take a toll on our mental and physical health.

Managing our emotions and supporting each other can be challenging at the best of times. This is why, more than ever, we all need to be doing our best to regularly pause, take a breath and be proactive in looking after ourselves and others.

We know that this isn't always easy, and we want to support you. In this article, you will find different practical things you can do to take care of your own wellbeing, as well as support the children in your life, your colleagues, loved ones and friends.

This resource takes an evidence-based approach to offering you practical

tools and techniques to help manage uncertainty, reduce anxiety and stay connected and grounded.

Mindfulness provides us with a means of cultivating greater and more objective awareness of our own emotional landscape, the emotions of others, and of external circumstance.

In doing so, it gives us more choice in how we respond to challenges we may face and the ability to more consciously choose where we place our attention.

Wherever you are in the world we sincerely hope that you and your loved ones remain safe and healthy. In the words of one of our favourite meditation teachers: "Moment by moment we can find our way though" - Sharon Salzberg.

This article was originally published by Smiling Mind.

 smilingmind.com.au



Article continues on next page. Read on for our mindfulness tips.

Maintaining a work-life balance during the coronavirus pandemic

The added work stress or uncertainty that many are feeling because of the coronavirus pandemic is understandable.

Whether you're an employee, manager, business owner or sole trader, there are actions you can take to protect and nurture your mental health.

- Be realistic about what can be achieved.
- Keep the hours you work in check and be mindful of work-life balance.
- Stay in touch with family and friends.
- Eat well, prioritise sleep and stay physically fit.

- Try and find time to switch off from technology.
- Monitor warning signs of poor mental health.
- Reach out to mentors and colleagues for support.
- Maintain interests outside work.
- Don't be afraid to ask for help.
- Consult your company's Employee Assistance Program (EAP) provider, if you have one.

Beyond Blue's Heads Up website has more tips for staying well when work and life stress affect your mental health.  headsup.org.au

Accessing support

If you need assistance, visit the dedicated Coronavirus Mental Wellbeing Support Service.

 coronavirus.beyondblue.org.au

At this time, the Australian Government is providing financial assistance to individuals who have lost their jobs. Visit  treasury.gov.au/coronavirus/households

If you are experiencing financial hardship, the National Debt Helpline offers free financial counselling.

Visit  ndh.org.au

Fear, anxiety and denial

Acknowledging that feeling fearful and anxious at a time such as this is not only normal but appropriate. Given the nature of the threat we are facing, fear and anxiety are adaptive responses as they alert us to the fact that we need to be taking appropriate action to keep ourselves and others as safe and healthy as possible.

It's also important to recognise that fear and anxiety can quickly escalate and reach a tipping point beyond which they are no longer helpful and can affect us in negative ways. When the acute stress response, otherwise known as the 'fight or flight' response, kicks in we're not as able to think clearly or make good decisions; we become more reactive and less responsive; and our thinking can quickly spiral, becoming increasingly negative and difficult to unhook from.

Beware denial

It can also be tempting to turn away from and deny the seriousness of what's happening. Denial may be particularly appealing given the significant impact that this outbreak will have on so many people financially, emotionally or physically. While temporary distractions can be useful for giving our minds a break, on the whole denial is not a helpful approach. It can leave us vulnerable and exhausted as it may lead to not taking appropriate precautions and it's difficult to sustain in the face of reality.

Mindfulness can help us see things more clearly, which in turn helps us strike a balance between staying informed and making sensible choices without becoming overwhelmed.

Warning signs

Mindfulness helps us get better at recognising and understanding our own personal signals that tell us we're close to our tipping point. We can think of mindfulness as being like our own personal 'fear and anxiety thermometer' helping us get to know our own warning signs and recognise them as they're kicking in.

In addition to knowing and recognising our warning signals, mindfulness gives us the opportunity

to respond by taking steps to settle and soothe our nervous system, which in turn enables us to think more clearly, make better decisions and respond as opposed to react.

Healthy brain breaks

Giving your brain a break when you're nearing your tipping point can be a helpful way of deactivating the acute stress ('fight or flight') response. Even short moments of reprieve are beneficial as they help reset enabling us to find the middle ground between overwhelm and denial. It's in this place that we're able to make better choices and are best placed to support ourselves and those around us.

We recommend trying out the following as often as you need to:

1. Move

Any kind of physical movement is a great way of releasing the build-up of excess energy that accompanies the acute stress ('fight or flight') response – take yourself for a walk or run outside; do some stretching, yoga or some other form of mindful movement; or crank some uplifting music and dance around the house for a few minutes.

2. Breathe

When you slow your breathing rate down the uncomfortable physical sensations of fear and anxiety start to subside. Try the following:

- Stop what you're doing, take three long, slow deep breaths.
- Impose a rhythm on your breathing so that your out-breath becomes longer than your in-breath.
- Try a 4-2-6 rhythm – e.g. breathe for 4 counts, hold your breath for 2 counts, and breathe out for 6 counts.
- If that doesn't feel comfortable, try imposing a 3-1-4 rhythm. The main thing is that your out-breath is slightly longer than your in-breath.

Warning sign examples include:

- | | |
|-----------------------|---------------------------------------|
| • irritability | • inability to focus |
| • losing patience | • catastrophic thinking |
| • a sense of urgency | • ruminating |
| • difficulty sleeping | • eating or drinking more than usual. |

3. Ground

Connect to what is happening in this moment right now more consciously engaging your senses. Try the following:

- Splash cold water on your face
- Take a hot (or cold) shower
- Cuddle your pet
- Smell and/or diffuse a relaxing essential oil (i.e. lavender, geranium, ylang ylang)
- Take a moment to enjoy a cup of tea – really pay attention to the aroma and taste
- Do one of the following short guided grounding exercises from the 'Stress Management' program in the Smiling Mind App.

4. Sleep

When we're fearful and anxious it can be hard to sleep. Given the importance of sleep for our mental and physical wellbeing, including immunity, establishing good habits around sleep is particularly important at the moment.

Consider creating a pre-sleep routine by turning off news and screens at least an hour before going to bed. If you wake during the night and find you can't sleep, rather than lay there and worry, try a meditation from the 'Sleep' program in the Smiling Mind app.

5. Connect

While social connection may be tricky during this time when many people are physical distancing, staying connected to others is more important than ever as we are wired to connect and seek comfort and care from others. We are fortunate to have so much technology at our fingertips enabling us to stay connected to family, friends and colleagues.

Try using video conferencing technology so that you can see each other, as we communicate best when we can see each other's body language and facial expressions. Do your best to listen and interact as mindfully as you can with others – really pay attention to the people you're interacting with.

6. Contribute


Contributing to the wellbeing of others helps shift our attention from ourselves onto what we can do for them. This helps us connect with others; gain a sense of agency, even if only in a small way; plus helping others also positively impacts our own wellbeing.

Consider how you might help others at this difficult time. For example, you could support a local business you value that is likely struggling at the moment or check up on an elderly friend or relative.

7. Create healthy habits

Mindfulness can help us create healthy habits to keep us and others as safe and healthy as possible. For example, washing your hands mindfully and taking care not to touch your face.

For more information about looking after yourself during the coronavirus outbreak, visit **Coronavirus Mental Wellbeing Support Service.**

 coronavirus.beyondblue.org.au



Looking after your mental health during unsettling times

As talk about the bushfire crisis turns toward rebuilding, it's important to be aware of how an extraordinary event like this can impact mental health in both the short and long term.

We've all just experienced something the likes we've never seen before.

Our amazing emergency services workers, volunteers and people in affected communities have been face-to-face with the fire and its destruction. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities have seen the land, which holds so much significance, devastated. Farmers in the midst of drought have had homes and communities threatened or lost.

Whatever your relationship to the fires, they have been emotionally challenging. Understanding the way that we feel in times like these is a vital first step in healing.

Fear, for example, is an important and normal reaction that helps activate our body and mind to make decisions to protect our own life and the lives of loved ones, friends and neighbours. It is also normal for the memory of intense fear to stay with us.

After a bushfire, many people deal with memories and ongoing feelings by drawing on their own strengths, as well as the support of others, and will gradually rebuild their lives and achieve a sense of wellbeing again.

However, it is common that some people struggle to deal with feelings and thoughts that result from a bushfire or from the tragic losses that may occur. It's important to know the difference between a common reaction to a stressful or traumatic event and signs that indicate you should seek additional support.

To help navigate these feelings, we launched a resource page on the Beyond Blue website with a breakdown of the common responses and signs that may indicate support from a GP or mental health professional should be sought. There are resources and information on how to make sense of what you might be feeling and where to get more help if you need it.

"Children and young people can be particularly vulnerable to the emotional impact of disasters and they look to the adults around them for reassurance and protection," our Chair, The Hon. Julia Gillard AC

Search "bushfires and mental health" on the Beyond Blue website to access the resource page.

'Be You' support for children affected by the bushfires


In 2018, we launched Be You, a national initiative that empowers every Australian educator – from early learning to primary and secondary school to foster the mental health of those in their care, and their own wellbeing.

As the bushfire crisis worsened, we knew that educators and staff working in early learning services and schools affected by the bushfire crisis would need additional support. So we developed a Be You bushfires resource pack to help educators respond to the urgent and unique needs of children and young people affected by the bushfires.

The Be You bushfire pack includes resources from across the Australian mental health sector so that educators can quickly find information and support that's relevant to the children or young people in their care. The resources are divided into three sections: immediate, short-term and longer-term, acknowledging that mental health impact and recovery from these bushfires will be different for everyone and may take some time.

As our Chair, The Hon. Julia Gillard AC said, "Our schools and early learning services will be at the heart of community-led recovery. They provide a sense of stability in hard times."



Educators can access these resources at
 beyou.edu.au

Coping with trauma



Common reactions

Reactions can be severe and are at their worst in the first week after a traumatic event, however, in most cases, they fade over a month. If your day-to-day functioning is seriously affected for more than one month after the event, it's important to discuss it with a GP or mental health professional.

It is also important to understand that a friend, loved one or work colleague may see these reactions in you, often when you do not. Listen to the opinions of those you trust and discuss these issues with a GP or mental health professional.

If you experience symptoms for longer than a month, or experience loss of hope or thoughts of self-harm, seek help from a GP or mental health professional.

Tips to deal with the emotional impact of trauma

- Spend time with people who care.
- Talk about how you feel about what happened when you are ready.
- Give yourself time.
- Set realistic goals to stay motivated, but don't take on too much.
- Do things that help you relax.
- Find out about the impact of trauma and what to expect.
- Try to keep a routine going.
- Review and reward progress – notice even the small steps.
- Be prepared for times when you feel you're not making progress, everyone experiences this.
- Talk about the ups and downs of recovery with friends, family and the health professionals involved in your care.
- Have a plan to maintain positive changes and plans to deal with times of stress or reminders of the trauma.

Spotlight on our Support Service



In 2019 our Support Service team supported 227,149 people – that's a lot of calls, emails and webchats. Providing this vital assistance cost \$11.3 million in 2019, funded entirely by our generous donors. We're seeing more people turn to Beyond Blue than ever before. Thanks to you, we'll be there for them.

When someone contacts Beyond Blue's Support Service, they speak one-on-one with a mental health professional. Every single request is taken seriously – no problem is too big or too small. A confidential chat with someone who truly listens can be incredibly helpful, sometimes even life changing. It's your donation to Beyond Blue that keeps this critical resource going.

Christine, one of our Support Service professionals, shares what it's like to be on the other end of the line.

How long have you been a counsellor for the Beyond Blue Support Service?

I started with the Beyond Blue Support Service in May 2017.

Can you tell us a little about yourself and why you became a mental health professional?

I became a mental health professional because I have a passion for supporting people. Everyone can struggle with their mental health at various times in life, for a variety of reasons, and need external guidance and help.

Being a mental health professional allows me to help people access key information, resources and hope. It's so

fulfilling to be able to provide a hopeful perspective for people experiencing mental health concerns, which can make a huge difference.

The knowledge and skills I've obtained – as well as through helping people who call the Support Service – helps keep me on track with looking after my own mental wellbeing, too.

Based on your experience, what are the most common reasons people contact the service?

I've noticed that people can be triggered by the news, particularly Royal Commissions and events such as the bushfires.

Some common reasons people call the service include feeling worried about symptoms they think might be anxiety or depression; feeling at a loss as to how to access support; family and friends who are trying to support a loved one affected by mental illness; people who



We try to identify what the caller needs and what has prompted them to pick up the phone. We assess any risk to the caller or loved ones that may be present, such as suicidal urges, self-harming or thoughts about harming someone else. We have clear guidelines to assess this risk and respond accordingly to ensure safety. On every call, I consider referrals to local services. This frequently includes GP assessment and referrals to other face-to-face mental health services.

Providing accurate information about the impact anxiety and depression can have on our physical and mental health is key.

“Coaching ‘in-the-moment’ strategies for managing anxiety and depression symptoms helps. Offering advice about self-care and healthy distraction helps people tap into their inner resources on a day-to-day level.”

Is there someone who contacted the service that particularly stands out in your mind?

Recently, I spoke to a woman struggling with long-term depression who felt uncomfortable about seeking and accepting help. After checking for any risk, we spoke for a while, and I could really understand why accepting care was so hard for her. I validated her feelings and gently reminded her of her courage, her wonderful awareness and ability to communicate all of this to me.

By the end of the call, she felt much more optimistic and willing to receive help. She was also reminded of her strengths and was back in touch with the part of herself that wants contact with others. She knew she needed support and that she could call us again whenever she needed to.

feel let down by attempts to get mental health support; plus those who are worried about suicide risk and don't know how to respond. We also receive calls from people experiencing acute anxiety or low mood, as well as those who just need to be able to speak to someone straight away, who they consider 'safe' and understands what they are experiencing.

The issues I see reflect the reasons why the Beyond Blue Support Service was set up – to provide an immediate point of contact for support and education around anxiety and depression, and to serve as a platform to help dispel stigma and misinformation.

What is involved during the call?

We always let people know upfront what the service provides – that we offer brief counselling, information and referral to local services, depending on individual needs.

I was touched by this woman's courage, openness and honesty. Calling us was a big step for her.

What keeps you inspired to continue in this line of work?

Speaking to people who need support and can access it immediately is what keeps me going. We provide an extremely accessible service for people from all walks of life. I hold a strong commitment to service and to the general public. I'm also motivated by the very high standard of services we deliver, as well as the constant learning involved. You never know what may come with the next call!

Is there anything you would like to share about the Support Service with Beyond Blue donors?

I would like donors to know that the team working on the Beyond Blue Support Service are all skilled mental health professionals who are very passionate about what they do. I'm constantly impressed by how my colleagues approach the work and the level of care, concern and support they show for each caller.

It is because of kind-hearted people like you that Beyond Blue Support Service mental health professionals like Christine can answer the next call. We are so thankful for your support, if you would like to make a donation, simply complete and mail the enclosed coupon, donate online at beyondblue.org.au/appeal or call 03 9810 6100.



Finding clarity in the open water



When Luke Richards is in the ocean, he doesn't think much. He can feel his hands slipping through the water. He can smell salt as he surfaces for air. But his sole focus is his next breath, his next stroke. Everything else is left ashore.

When Luke took up open-water swimming, it wasn't meant to be a coping mechanism. In fact, it had nothing to do with his mental health. Three years later, it has become a key to sobriety, mindfulness and a healthy marriage.

"It's meditative for me," Luke explained. "If I'm having a good swim, if everything is working well, I don't really think about anything. It's probably the only time I practice true mindfulness." Turn back the clock seven years and the idea of achieving any clarity seems impossible. Because up until 2013, Luke was an alcoholic.

"I was a daily top-up drunk. The physical effects of drinking copious amounts for a long period of time were starting

to show. My hands would shake, I was nauseous most of the time, I could not hold or use utensils well. I had to sneak a small bottle of vodka into the office during the day to calm the physical effects of withdrawal. I spent every spare cent I had on alcohol."

This was Luke's reality for years. He made attempts at getting sober. "I went to the doctors. I was still at the stage where I thought I didn't have that much of a problem. I was still holding onto the hope that I could just control my drinking. The doctor told me I had early onset Korsakoff syndrome (a chronic memory disorder, commonly induced by misuse of alcohol). I freaked – like far out, I've got brain damage. The sad thing is that it didn't actually

"If I'm having a good swim, if everything is working well, I don't really think about anything. It's probably the only time I practice true mindfulness."

change anything. You can't shock someone like me into sobriety," Luke said.

It's hard not to fill the silence as he tries to find the next words. "I had to be broken enough to be able to let go of the loop that was there and to want something different. I had to want life."

He went to rehab, participated in Alcoholics Anonymous and in 2013, he got sober. Luke credits much of his recovery to the support of his loved ones – his wife, his parents, his siblings. He believes that recovery is a team effort. Even his penchant for open-water swimming started out as a family affair.

"My wife had a bucket list and she wanted to swim in the Lorne Pier to Pub. She's from the UK, terrified of swimming in the open water and I decided I'd do it with her because I didn't want her to have a panic attack in the middle of the water."

But even with family support, it wasn't easy. Luke says he wouldn't wish his experience upon anyone. "The hardest bit is obviously when you come off [alcohol] and you're not just shaking and shivering, you're in pain. The physical pain is one thing but when you combine it with psychological pain, it's an incredible thing to deal with."

"When I was in rehab, that was when the psychiatrist was like, you've had trauma and that's when I was officially diagnosed [with anxiety and depression]."

"I think it all started when I stood up for someone else. There was this thing that happened on Year 7 camp. They were picking on some kid and I stepped in. From that moment, that was it. I became their number one target."

The bullying was relentless. "There was one particular guy who was connected to some pretty bad gangs in the area and I couldn't touch him, I couldn't fight back. There was nothing I could do about it. Even when I was 19, going out for the first time, catching the train into town from Carrum to Mordialloc, I'd be terrified that I'd see these people on the train because I knew if they saw me alone, that would be it."

Not once does Luke's voice waver. His tone is calm, matter of fact even, void of bitterness. He has dealt with these demons.



Luke Richards started open water swimming because he worried about his wife swimming alone. He didn't know it would be the thing that helped save him.

"That was probably the number one factor that put me on the journey, combined with the fact that nothing was ever treated or dealt with. There was never really talk about a lot of that stuff at home. It's just the way things were."

Today, in addition to a loving wife and two beautiful children, Luke works, swims and speaks extensively about his mental health journey. He doesn't take anything for granted. "I consider myself to be recovered however I still treat myself as if I'm not. The reality is I still have moments when the anxiety gets the better of me. It's an ongoing thing but I'm not debilitated by it anymore. It doesn't own me the way it used to."

These days, Luke finds his peace in the water. In August he was planning on swimming the English Channel. "I hope to show people who are struggling that you can come back from the darkest places and do amazing things." If you want to follow Luke's story, and keep up with him while he prepares for his big swim, please visit his website

swim4recovery.com.au

While we're not sure when Luke will be able to undertake his swim, it is something for Luke to focus on and look forward to.

The Beyond Blue podcast launch

Beyond Blue's very first podcast series, *Not Alone*, will explore common experiences of people dealing with mental health challenges.

We're very excited to announce the upcoming launch of our new podcast, *Not Alone*. Podcasts have seen a huge rise in popularity over recent years. The intimate nature of podcasts (most people listen with headphones) creates a unique sense of connection between speaker and listener. This format presents an exciting opportunity for Beyond Blue to reach a widescale audience and model important, open conversations around mental health.

Not Alone will explore trending topics from the Beyond Blue online forums and share stories of people affected by depression, anxiety and suicide. Over one million people visited the forums last year alone to share their lives anonymously, to offer support and to know that they're not alone in their feelings. We've noticed that some personal experiences are being posted time and time again. This podcast seeks to explore these common experiences.

Season one of the podcast will feature six episodes. The topics include overcoming trauma, work stress, loneliness, life lacking purpose, dealing with an inner critic, and supporting a loved one with a mental health

condition. By sharing personal stories in the form of open and honest conversations, we can reduce the stigma that stops people speaking up when they need support.

The host of the podcast is Marc Fennell, an accomplished media presenter who has worked with the likes of the ABC, SBS, Channel 10 and Audible. Marc is a brilliant interviewer and has been incredibly enthusiastic with his involvement in this project.

***Not Alone* is set to launch in May and will be available to listen via platforms such as Spotify and Apple Podcasts. It will also be available on the Beyond Blue website.**

Not Alone podcast host Marc Fennell with Beyond Blue Speaker, Noel, after a recording session in Sydney.

Photography: Ash Berdebes, Beyond Blue



Team Beyond Blue in action

We are always amazed by the inventive ways the community comes together to fundraise for Beyond Blue. Generous contributions from the community make an enormous difference in supporting Beyond Blue's programs and services as well as engaging friends and neighbours in conversations about mental health.



Claire and Brendan: Forest Art Byron Bay

About a year ago, Claire and Brendan hatched the idea for Forest Art. They planned to invite the local community and friends to Brendan's art studio for a fun, arty night out. After two successful Forest Art nights, they decided to make their third art show a fundraiser.

They chose to support Beyond Blue, knowing that many people in their community were in some way affected by anxiety and depression. Their exhibition combined blue artwork — sculptures donated by acclaimed local artists and others that were practical and funny: a pair of blue scissors, a mug, a blue whisk and so on.

"Twenty per cent of art sales went to Beyond Blue," Claire explains. "We sold different types of blue drinks, local bands played Bluegrass music and nearly 300 guests came (up 98 steps!) to experience the one night only gathering. The night was beautiful, unexpected and so very magical." Claire and Brendan raised almost \$1,000 for Beyond Blue and helped promote awareness for anxiety and depression. They say what meant the most to them, was how their event brought people together.



Gabriel: Running for recovery

After Gabriel lost his father to cancer in 2012, he began to experience depression, and turned to drugs and alcohol to cope. Following three suicide attempts in six months, he knew he needed help on his journey to recovery.

Gabriel reached out to Beyond Blue's Support Service, and they recommended a psychologist. After six months, he set himself a goal to complete a Tough Mudder challenge. Gabriel began to exercise regularly and eat well and made new friends at Park Run. For the first time in a long time, he started to feel well again.

In August 2019, Gabriel ran in City2Surf. He decided to fundraise for Beyond Blue to give back to an organisation which he felt saved his life. Gabriel says that since sharing his story he has received an outpouring of love and support. People share with him their own personal stories and struggles, and he says being trusted to hear their stories is both humbling and rewarding.

Let's take our fundraising online! If you would like to host a virtual fundraiser for Beyond Blue go to fundraise.beyondblue.org.au or call us on 03 9810 6100.



Beyond Blue simply couldn't achieve our vision without the generous support of people like you.



Together we're
creating a mentally
healthier Australia.

Together we are
Beyond Blue.

Thank you.

If you need someone to
talk it through with, get in
touch. We'll point you in
the right direction.

 **1300 22 4636**

 **beyondblue.org.au**

