

The story of

Penguin's mosaic/word jumble honouring those on the fringe

This unique unnamed artwork celebrates how marginalised people contribute to our communities, despite their struggles. It reflects the diversity each community has and seeks acceptance for marginalised issues such as (but not exclusive to) mental health. It demonstrates how a sense of community can develop around marginalised people, by highlighting words that we can all identify with through our lived experiences of good and bad days – or, *life*. Its message is simple: *Is there no place for me?* And marginalisation affects so many fringe groups in communities.

“To me it's about all the complicated things humans deal with on a daily basis. You never know what someone else is going through so it's best not to judge”.

Sarah Lansdown, journalist

The installation 3m wide by 1.8m at its peak is three rectangles representing the upper part of the human body, with the boxed-in look and sharp lines deliberately chosen. The front is a tactile 3-D landscape mosaic of two trees that together form a central heart-like shape with a river running through it. The trees are covered with leaves using a variety of colours to signify all seasons. There are fish, butterflies and birds. The foreground and lower regions are filled with flowers, plants and in the centre are a collection of joyful hands to signify the collective of people our mosaic represents. It is a magical place creating a lush paradise where we can find peace, happiness and safety.

The back is a jumble of 150 words inviting each of us to reflect on the notions of despair, empower and celebrate. The jumble talks to us of human feeling and emotion, both positive and negative, the reality of the human condition whether on the margins or not. Short verbs, those lovely doing words, take priority over complex and abstract nouns.

Our story starts with a bequest from an unnamed man. He asked us to showcase that people facing mental health challenges, and indeed those in any marginalised group, do truly contribute meaningfully to their communities and do enrich our lives.

Life changed at 33, paranoid schizophrenia, disability pensioner, alone and invisible. Before that he had been Loans Officer in a Bank, both in Australia and in New Guinea. Yet every day he woke up, lived and did things however simple, however hard. Years later, new medications and part-time work reignited his self-worth. Welcomed into a team, he finally found friends, socialised, completed qualifications, and regained his confidence, motivation and self-belief touching the lives of so many people. A top bloke.

So our little community here in Penguin wondered how best to be true to his dream. We reasoned that unlike most media coverage on marginalisation ours would offer a very positive spin thereby accepting those on the fringes while at the same time challenging the rest of us to be less narrow-minded and more accepting.

His small bequest grew quickly helped by the Tasmanian Government, Central Coast Council, local politicians, and the graciousness of a dozen vendors. And with a lot of input from our community.

But his is not the only story from living on the fringe.

Traumatized at 13, depression at 17, rock-bottom followed by seriously bad choices. Study success opened doors, marriage and kids but the issues remained. Years of mis-diagnoses and treatments: medications, bipolar, counselling, medications, psychosis, hospitalisation, medications, borderline personality disorder, ECT, and domestic violence until finally treated for PTSD. What a difference that made, my return to normal, reaching resounding strength, a sense of peace and my career.

And.

As family and friend of people facing mental illness accepting our powerlessness in the face of real suffering is a daily gut-wrench. While we love and support, eliminating that suffering remains elusive. We grieve our perceived loss of the person we once knew before their illness hand-in-hand with sheer admiration and celebration for their courage and tenacity each and every day. This is my closeted joy.

So it is our hope that you also reflect on the sentiment of the artwork, which is a tribute to people and communities being kind and without which the project would not exist.