

FOCUS



Kieran and Rasa

Kieran's story

By Rasa Kabaila

I became Kieran's case manager in 2013 after he was referred to our community health team for support; he had been diagnosed with schizophrenia and epilepsy.

Kieran is the same age as me and I feel in many ways we can relate to each other as we are both in a similar point in our life, the constantly changing, exciting and scary 20's. Furthermore, Kieran and I both enjoy artistic endeavours, although Kieran's work is his profession and mine are hobbies. I dance and enjoy drawing and craft and Kieran is a talented artist and musician.

In writing about his illness Kieran states: "It is still really hard for me to deal with this illness; especially when there are no signs of when I'm getting sick, and how quickly things turn from bad to much

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worse ie. when I was last hospitalised, I started off with really bad paranoia, and was very delusional. But things turned worse in about a week or two, as I started to have visual and auditory hallucinations, etc. Recovering from an episode like this takes lots of time and usually means months of time spent in the wards, and the more they occur, the more they are likely to recur and even worsen. After being in and out of psychiatric wards for the last several years, I now accept this and understand it may stay like this, but I keep a positive outlook on it all hoping that the psychotic episodes will eventually diminish and my quality of life will stay consistently better."

Fortunately, Kieran's artwork has really been a motivator for him to move forward with his life. His art is beautiful, colourful, imaginative and precise. Kieran sells his artwork on canvas and owns a clothing label named 'I Heart Threads'. He produces his designs by illustrating on drawing tablets and does further editing in computer programs. The blank garments are sourced

from a company in Sydney. The designs and garments are then sent to a printing factory based in Sydney, where they are printed via Direct To Garment (DTG). Kieran sells online in Melbourne and has since had some interests in selling his work voiced from all the way over in Japan.

Finding out about two art competitions, the Mindscapes Festival and RAW: natural born artists, I encouraged Kieran to enter, which he did.

The Mindscapes Festival offers mental health consumers opportunities to express their artistic abilities, to support their own recovery, help with social inclusion and reduce stigma. Kieran won the Mindscapes Festival Arts Competition. This was very exciting for him and it made me feel very happy that I was able to contribute in some way.

RAW: natural born artists, is an international independent arts organisation that hand-selects and spotlights independent creatives in visual art, film, fashion, music, hair and makeup artistry, photography, models and performing art. Kieran entered this competition and was a finalist.

Kieran has also exhibited his work recently in Melbourne and Canberra - the future is looking bright.

He is now hoping to be able to stay in recovery while looking at the possibility of gradually and safely reducing his anti-psychotic medication with professional help and guidance.

I am so proud of Kieran's hard efforts to stay in recovery. He has had great support from his family, girlfriend and friends, however it's Kieran that deserves the greatest plaudits.

This story is an example that mental illness does not have to be a curse and that people with mental health issues can live great lives.

You can view or purchase Kieran's artwork on the following website www.iheartthreads.com.au/

Rasa Kabaila is a level two registered nurse and clinical manager

stARTalking

By Louise Ward and Sinead Barry

Undergraduate mental health nursing education requires innovative and engaging student learning opportunities.

It requires attention to current health care issues and treatment initiatives. It involves motivating undergraduate nursing students to actively engage in promoting a recovery process of client engagement through effective communication, and the development of strong connections within the community.

To meet these objectives La Trobe University, School of Nursing and Midwifery developed an art project called stARTalking. The project was facilitated during a clinical placement at Corpus Christi Community (CCC) in Melbourne, 2013. stARTalking was a program that used an interdisciplinary approach to undergraduate mental health education, involving La Trobe University art therapy students, La Trobe University nursing students, CCC clients, CCC staff and academics.

The process of art making provided a diversional activity to support group sharing and an opportunity for students to develop their communication skills, potentially gaining a greater understanding of the clients they were caring for. The students were able to establish meaningful interaction and develop therapeutic relationships in which to provide care. The artwork created was then exhibited at La Trobe University Art space.

stARTalking, as the title implies, allowed creative works and/or the art to speak for the client and the student. It speaks of partnership and collaboration and community engagement as a way to support undergraduate mental health nursing education and client outcomes.

Dr Louise Ward is senior mental health lecturer and Sinead Barry is a lecturer in Nursing. Both are located in the School of Nursing and Midwifery at La Trobe University, Victoria.

