

Peer support specialist

Bruce Dumper, Tupu Ake

The idea of a peer-led mental health support service was something that excited Bruce Dumper. When he heard of a new service, the first of its kind in the country, he knew he wanted to be involved with its development.

Bruce was in his teens when he first experienced mental illness. Life at home was tough. He joined the Air Force, but after just three months of basic training he was medically discharged. A doctor sent him home with medication he says “turned him into a zombie”. On seeing their son, Bruce’s concerned parents threw the pills away. It was then he turned to alcohol and drugs in an attempt to keep the pain away.

Several years later Bruce met a woman he called his “angel”. That angel eventually became his wife. One morning, after three years of marriage, Bruce’s “angel” woke to find him hiding in the wardrobe. “That started my journey which carried on for the next 30 plus years, including admissions to hospital and attempts at taking my own life” says Bruce.

At the end of 2006 Bruce lost his job of 20 years. The suicidal thoughts returned, but this time things were different. Instead of hospital, Bruce was admitted to respite and then introduced to Workwise Employment Agency. Things began to change. Through Workwise Bruce found a job as a support worker with another non government organisation, similar to Pathways. “It was then I found out about peer support specialist training”.

While working for this organisation Bruce completed his peer support specialist training and heard about a new peer-led service that Pathways was opening. “The concept that peers could run an acute mental health service really excited me - for the first time in a long time.” Bruce applied for and got a job with Pathways. To his surprise he found himself as part of a team working to shape the new service. “Pathways and the clinicians actually listened to our ideas and valued our input. I could see things were changing.”

“If I can get this far, anyone can. Just set your goals and start your journey. It’s great.”