

'A life worth living'

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feeling of abandonment, the anxiety, but I now know it only masked what was deep inside. I soon began to drink anything I could get my hands on. I was the one in our group of friends who would always get drunk, beyond memory.

"After a year I made friends with some guys who were doing drugs. Speed, weed, ecstasy - they allowed me to escape and feel like I was untouchable. I was always trying to be someone I wasn't.

"I finished school in year 10 and worked here and there, but I could never hold a stable job because of the choices I made. Work was a way of paying for my addiction, and I borrowed money from family and friends, to fuel my ever growing addiction.

"I was in a bad state, thought of suicide and felt I had no worth. It's sad to say that alcohol became my best friend.

"At 17 I began looking for more excitement: stealing cars, breaking and entering, and being 'drunk and disorderly' kept me amused. Never thinking of the consequences ahead.

"At home my parents took out an Apprehended Violence Order (AVO) against me and I spent eight months at UnitingCare Burnside, which works with young people. Unfortunately the addiction didn't stop - I just got clever at hiding it.

"While at Burnside I spent a few nights in juvenile detention and ended up in court. Through it all, my adoptive parents still supported me. It was very difficult to be in the same room as them and not be able to talk to them to express how sorry I was for my actions.

"The AVO was lifted and I returned home. I was 18 and past self-defeating behaviours slowly started to

creep back. "My probation and parole officer recommended Odyssey House, but it was a big step and I put it off for about four months.

"I officially advised the court that I would go to Odyssey House, but the night before I decided to party for one last time. After downing a bottle of Jim Beam, I yearned for a bigger buzz and went to my mum's drawer and downed a bottle of pills.

"Luckily, my mum found me and called an ambulance. I ran away and when the police finally caught up with me they classed my binge as a suicide attempt and I was placed at the Birunji Youth Mental Health Unit. Four weeks later I was once more given the option to go to Odyssey House, and this time I went.

"Initially Odyssey House was just an escape to get away, a place to stay and just go through the motions. I didn't really want to be there. However, I soon noticed positive changes in myself and how I viewed others. I realised there was a light at the end of the tunnel and I had an opportunity to change my life - an opportunity I had to take.

"I spent 19 months at Odyssey and it was certainly an up and down journey, but I discovered some really important things.

1. I discovered who I was and what I stand for - my identity, values, beliefs, morals.
2. I was able to reintroduce into my life the family and true friends I had neglected for so long.
3. I finally found that I was somebody worthwhile and could be proud of what I had achieved and where I was going. I learnt to express myself without worrying about others judging me.

"Odyssey House saved me. I am now doing an apprenticeship in Carpentry while attending TAFE, utilising some of the skills I learned in woodwork classes at Odyssey. I am also working as a farm hand on the weekends. My final words of advice for others looking for help: Be more concerned about your character than your reputation. Your character is who you really are, while your reputation is merely what others think of you."

A message from the Chairman



Doug Snedden

The Board and staff recently held our annual strategic planning meeting. The cornerstone remains our mission of helping people with alcohol and other drug dependencies through the community therapy model of care.

The Strategic plans sets out how we need to change to adapt to changing circumstances and where we can extend or improve services.

"What we do" at Odyssey House is not expected to change greatly. Our plan is to explore ways of increasing our capacity in the withdrawal unit and to add programs and services through collaboration with education, training, housing and employment services.

Over 80% of our funding comes from state and federal health grants and this needs to change. The grants programs at both levels of government are undergoing review and it is prudent to diversify our sources of revenue. We have to increase the focus on fundraising, generate other revenue and seek funding for the work we do for families.

Like many organizations we need to do more with less through cost saving, in kind support, efficiencies and linkages to other providers.

The commitment, understanding of the issues and the ideas put forward at the strategic planning meeting reinforced in my mind that we have a wonderful organization that will continue to prosper and serve the community.

Doug Snedden
Chairman



Art for healing

Learning new skills is an important part of the therapeutic approach at Odyssey House, not only to prepare clients to find employment when they leave, but also to build their confidence and social skills so they can deal with life's ups and downs without resorting to drugs.

Our Progressive Learning Centre is registered by the NSW Department of Education and Training and is a member of The Association of Independent Schools. Dynamic and innovative in their approach, staff at the centre teach courses in remedial English and maths, computer skills, job-seeking and visual arts. They also focus on helping clients achieve personal growth as they recover from years of substance misuse and, in many cases, co-existing mental health issues.

The art-as-therapy component enables residents to create something they can be proud of, express their feelings and interact better with others in a non-threatening environment. Artistic activity - from woodworking and screen printing to

drawing, painting and clay work - has recognised benefits for people with poor social or communication skills, low self esteem or mental health problems, which often co-exist with alcohol and other drug dependence.

Visual arts teacher Melissa Cranfield has been teaching at Odyssey House for more than 20 years.

"In a previous teaching role, I attended a Youth Forum that included residents from Odyssey, and from that point on I knew that Odyssey House was the place I wanted to work," Melissa says.

"In those days, the Visual Arts Workshop was an empty shed full of cobwebs and hadn't been operational for two years.

"I developed a new program for what I term 'my crew', teaching residents skills in screen-printing and visual arts such as drawing, painting and woodworking. My philosophy was simple: if I do my job properly they should end up not needing me.

"Using local connections we printed T-shirts

for local community groups and sporting clubs, and we ran workshops in local schools to raise money for Odyssey House.

"While some residents find they have a natural talent or interest in visual arts that they can develop into a job when they leave, our focus is more educational than vocational. On a therapeutic level we build self-esteem and self-confidence and get residents to express themselves.

"My most treasured moments at Odyssey House include when we participate community projects such as painting the huge murals for Campbelltown Hospital and the Brown Street Mental Health Centre.

"One of the most rewarding things for me personally is seeing residents evolve from their first workshop during their assessment phase, to become confident individuals at the end of the program.

"What we do at Odyssey House is very valuable for both our clients and for society," Melissa says.

THE FACT FILE - Marijuana

Marijuana (from the plant Cannabis Sativa) is the most commonly used illegal drug in Australia. Marijuana is also known as cannabis, grass, mull, pot dope, hash and yamdi. In Australia the most common form of consumption is smoking the dried leaves and flower buds of the plant in either hand-rolled cigarettes (joints) or in water pipes called bong.

The chemical in marijuana that makes you feel high is delta-9 tetrahydrocannabinol (THC). THC is absorbed through the lungs (or stomach) into the bloodstream and taken to the brain. Once it enters the brain it creates changes in the way people behave and experience things. For example, marijuana users who concentrate hard and see things in a different way from normal might believe they are coming up with deep thoughts and important new ways of looking at life. Cannabis affects people in different ways and some people have very different experiences each time they take it.

Short-term effects: Difficulty concentrating, impaired co-ordination, bloodshot eyes and dry mouth. A common side effect is a boost to the appetite, usually referred to as the 'munchies'.

Long-term effects: Respiratory diseases, smoking-related cancers, low sperm count and sex drive. Psychological dependence on the drug leads to increased irritability, memory loss,

Taking marijuana can be a confusing and frightening experience and the people you would normally turn to, such as close friends and family members, might not be able to help, or perhaps you are embarrassed to talk to them.

emotional imbalance, lack of motivation, paranoia and anxiety attacks, and there's also a link to psychosis and schizophrenia in heavy pot smokers. There can be social impacts such as relationship problems and unemployment issues related to marijuana abuse.

Even though most marijuana is now grown hydroponically, evidence shows a high concentration of toxic chemicals still exists in the plant when it's smoked.

Using marijuana is illegal in Australia. If you use, sell or have items used to take marijuana such as bong, and you get caught, you could face substantial fines and penalties including a prison sentence.

Your local GP can help and most libraries have information on local services that provide advice and guidance on quitting marijuana. The National Cannabis Prevention and Information Centre (NCPIC) provides free resources that can be downloaded from its website www.ncpic.org.au. The Australian Drug Information Network (ADIN) www.adin.com.au can direct you to a service in your local area.

It is never too late to seek help.

Source: NSW Department of Health,
Straight Talking About Drugs - Cannabis,
National Drugs Campaign.



A message from the Chief Executive Officer



James A. Pitts

There is an old adage that 'The only thing constant is change!', which is very apt at Odyssey House.

On a fundamental level, our mission at Odyssey House is to effect life-altering change: helping clients overcome dependence on alcohol and other drugs, change self-defeating behaviours and attitudes and learn coping strategies to become productive members of society. The journey to become an individual with self confidence, a sense of adequacy and coping ability is arduous, but worthwhile.

Organisational change is not quite so arduous, yet still essential to ensure we are working as effectively and efficiently as possible to meet the evolving needs of our clients, achieve best practice and comply with regulatory requirements.

Odyssey House embraces change through a continuous quality improvement program. I am pleased to say this received substantial praise in a recent review by the Australian Council on Healthcare Standards, which looks at areas from processes and governance to community engagement and client care.

On the staffing front, thirty per cent of our people work with us for more than ten years, including our Legal Liaison Officer, David Ridyard, whom we bid farewell after 12 years. We recently made changes to our staffing structure at the residential rehabilitation facility and our Admissions and Intake Centre (AIC), which includes the Magistrates Early Referral Into Treatment (MERIT) program. The appointment of an AIC administrative assistant and two supervisors at the main house gives us more flexibility and enhances the smooth running of our services; recruitment is also underway for a Chief Operations Officer.

Odyssey House is celebrating change on Sunday 28 October and I invite you to join us for our annual Celebrate Recovery Day to recognise client and staff achievements and mark our 35th anniversary. It is also a rare opportunity to tour our rehabilitation facilities, so come and find out what it takes to make real changes in people's lives.

James A Pitts, MA
Chief Executive Officer