

KICKING GOALS



“I HAVEN’T
LOOKED BACK.”

Poet, sportsman, husband and good mate, Tyson is an impressive young man with talents and potential unlimited. His struggles with mental illness made him the person he is today – and he’s using this experience to help and inspire others.

Just like one of Tyson’s poems or beloved footy matches, his life has had plenty of twists and turns. Upon finishing school he was on track to becoming a VFL Umpire when he experienced his first psychotic episode.

“We didn’t really know what it was. I gradually got more and more manic which was good for the VFL training, I was exercising every-day without a break and was obviously pretty fit, but it got too much. A lot of weird stuff happens when you have

WARNING: This story contains themes of suicide. If this raises issues for you, call Lifeline on 13 11 14

a psychotic episode, much of which I don't remember now – it was like a blur.”

He lost the umpiring position and went into Flynn Unit at Latrobe Regional Hospital where he was medicated and discharged. “I was kind of coming down off being manic and didn't have a job. I basically sat around for the next four to five months.”

Still playing local sport, he just wasn't enjoying it as much because he felt he'd failed. His ongoing interest in cars and mechanics led his parents to suggest that he try for an apprenticeship. He was successful and sent on placements at several car dealerships.

“I was a year into my apprenticeship before I decided to go off my medication. The decision was sort of my idea and the doctors also wanted to see how I went.”

Another reason he describes was the stigma around taking medication for mental illness. “I was also in a relationship and I went off it while that was going on because I didn't want her to find out.” The symptoms came back and in three months he was back in Flynn Unit.

Out from his second hospital experience, he found that he had lost his placement and was redeployed to another, more understanding employer. “I finished my apprenticeship and then worked for one of my old bosses because he was a really good bloke.” Things went well for about a year, he was kicking goals and set to be promoted to foreman after gaining a little more experience.

For reasons he can't explain, he decided to go off the medication again. “I never really consulted my doctors about this decision – which was probably a mistake.” Five months later he ended back in Flynn Unit again.

Back at work, his boss was very supportive but something inside Tyson had changed. “I felt in myself that I wasn't the same person, I'd forgotten a lot of stuff, I didn't have the same confidence with my work. I developed depression and anxiety and went on antidepressants for a few months and that sort of numbed me, I didn't feel the highs or the lows.”

Due to the stress and anxiety, he decided to look for a change in career. His mum saw a job advertised for a peer support worker and he decided to give it a go and started in 2017.

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In his role he sees clients who have recently been in or are still in the Flynn Unit. “I speak to them on a non-clinical level and just talk about my experiences and how I can relate to their situation and just have a general conversation about the weather and the footy and give them some sort of hope for recovery. It's a pretty cool job.”

He starts important conversations about how a person is with the simple question: How are things going with your mental health? “That's my way in to talk about how they're feeling or how they're thinking. Generally, with my mates, if there's something going on, they are a bit quiet, so I'll say: “You're a bit quiet, what's going on, do you want to talk about it? There is still stigma attached to a lot of mental health things and I've felt it myself. That's probably the biggest thing, trying to break the stigma down with as many people you can and make it an easy conversation.”

It's been four years since his last psychotic episode in 2016 and during that time he has excelled at his job and also got married.



“I haven't looked back, there have been no hiccups. I've been pretty stable and happy and doing pretty well at the moment, I think the key is to stay on the medication.”

His wife is his main support person and was there through his last psychotic episode. “She has stuck with me, and if something goes wrong, she'll know.” The couple do everything together enjoying a shared love of footy and sports.

Tyson has always enjoyed being creative and often used to write rap songs. He now weaves this skill through his peer support work and writes poems around mental health related experiences. “They reflect what people have said, what I've been through and I share them at our peer reflection meetings. Everyone loves it, so I keep doing it.”

His life goals are not just in footy anymore. “I've got my new goals which are to be a father and to do well at my job.”

My Life

My life it started as normal as any other, with loving parents and an older brother.

By the age of three I had most of my teeth and by the age of four I had grown some more.

As a young boy I was active and happy, with a big smile, a strapping young chappy.

I grew into clothes and I grew out of shoes, a young teen with ambition, what path would I choose?

As I flew through my teens in my baggy blue jeans, I was destined for greatness or not as it seems.

As I was to be struck with an illness as I entered adulthood, a mental illness of the mind, the result was not good.

My confidence took a blow and the recovery was slow, so as it seems, I did not conquer my dreams.

But the way it's panned out, I would not change it no doubt.

As my life has a meaning, I'm here for a reason.

To help others and be peer support, to help others when they're distraught.

My life may have changed, but this is not for the worst, as I dive into my life, attack it headfirst.

I will never forget the past, but I will live for tomorrow, I will focus on the positive and not dwell on the sorrow.

As tomorrow is a new day, no one knows what it will hold, if it's anything like today then it will be pure gold.

My Mantra – Words to Live By

Don't take life too seriously because you never get out alive.

Things will change all the time you just have to roll with the punches.

Life is like a rollercoaster some bits are fun, some are scary, your life goes upside down and repeats this until you die, sometimes you go up, sometimes you go down, sometimes you get butterflies.

When it's over, you look back on the crazy ride, you may want to go again, or you may say no way...

#storiesstrong

WHO TO CONTACT

Lifeline 13 11 14

Beyond Blue 1300 22 4636

www.beyondblue.org.au

Reclink www.reclink.org

Centre for Mental Health

Learning Victoria www.cmh1.org.au

Emergency 000

Tyson's key messages:

Things change and it's important to adapt. Just because one goal doesn't work out, it doesn't mean you can't accomplish new goals.

Recovery takes a long time. It will be a part of your life, it won't happen instantly.

Don't take life too seriously. You can only do what you can do. You can't push yourself too far, you can try, but it's not going to end well. Just accept it for what it is and just be happy.

This article is part of the #storiesstrong suicide prevention campaign which highlights a series of twenty articles developed by a diverse range of people with lived experience of suicide and experts in the field.

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For more information visit www.gphn.org.au

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