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About GROW

Founded in 1957, GROW continues to provide free, Peer to Peer groups for people looking for support with their mental health and wellbeing. In 1954, Con Keogh, a Catholic priest and cofounder of GROW, suffered a mental breakdown and was hospitalised. He spent about 10 months in hospital and after being discharged he describes being mortally afraid and suffering from severe memory loss.

In those days of high levels of stigma and discrimination, with enforced seclusion and restraint in a highly institutionalised system, Con and his colleagues believed there must be some better alternatives.

During his time of recovery, a friend invited Con to attend an Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) meeting. Despite not identifying as an alcoholic, Con attended the meeting and responded well to the fellowship of the meetings and the AA program. Along the way he met others attending AA who were not necessarily alcoholics but found attending the meetings helped with their mental health.

Eventually this group of like-minded friends started to talk about forming a group to meet their own specific needs to help them recover their mental health. Rather than being locked away and subjected to sometimes damaging treatments, they wanted fellowship, humanity, social serenity, friendship and community, and they realised they could find all those things by being together and providing mutual support.

They began to have group meetings and began to realise the benefits of those meetings. But they knew they needed to document and formalise what worked – these days, we call it evidence. The groups met outside of their normal group meetings to start documenting what helped them get well and what caused them to decline. These were the earliest leadership meetings.

This summary of collective wisdom created the early iterations of the program. More than 66 years ago a wellbeing program was written entirely by people with a lived experience of mental illness.

Today we stand on the shoulders of giants and continue their work through the same process.

The outcome of this is what we now know as GROW. April 26 1957 marks the first official meeting of the Grow Program – people who were looking for support with their mental wellbeing. Back then we were known as Recovery – a name that emphasised the goal and the solution, rather than the problem. From its very humble beginnings, GROW continues to operate extensively in Australia (and indeed internationally). GROW continues to be a community-based organisation – designed, developed and delivered by people with lived experience – and has helped tens of thousands of Australians with their recovery from mental ill health.

Well before codesign in mental health became the modern buzzword that it is today, GROW became a world leader in codesign by people with lived experience. But GROW went further than this in that it developed as a model of integrated governance – something which most of today's codesign organisations can only aspire to.

For codesign is not the ultimate goal but rather is a part of the pathway to the ultimate goal of integrated governance and recovery – for people with lived experience, it is not good enough to be involved in codesigning something and then losing control of decision making on whether what has been codesigned is implemented. Integrated governance means people with lived experience are the decision makers on what is implemented, how continuous improvement occurs and how services are delivered.

This is what GROW has achieved and continues to develop and why GROW still is an Australian and world leader in codesign and integrated governance for people with lived experience.



The History of GROW

GROW



mental wellbeing programs



1954
Father Con Keogh was hospitalised following a mental breakdown

1957
April 26 marks the first official gathering of a group of people at a church hall in Hurstville NSW, to begin helping and supporting each other back to good mental health. This group was known as Recovery

1959
The first version of what is now known as the Blue Book was published

1961
The formation of a central committee of group representatives

1956
Con and others started to attend Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) groups seeking help for their mental health. After meeting likeminded people within AA, they started to talk about forming a group to meet their own particular needs to help them recover their mental health.

1958
The first version of the 12 Steps were written - known as an 'Amplification of the 12 steps'

1960-1969
By the end of the 60's, there were seven Recovery groups - three in metro Sydney and four in regional NSW

1962
Recovery rents its first HQ in Sydney NSW.
By the end of 1962, Recovery groups had grown to 8 metro groups and 10 regional groups

1971
Recovery receives its first government funding from the NSW Government
Recovery spreads to Hawaii under the name of GROW

1967
Recovery groups now total 120 throughout the country

1965
Recovery spread to New Zealand

1964
Recovery has its first international patron W Clement Stone, an American businessman.
By the end of 1964, Recovery had 31 groups across Australia

1975
Recovery officially changes its name to GROW

1970
Recovery hits 180 groups Australia-wide

1969
Shaun O'Hanlan, who had been a missionary in New Guinea suffered a mental breakdown. While recuperating in Victoria, he attended a Recovery group and returned to Ireland well armed with Recovery Literature. He starts the first Recovery group in Ireland.
The first youth group is started in Sydney

1963
Recovery spread to South Australia sponsored by Bill Salter, a medical superintendent at Hillcrest Hospital in Adelaide. In NSW another mental health professional, Neville Yeomans sponsored a group at North Ryde Hospital. The value of Recovery groups was being noticed by the medical profession. Groups were also started for patients in hospitals moving toward rehabilitation
Recovery launched its first group for former prisoners at Long Bay Gaol in Sydney - this was the first private group
Recovery gained its first benefactor, Sydney businessman Rueben Scarf
By the end of 1963, there were 24 Recovery groups throughout the country

1976
The first residential program was started in Cairns in Northern QLD

1979
GROW's residential drug rehabilitation program starts in NSW

2000-present
Fr Con Keogh's health was declining leading him to be less involved, stalling the growth of the organisation.
GROW has re-established a National direction, strategy and support that has turned the organisation into the success it is today.

More programs have been added to GROW's portfolio including:

- Get Growing Program for school aged participants
- an online version of our Grow groups known as eCrow
- Young Adults programs
- Prison groups
- Carer's groups

1978
The first mainland Groups take place in the USA

1980-2000
From here on Grow developed and expanded across Australia with Branches being established and funded in each State. The value of Grow was being recognised in supporting community mental health.
Grow National was established at Enmore NSW and for many years nurtured developed and trained Grow leaders and employees from around the country and from overseas.

To date, GROW has helped thousands of Australia recover from mental ill-health.



Our Unique Structure

The Grow Program symbolises the unique leadership participation structure of our organisation. It is designed to preserve and promote the value of Grow participants' lived experience, foster personal development and provide further opportunities for participants to be involved in the growth and development of the organisation. People with lived experience remain the valued and respected custodians and developers of the Grow Program. They are involved in all decision-making activities at all levels of the organisational structure of GROW (the organisation). The Blue Book, which is the guiding light in the Grow Program, was designed, developed and written by Grow group participants over the past 66 years. In April 2022, Growing to Recovery: Readings for Mental Health Volume 2, was released. Once again, this new book of readings and wisdoms was written by people in the program, with lived experience of the Grow recovery model.

GROW operates like two parallel universes. On the one hand there are the Growers who participate in the program – the individuals, the organisers and recorders, the leadership meetings, the Branch Program Teams, Literature Teams and National Program Team which have inviolate control of the Program, the content and the written material. On the other there is the management team which operates to support them in what they do, as well as in meeting public, statutory and fiduciary requirements.

All of us work together in accordance with GROW's Chief Operating Principle:

“The development, evaluation and improvement of each activity in Grow is looked after by the grouping of the people responsible for it, in conjunction with those responsible for the common welfare of the whole movement.”



Growing Together: Our Statement of Strategic Intent



MISSION We enable people and communities to grow, recover and maintain good mental health.



VISION FOR GROW GROW is the premier provider of intentional peer to peer support to promote hope, mutual help and recovery for good mental health for people throughout Australia.

VALUES



PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY We act ethically and always take responsibility for our actions.



PERSONAL VALUE We believe every person has intrinsic value.



MUTUAL HELP We collaborate and share knowledge, skills and expertise for the personal development and leadership of all.



FRIENDSHIP We support each other and act with courage in the best interests of Grow.



COMMUNITY We create a caring and sharing community to provide a sense of belonging, social connectedness, and purpose to everyday life.

GOALS



To be the leader in peer to peer support for good mental health by:

1. Continuously developing the Grow Program of Recovery and Personal Growth
2. Providing new ways to deliver the Grow Program through sustainable and vibrant peer group programs that attract and retain people
3. Developing and delivering prevention and early intervention strategies and programs applying the Grow philosophy and wisdoms
4. Identifying and diversifying into new streams of revenue which:
 - a. enable GROW to expand its offerings to the community and
 - b. reduce the level of GROW's reliance on a relatively small number of funders to ensure our long-term sustainability.



Chair of the Board

John Della Bosca A.M

There is no doubting that this year has been a difficult and surprisingly disappointing year for GROW. The Western Australian and Northern Territory governments have defunded our activities in those jurisdictions. This has been despite the best advocacy and representational efforts by local GROW management and National Office especially NCEO David Butt, WA board member Judy Edwards, WA Manager Lynda Diagne, and NT Manager Kate Francis.

Like every facet of human life government policies follow fashion trends. Sometimes important issues are widely misunderstood and become political or bureaucratic fads. This seems to be the underpinning of the mistaken decisions in WA and the NT.

It was the source of enormous frustration to all of us involved with trying to get these decisions reversed or reviewed that we were repeatedly told at the highest level that it was essential that programs be codesigned, client oriented and evidenced based. We repeatedly explained that there is no mental health Peer to Peer program that comes close to the level of codesign and client orientation achieved by GROW and that our success is backed by sixty years of experiential and academic evidence.

The final outcome is both good and bad. Bad because it will take some time to recover in WA and the NT and many GROWERS in those jurisdictions will have a challenging time. Good because it has inspired us to loudly demonstrate our value to the decision makers around the commonwealth and emphasize that GROW has very contemporary relevance to Mental Health policy and society more generally.



“ Above all GROW can be confident that what we do, we do well and we should not let these setbacks throw us off course. It is a cliché, but our best strategy remains “stick to our knitting”. We just need to explain its value more clearly and more often. ”



National CEO Report

David Butt

This has been an unusual and unexpectedly challenging year. Yes, we have suffered losses – of funding, of people – but we also have had many successes. And we need to learn and evolve from the losses but not let them overshadow the gains and triumphs of the year.

GROW lost its core funding in Western Australia through what can only be described as a flawed tender process. Through that process, every existing mutual support and self help organisation was defunded and the money given to recreational and social activities. This appears to have come out of a poorly informed understanding of codesign and principles of recovery oriented services – as if these are the new, bright and shiny slogans being touted about, even though GROW has been a world leader in codesign and recovery oriented services since the 1950s.

The WA Mental Health Commission claimed publicly that participants in mutual support and self help services which were being defunded would be able to transition to the services receiving additional funding, but it quickly became apparent that these were not like-for-like services – 10 pin bowling and fishing clubs are not necessarily a good alternative to intentional Peer to Peer support – and that they were still getting around to working out how to do codesigning.

So after 56 years of service and support in the state, we were forced to close most of our support services for our WA groups. My sincere thanks to our WA Manager, Lynda Diagne, who we have been able to keep on at this stage and for those staff where we were left with no option but to make them redundant. It is a measure of their commitment and belief in Grow and their fellowship with the Growers, that all Program Workers remained committed to supporting our Groups until our funding ran out.



“GROW will continue on, building on the past and by so doing creating a better, brighter future.”



GROW continues in WA – the Branch Program Team, ably led by Mel Hayward and Josh Kirkham, has maneuvered to keep as many groups continuing to operate as possible. At last count, 13 groups were continuing to meet (there were up to 30 previously) but these groups need to abide by the requirements of the group method to ensure quality delivery of the program. My thanks also to other Branches which have been reaching out to support WA groups, Organisers and Recorders and the BPT.

The Northern Territory situation is, if anything, even more bizarre. In April we received a letter advising that we were being defunded and that they had extended our funding until 31 December to allow us to transition (we are not sure to what?). There was no consultation and no process – it was simply a decision made by someone within the NT Department of Health who believed we should be funded by the NT Primary Health Network through the bilateral agreement established between the Federal and NT Governments. This was despite the fact that:

1. The bilateral agreement does not include GROW
2. The NT PHN says GROW does not fit within its funding guidelines
3. No other state or territory has taken this position.

We are continuing to look for new funding opportunities in the Territory and once again the groups are planning to continue to meet if our program support needs to cease at Christmas time this year. My sincere thanks to Territory Manager Kate Francis and Program Worker David (Daisy) Taylor for their commitment in continuing to provide support in these challenging circumstances.

These are significant setbacks. And indeed it is disappointing – for the people of WA and the Northern Territory – that in their belated recognition of codesign, but lack of understanding of all that it implies, those two governments have taken the cause of lived experience in mental health backwards.

But GROW has faced many setbacks in its 66-year history and still survives (and indeed thrives). Our aim is to build back again in WA and the NT and while this will take time our history shows that we can do it. However we do need to continue to work on ensuring that GROW does not remain mental health's best kept secret and that there is much broader recognition of GROW's significant success in supporting mental health and wellbeing in the community.

An important part of this will be to demonstrate to decision makers the value of intentional Peer to Peer support as a low cost but very strongly evidence-based approach to keeping people out of hospital, at home, in the community and functioning to the best of their capacity.

While I have dwelt on two major challenges, there also is much to celebrate from 2022-23. I will leave the information below – on specific programs and services, and on Branch/Manager reports – to tell those stories but certainly I think we have gone through significant renewal and evolution over the past few years.

My thanks to all staff for their support and successes over the year and their strength of dedication to the GROW purpose. I also want to thank our previous Chair, Lesley van Schoubroeck, who stood down from the Chair role and the Board late last year and the new Chair, John Della Bosca, who has brought great knowledge and empathy to the role. I am sure he had no idea what he was in for.

Once again, who knows what tomorrow might bring, but our record shows that, with all the ups and downs, GROW will continue on, building on the past and by so doing creating a better, brighter future.

Kind regards,

David



NPT Report

The National Program Team (NPT) is made up of a mix of principally lived experience or grass roots leaders (volunteers) and the National Program Manager working together for a common purpose from a national perspective.

In accordance with GROW's Chief Operating Principle – each level of governance has members with lived experience responsible for the welfare of each aspect of the organisation.

Lived Experience leaders in GROW are founded upon demonstrated personal growth to maturity and mental health progress or recovery. It is embodied by their ability to provide leadership to those participating in group meetings through local volunteer teams and leadership meetings. This provides a clear pathway for others to similarly take up responsible positions and share what they have gained at every level of the organisation and contribute to GROW.

Reviewing reports from every Branch in Australia

GROW has built lived experience (GROW leadership) into every aspect of governance in the Organisation. In this regard each GROW group in Australia belongs to a local region and in turn the Organiser and Recorder of each group meet within their region every two months. This meeting provides the opportunity to review group successes and needs and plan for expansion, training and if needed inter-group support. These discussions are collated by member teams into a report that is sent to the NPT to review every three cycles (4 months). The NPT reviews these reports from each branch and offers feedback, advice and leadership support.

Reviewing Quality Improvement requests in relation to the Grow Program

Quality Improvement requests have continued to flow in from members, leaders and staff around the country and have been reviewed successfully. The QI feedback has increased dramatically with the commencement of the Blue Book review.



Heath Heath (Board and NPT Member) shows off his fishing skills at the SA Community Weekend



National Program Manager Report - Darryl Ballestrin



Blue Book Review

The Blue Book review and update is one of the largest codesign and lived experience governance projects undertaken in the country. It is the first time in 12 years that a full review of the Blue Book has been undertaken and involves Grow members and volunteer Grow leadership in all states and territories.

The National Program Team (NPT) proposed the review and as part of the process took into consideration Quality Suggestions submitted through the Quality Management system, approved submissions from local leadership as Branch approved material, and updated material from Grow Ireland and New Zealand. The NPT also called for new submissions from local Grow members and leaders in each state and territory in Australia for content for the revised Grow Program material for the Blue Book. More than 100 people are involved in the project on an ongoing basis.

This continues to highlight Grow's great strength in true codesign and lived experience governance. The process involves experienced Grow members/leaders taking on the responsibility to review, provide feedback and approve proposals, additions, and revisions of our Blue Book Program of personal Growth – the central and key foundation of Grow and its work in mental health recovery. Significantly, the decision and responsibility remain with the body of Grow leaders to stand behind the Program that will form the basis of our recovery model in the years ahead. In so doing, this ensures that the Grow Program is relevant, contemporary, accessible and stands as a testimony of what 'worked for us' in our mental health recovery and will for those who follow.

Leadership Days

Through our Leadership Days, Grow leadership has been reviewing proposed Program content and contributing to the Blue Book review. As NPM, I was privileged to participate in several Branch Leadership days around the country and speak first-hand to those Grow leaders who have taken the recovery journey and carry Grow's philosophy and message in their hearts. What struck me most was the level of knowledge and wisdom carried by Grow's volunteer leaders and how deeply they understood the process of the recovery journey through Grow. In each case there was vigorous and animated discussion about what potential changes would mean, how it could be improved and possible implications for first time Grow members. At its heart in terms of the Grow Program, there is a deep love for what 'made us well' and a genuine desire to 'share what we have gained' to improve the way for the future of those in need.

NPT

Thanks to all who participated in the National Program Team – the vital team from across the country with volunteer representatives meeting to discuss and review Branch leadership activities, provide feedback and advice and direction on training issues and governance around Grow's Program content and quality improvement suggestions. The team farewelled Vice Chair Alison Francis and welcomed new member Bill Narnst from Queensland in the past year. The National Program Team also has reviewed many Program related Quality improvement requests in the past year, incorporating suggestions and feedback into Grow program and practice as suggested by Grow members and attendees.





Training and development

Our Online Training Modules have been developed and revised based on review and feedback of needs of Program Workers and newly elected Group organisers. The Online Program Training modules help give new Staff and volunteers a solid grounding in Grow philosophy and practice, while providing practical information on the effective running of Grow meetings and Grow's four essential features – The Program, The Group Method, The Caring and Sharing Community and The Legal and Organisational structure. All staff have been enrolled to complete the online training modules around the Grow program by December 2023 and then it will be rolled out to Grow Organisers and Recorders.

Communities of Practice (COPs) ran regularly for Grow Program Workers and Get Growing Workers – these forums which are held online gather staff from across the country with a focus on helping each person become successful in their role. This is achieved through direct training, troubleshooting problems in their roles and developing peer support with other experienced Workers including mentoring and leadership opportunities.

Podcast Program Training series and Personal Testimony interviews – both short and long form conversations and interviews – were developed and available on Spotify for Grow leaders and members to access and listen to on the go. These touched on topics requested through Leadership meetings, Staff feedback and Grow member feedback.

Overall, this has been a highly successful year for the development of the Grow Program, our other programs and the highly contemporary supports we have in place and in particular for the continuous learning and development of our Growers and support staff. We look forward to further development in 2023-24.



Our Services

The Grow Program

Our program is a 12-step program of personal growth, mutual help and support. The Grow Program is all-inclusive and draws on many principles for mental, social, emotional and spiritual health. At each meeting, members talk about how they came to GROW and how they are exploring self-improvement strategies on their road to recovery. Grow Groups are free of charge and there is no need to have a referral or a doctor's diagnosis. Members can choose to remain anonymous. Our meetings take place in a safe, caring and confidential way, whether the meetings are face-to-face, online, known as eGrow Groups, or a hybrid of the two (some people face to face, others online). Our members meet weekly and follow the Group Method. At each meeting, GROW members will have opportunities to share any of their life challenges or issues and first-time members may choose not to speak or share.

Prison Groups

Our Prison groups celebrated their 11-year Anniversary this year with an incredibly rewarding year for the inmates at Langi Kal Kal, Hopkins Correctional Centre and Program Worker Robert Turnour. Although it has been 11 years of continued leadership and consistent groups within the Prison system, this year Grow Victoria started the program fresh after a year long COVID hiatus. We had all new groups with beginning Growers, a re-building of leadership within the groups and the continued commitment and passion the inmates and Program worker Robert needed to give to the groups to get them off the ground and running again.

Their success shows through the three Grow groups, which have full membership having inmates who have stepped into Leadership roles within their groups, a commitment to the Grow processes including using the Group Method, use of the Grow literature, participation in Leadership meetings, regional meetings and holding socials.

The committed Growers contributed to our Blue Book review over two sessions helping Grow move forward. The group leaders and growers actively engaged in the voting process.

The groups actively participate in the literature process and have written humble but powerful papers for the wider Grow community.

Adrian has written about his experience in Grow meetings and the impact he has seen the program have on not only himself but his peers.

“I very much look forward to our weekly meetings and absolutely love everyone’s positive attitude towards deepening our understanding and perception of mental health and, also, the non-judgmental and collaborative environment and culture that we all have a part in encouraging and keeping alive.

**The momentum is REAL!
What I mean by that is, each week, I have been taking notice of all the individual growth of my peers.”**



“To sum it all up, whilst keeping relative to our current position and the Topic, every day we combat personal disorder in our lives; we are in prison after all. Our time here is settling for disorder in lesser things for the sake of order in greater things, in our case the rest of our lives, therefore, to be content to be discontent in many things.” (Bl. B p18)

“Being in prison doesn’t define who we are. We are growing to maturity every single day and I hope, wholeheartedly, our contribution helps our society and wider community (whether Growers or not) with growth in their relationship to themselves, in their mental health and in their community growth in maturity also.”

Grow Victoria is incredibly proud of the work we do in this space and look forward to continuing to contribute to the Recovery of our Grower inmates within the system.



Young Adult Groups

Grow holds National Young Adult eGrow groups with members logging in from across the country and some international members. The groups experience strong attendance with meetings aiming for authenticity and vibrancy. Our young adults include 18–35 year olds with a well-balanced mix of different types of personalities who come together to help each other on their Mental Health journey. Our Young Adult cohort truly shines with the ability to be patient with one another, listen to each other and affirm one another for the work they do on themselves and their individual experiences.

The future of our Grow Young Adult space is exciting with many ideas on how to reach young adults in a space that matches their lifestyles. Our Young Adults are often busy, sometimes managing multiple jobs, studies and importantly their interpersonal relationships with friends, families and loved ones.

Grow is looking to partner with universities to introduce face to face groups and continue offering our groups in an online space.

Carer's Group

Our Carer's group members all care for someone who is experiencing mental ill health while managing their own wellbeing. The group is open to anyone in Australia who cares for and supports someone who has a mental illness, is neurodiverse, or has a brain injury or dementia. Our Carer's group operates successfully in a hybrid space with meetings often experiencing an attendance of more than eight members each meeting. The group has seasoned leaders who ensure our beloved group method and structure is followed. The group comes together away from their responsibilities and caring duties, in partnership with the program, and guide each other through their shared problems.

This past year's highlights for the group included both leadership positions being filled, a relocation to a new venue that suits the face-to-face members, many socials throughout the year to come together away from their responsibilities and caring duties, and provide a space for carers to enjoy a social activity away from the structured meeting setting.



Young Adult performing at Victoria Branch Social



Growing Resilience

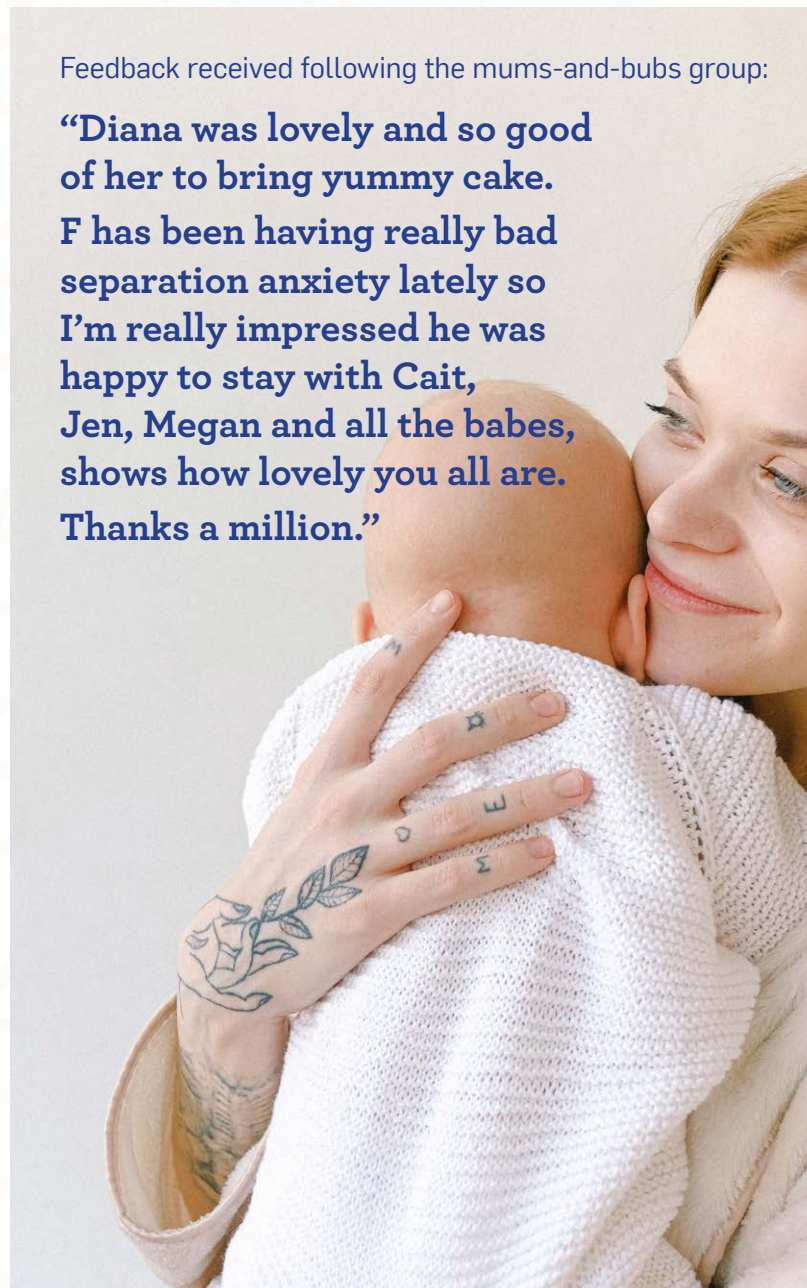
Originally developed in 2020 in response to COVID, the six-week Program continues to attract attention, with the content remaining relevant and practical in current life standards – responding to people distressed by fires, floods and, more recently, cost of living pressures. Delivery over the year has been supported by Program Workers from around the country.

During the reporting period, we received 290 expressions of interest to participate in the online Program, with 12 complete Programs delivered over the financial year. It is important to note that GROW rarely committed to promoting the Program over this time, with most inquiries coming from Google searches or referrals. Branches have also had some very successful trials of delivering the program to local groups in the community face-to-face. Some of these groups include a Perinatal group of young mums, residents of a residential rehabilitation center and a regional town in Country Victoria. If you have not come through the GROW program, Growing Resilience can be a very gentle introduction into the GROW Program and some of its basic Principles. Program workers will be able to affirm that intentional Peer to Peer support remains a core focus of the short program, with many relationships formed between group members and maintained after the group concludes.

The Program was delivered on 33 separate occasions over the year, with 148 participants completing part-of or all of the program.

Feedback received following the mums-and-bubs group:

“Diana was lovely and so good of her to bring yummy cake. F has been having really bad separation anxiety lately so I’m really impressed he was happy to stay with Cait, Jen, Megan and all the babes, shows how lovely you all are. Thanks a million.”



Get Growing

Get Growing has become a much loved program wherever we have been able to deliver it. It has not been uncommon for Growers who have come through the Program that has supported their mental health recovery to reflect "I wish something like GROW was available to me when I was younger" – especially as so much about Grow is learning new and logical ways to practically help manage many of life's stressors!

For approximately eight years, GROW has been doing just that. Get Growing is a youth based program delivered in schools and youth based organisations to young people aged 11-17, many of them considered 'at risk' of developing poor mental health. Developed on the philosophy and using the main principles of the GROW Program, this 10 week Program is facilitated to 'start a conversation' around issues that can impact a young person's wellbeing – Personal value, defining healthy relationships, personal boundaries and chilling out in a crisis are but a few. The real magic of the program however becomes visible through the genuine and positive peer rapport that grows within the group members, as they develop new skills in better managing life challenges and learning through other's experiences.

This year, Get Growing has been delivered in South Australia, Victoria and the Northern Territory.

25 Complete Programs were delivered over the financial year to approximately 225 young people.

And we are excited to confirm that funding has been secured that will enable the Program to be brought into NSW in the next financial year.

Some feedback captured from students having gone through the program during the year:

- This term in a high school session, one of our students has severe anxiety and spoke in front of the group for the first time today
- Defence Primary School Term 1 had feedback that a student enjoyed learning about feelings

- Two students who have said they "have no friends" have connected with each other through the group
- In a Defence high school the students have found they share problems about moving house/areas a lot and experiencing racism at school, not realising previously that they weren't alone in these feelings/experiences.

'I've learnt to control myself and overall feel less angry'

'I've learnt skills that I didn't know I needed. It's made me a better person'

'I've learnt to control my emotions and not throw punches as soon as I get mad'

'I learnt that I'm not as useless as I thought I was and other people thought I was'

'I've learnt how to communicate with other people better and I know how to be more friendly'

'I learnt how to make friends better and have a good time with other people'

'I've learnt that everyone's equal'

'I learnt to have self confidence in myself'





**Program Outcome –
Building Genuine Friendships, Leadership
Skills, Increased Confidence:**

**Get Growing has been delivered on 140
occasions, supporting 690 young people.
Get Growing is now being delivered in
3 states cross Australia.**

‘I’ve learnt to stand up for myself’



eGrow

eGrow has emerged as a valuable and innovative addition to Grow's Wellbeing Programs, addressing the need for accessible alternatives to traditional face-to-face meetings. While eGrow introduces some differences in terms of social interaction, the core methodology and utilization of the Grow Program remain identical, ensuring that members continue to receive the support and guidance necessary for their wellbeing.

The virtual format encourages flexibility and allows members to engage at their own convenience. Its ability to maintain program integrity while embracing technological advancements ensures that members receive the support and resources they need to enhance their mental and emotional well-being.

Our eGrow groups have continued to be a valued addition to our Grow Wellbeing Programs as they have remained in high demand while delivering positive health and wellbeing outcomes to participants.

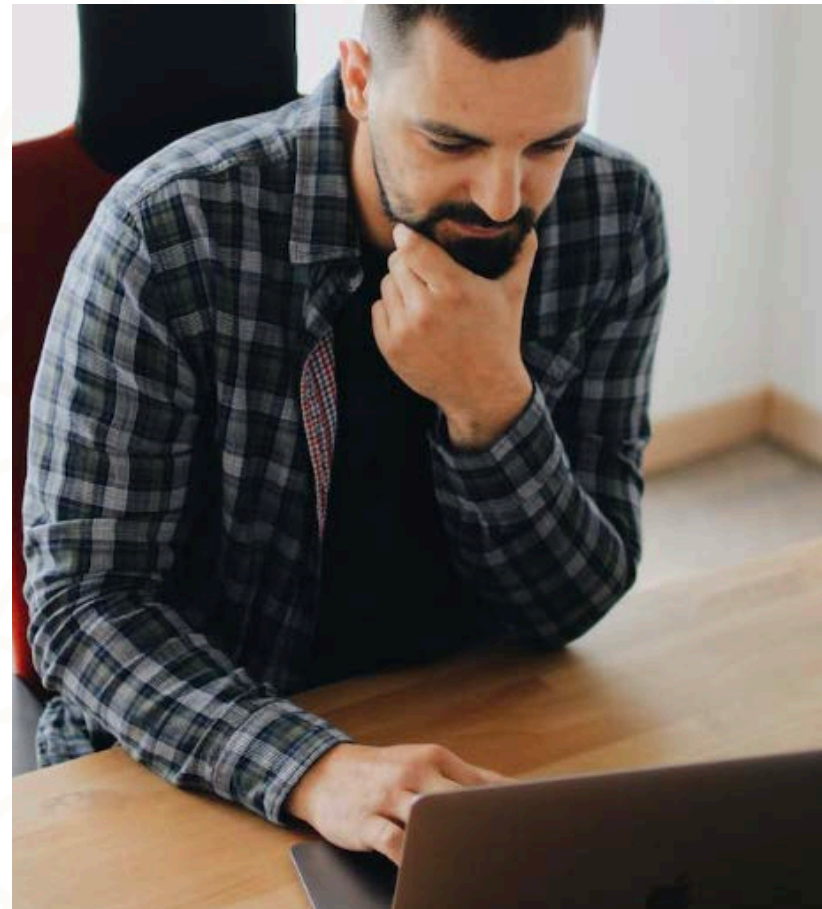
In the 2022/2023 financial year, there were 18 eGrow groups operating nationally, with an additional eight groups operating in a hybrid model (a mix of online and in person participants).

This is an increase of 10 groups from the previous financial year.

There were 400 attendees, 4552 attendances and approximately 143 first timers.

Welcome to Grow

This is an orientation session to new participants before attending their first Grow Group meeting. The introduction of the online submission form has significantly streamlined the process of enrolling new participants into the Grow Programs. The data shows that, on average, there are 2-3 new submissions per week for each online group. This not only indicates a consistent interest in the programs but also suggests that the online format is convenient and accessible to potential participants.



Service Activity



GROW also provided leadership development opportunities throughout the year, with those sessions attracting

530
visits.



Nationally groups received
24,434
visits over the year, and of those

1158
people visited GROW
for the first time.



There were
594
visits for the Organiser
and Recorder meetings
for the year.

GROW also continues to deliver both online and face to face group meetings, as well as hybrid meetings, to meet the needs of different locations in Australia.



Residential Rehabilitation Program

NSW GROW Centre - Residential Rehabilitation

The GROW Residential Rehabilitation Centre, founded in 1982, is situated on 7 acres of pristine farmland in West Hoxton.

The Centre offers long term rehabilitation and recovery for up to 17 residents suffering from substance misuse disorder and poor mental health (dual diagnosis).

Given our location and our unique offering, the GROW Residential Rehabilitation center is like no other in NSW, where residents are surrounded by animals, parklands, ponds and each other equating to an expansive serene space to reflect and recover.

It has been an extremely positive year at GROW with six residents graduating from the program after spending circa 12 months in rehabilitation. Many of these graduates chose to take up residence in the Transition House after leaving GROW, while others decided to move back with their families.

All six graduates have maintained their sobriety and either found full time or part time work or have enrolled in TAFE courses.

There seems to be a common theme with the graduating residents in that they all want to eventually work in the recovery/rehabilitation sector and give back what they have learnt in the GROW Program. With recent studies showing the benefits of lived experience in the recovery space, this is extremely promising.

We continue to work tirelessly with the likes of the Department of Community Justice and the Department of Housing to reunite mothers and fathers with their children who have been removed due to their problems with addiction and/or mental health. This is an extremely detailed and drawn-out process which places immense pressures on staff and the residents, however it is one of the most rewarding parts of the GROW program and what can be achieved.

Over the year we have expanded and strengthened our relationship with The Network of Alcohol and other Drugs Agencies (NADA) with increased dialogue around additional funding and external support. The National Manager has also been interviewed by NADA for an upcoming piece in their quarterly publication of the Advocate, which is distributed across the sector Nationwide. Another positive is that Grow has been verbally advised by South West Sydney Local Health District (SWS LHD) that funding to the Grow program's original contract will be increased by a further five years, taking the funding agreement to 2029.

Our latest survey results show that 88% of ex residents who graduated from the program have maintained their sobriety while 91% of residents surveyed stated that their outlook on life had improved since joining the GROW Residential Program.



Growers from the Residential Community invited Sydney Metro Growers for a BBQ at West Hoxton in November.



Transition House NSW

The Transition House is a three-bedroom house located 10 minutes' drive from the GROW Residential Rehabilitation Centre – West Hoxton.

The Transition House has remained full all year with most graduates taking up the opportunity to relocate from West Hoxton to the house after completing the program.

While staying at the Transition House, residents have access to staff at the main center 24/7 and are still supported by the Grow Program. Residents come back to GROW on a weekly basis to attend GROW Groups, NA/AA meetings, swimming and group dinners.

Easing residents slowly back into the community makes the transition for them easier and has proven to be an effective mechanism in their recovery journey and the GROW residential program.

All residents of the Transition House have maintained sobriety over the year and all have commenced work/study and are now part of the broader community and are functioning members of society, free of addiction and their troubled past.

ACT House - Residential Rehabilitation

The GROW ACT House is a purpose-built dwelling, aimed at delivering residential rehabilitation in a comfortable, homely setting.

The building was commissioned by Barton Housing in the 1980s by combining two blocks previously occupied by Barton Housing rental properties, constructed by ACT Housing with government funding and input from several community leaders including GROW.

The ACT House offers a safe environment for up to five residents to recover from mental health issues and substance misuse disorder with the average stay being four months.

In August this year, GROW was advised in writing by The Mental Health Commissioning Team ACT that our funding will be extended until June 2025 which is great news.

Orientations continue with external services including Step Up Step Down and the Canberra detox unit, raising awareness of local GROW Groups and the ACT House program.

By doing this, bed occupancy has improved with the house being full much of the year.

Currently we are running 5 separate GROW Groups across the ACT supporting more than 60 Growers.

During the financial year we hired a new Residential Program worker, Matthew Loader.

Matthew has been part of GROW for five years and originally came to the NSW Residential Rehabilitation Centre in 2018 to get help with substance misuse disorder and his mental health.

After spending 11 months in the GROW program, Matt transitioned to the ACT House as a resident where he spent a further two years (due to COVID) in the program. During this time Matt completed a Certificate 4 in Community Services, AOD and Mental Health.

After discussions between Matt and the National Manager, Matt joined the team in ACT House in June.

Matt's vast understanding of the GROW program and recovery has made a huge positive impact in the house and we are very pleased to have him as part of the Residential Rehabilitation Team.

During a typical week at the ACT House, residents will participate in daily exercise, Grow Groups (with external members), Focus Groups, Bowling, Program Study and gardening.

Over the course of the year, the ACT House has provided rehabilitation and recovery for 11 residents.



Activities - ACT House

Sonia Di Mezza (Grow Director) had the opportunity to visit the ACT House in Canberra. She was given a tour of the property and an explanation of how the program worked by Lily (Residential Program Worker) here, and gained an understanding of how the program operates and the activities organised for the residents as well as the resources and facilities available on the property.



Board Director Sonia with Residential Program Worker Lucas Spensberger and Matt Loader



Initiatives and Projects

Academic Literature Review

In 2022, GROW commissioned Brittany Moetara and Megan Kah En Chong, honours students in psychology from the University of Queensland, to undertake an academic literature review of Peer to Peer support.

The review emphasised that the affordability and flexibility of Peer to Peer support enables it to serve a broad range of populations and contexts. It revealed consistent evidence that Peer to Peer support for mental health positively impacts quality of life, sense of personal agency and feelings of social connectedness. However it highlighted that evidence for impact on clinically relevant variables, such as symptom severity and hospitalisation, is weak. This is because clinical outcome data are rarely collected, with emphasis being put on participant self-report instead.

The review also noted that clear and consistent definitions of Peer to Peer support are lacking in the published literature and suggested that GROW, with its long history, could lead in establishing the standard.

eLearning

GROW has launched a Learning Management System (LMS) called Grow Smart. Grow Program Training eLearning modules which were created with the intention of providing an introductory background to the Grow Program are now live on Grow Smart LMS.

There are five different parts to the training, each of which contain about four or five modules except for Part 1 – 'The Annual Evaluation and Program Cycle in Grow' which is comprised of one module outlining Grow's annual schedule of events and reporting timelines.

The five parts of eLearning are titled as follows:

1. *The Annual Evaluation and Program Cycle in Grow*
2. *The History and Philosophy of Grow*
3. *The Grow Program and Problem Solving in Grow Groups*
4. *The Group Method and Grow Group Evaluation*
5. *Governance and Roles in Grow.*

The modules are based primarily on organising effective and authentic Grow meetings, developing leadership and applying Grow principles.

A dedicated Streaming Channel on the Grow Intranet has also been created to host the compilation of videos incorporated into the Grow Program eLearning modules for easy access outside of the LMS.

Work on the Grow Program Resource Manual continues with updates and revisions being made to the original commentaries where necessary. This is a work in progress alongside the review/revision of the Blue Book.

The Get Growing Program Training eLearning modules are currently under review. It is anticipated that once feedback is received proposed changes will be made to the modules and they will also be uploaded to the LMS. Their intended purpose is to provide a deeper and more comprehensive understanding of the Get Growing Program and its foundation for Grow Youth Program Workers delivering the Program in schools and other organisations.

There is also now a dedicated 'Grow Program Resources and Discussions' channel on Spotify which covers a number of topics and is intended to help spread the message of Grow into the wider community.



National eGrow Project

With registrations steadily increasing nationwide and new groups regularly opening, the National eGrow Project Working Group formed to implement operational improvements to ensure that we continue to provide the best program possible. Key achievements of this Project and Working Group include:

- All eGrow groups are mapped out nationally and advertised on our website, with the inclusion of hybrid groups.
- Revision of our website eGrow query submission form to ensure necessary information is captured.
- Creation of an opening, recessing and closing eGrow groups procedure to support Program Workers particularly in the area of opening new groups.
- Training provided to Program Workers regarding establishing new eGrow groups.
- Improving the onboarding experience of participants by the creation of a 'welcome pack' that is sent out upon receipt of eGrow queries.
- Improving opportunities for social connectedness for our eGrow participants by facilitating additional online branch socials
- Increasing opportunities for referrals to eGrow groups by revising the Growing Resilience program delivery materials.

Legacy Club

In 2023 GROW Australia officially launched its Legacy Club – our special community of future stewards of mental health and wellbeing who have left a gift in their will to GROW Australia. While people have left gifts to GROW in the past, this is the first time we have met with those who have pledged a gift to GROW to thank them and understand their intention for their farsighted pledges.

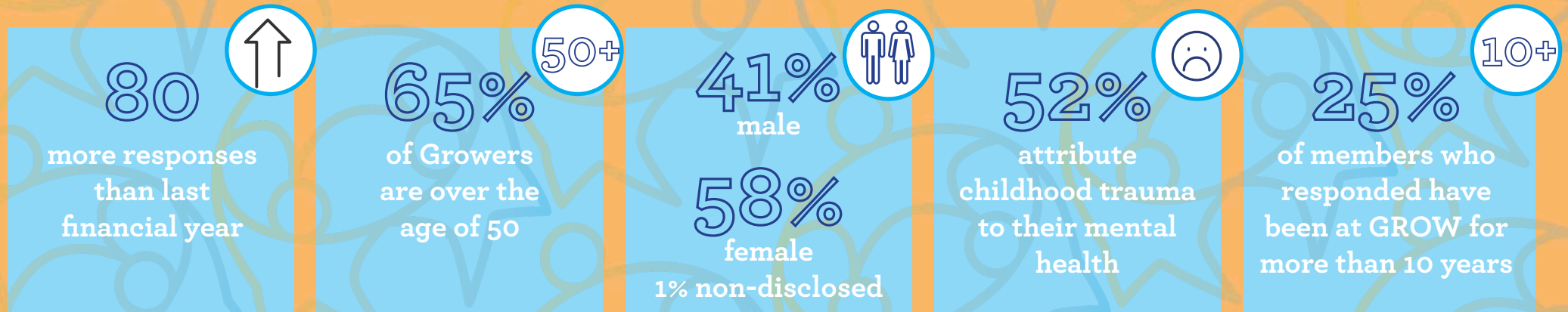
It is also the first time we have partnered with Safe Will, Australia's leading online Will writing platform to offer all our Growers, their friends and families the opportunity to write a bespoke Will for free as part of Free Wills Week.

Having a Will is a good, ordinary thing. It builds on the principles of self-activation and regard for others by ensuring loved ones are taken care of and estate wishes are considered and articulated. An estimated 40% of Australians do not have a valid will. GROW Australia is pleased to be able to offer this service to our community at no cost.



Member Survey – Our impact story

Every year, GROW undertakes a member survey to gather valuable data from members about the makeup of our member base and the efficacy of the Grow Program. For the 2022 survey:



“Many participants commented that the connection with other people and the ability to help others as a way to help themselves was a core component of the elements that positively impacted their recovery.”



Insight - GROW is directly contributing to reducing our members' sense of loneliness and isolation through community building activity.



Odd Socks Day 2022

Odd Socks Day is GROW's major awareness raising campaign that kicks off Mental Health Week. It's a fun and light-hearted approach to supporting mental wellbeing, raising awareness about the issues surrounding stigma and discrimination, starting a nationwide conversation about mental health, understanding that anyone can have an odd day and learning that we can all make a difference.

Odd Socks Day aims to empower everyone to realize that they can make a meaningful difference in the lives of those affected by mental health challenges.

It celebrates our shared humanity by acknowledging that everyone, regardless of background or circumstance, can have an "odd day." This simple yet powerful gesture reminds us that we all face challenges and struggles at some point in our lives.

The colourful, mismatched socks worn on this day represent the diversity of experiences and emotions that make us human. It's a reminder that embracing our unique quirks and imperfections can be a source of strength and connection.

We hosted a national online event again this year and the feedback was incredibly positive. Grow Branches across Australia hosted local activities and events to support the awareness campaign.

The #OSD2022 pic and tag promotion resulted in great social awareness. Social media became a real centre point to the campaign and offers a great opportunity for development in future years.

Sock it to Stigma

GROW Australia launched a sock subscription service last year as part of Grow's fundraising efforts. The subscribers receive custom designed pairs of socks every month along with Grow wisdom cards. GROW has also taken over the management of the sock subscription and sales service.

eStore

GROW expanded its services in 2022 by introducing an estore on our website. This estore platform offers a range of products to customers. These items include literature and GROW branded merchandise such as hats, t-shirts and hooded jumpers.



Ballina Growers having a laugh on Odd Socks Day 2022



Growers enjoying lunch out and promoting Odd Socks Day 2022



Board of Directors



John Della Bosca A.M – Chair

John has extensive experience within the health and mental health sectors, having held such positions as the NSW Minister for Health, Associate Director of the Whitlam Institute (University of Western Sydney), Chairman of Family Drug Support and served on the boards of Coast and Country Primary Care and Independent Community Living Australia. John also led an important campaign called Every Australian Counts – to increase grassroots support for the introduction of the NDIS – displaying diverse and valuable skills that will be critical to the success of GROW's future strategic plan. John is highly accomplished – having been awarded an Order of Australia in 2020, the PRIA Golden Target Award in 2013 and the Ted Noffs Humanitarian Award in 2001. He completed a PhD in History (2023), after already earning a Masters in Letters with merit in 2010.



Ina Mullin – Deputy Chair

Ina has over 20 years' experience in stakeholder engagement and communication. She is the inaugural Director of Partnerships and Engagement at the National Suicide Prevention Office after serving as Director, Communication and Engagement at the National Mental Health Commission. Prior to this she held business development, brand management and public relations roles at a variety of NFP suicide prevention and mental health service providers, most recently as National Manager Communication and Public Affairs at Lifeline Australia. Ina holds a Master of Arts in Communication Management, an Executive Master of Business Administration and a Bachelor of Arts (Hons).



Heath Fereday – Director

Heath has over 10 years of experience in working with the Grow Program and more than 7 years of experience in Program and Consumer Leadership Roles within GROW. Heath was the Chair of the South Australian Branch Program Team (elected peer leaders), is a member of the National Program Team and is an active member of the GROW Community and was nominated to the Board by his peers.



Board of Directors



Jeremy Morse – Director

Jeremy is a CPA, with extensive experience in the for-purpose community sector, primarily centred on aged care, disability and mental health support services such as the NDIS. While his work has covered the breadth of accounting and finance functions, his recent focus has been providing reliable advice to Board and Executive decision makers. Alongside his financial leadership roles, he is also a director of an ethical investment company operating in Pakistan. He is a member of the AICD and holds a Master of Accounting from the University of Tasmania.



Dr Judith (Judy) Edwards – Director

Judy has a strong commitment to community service and lifelong learning and has qualifications in medicine and public health. Her interests have taken her on a stimulating career path through general practice, politics – where she was the West Australian Minister for the Environment and then the not-for-profit sector, leading a small medical research foundation. She was also involved in the implementation of new mental health laws in WA in 2014. Judy currently chairs an advisory board at Curtin University engaging community and industry and promoting digital transformation. She is involved with several local community services and other organisations and kayaks for relaxation in her spare time.



Mark Lacey – Director

Mark is a mental health professional with twenty-six years' experience. He has fought for the recovery of those with mental illness and for systems that routinely provide for that recovery over that time. Mark commenced a Master of Philosophy degree in the field of moral theology in 2022. Mark has been a Grow member for twenty-three years, a leader in Grow for sixteen years, and Chair of the Vic-Tas Branch Program Team for four years and a member of the National Program Team. Mark is a member of the four-person sub-committee of the NPT charged with leading the consultations to rewrite the Blue Book, Grow Australia's main piece of literature. Mark is a foundation member and current chair of the Insights Mental Health Group Ballarat, 2005 to the present.



John Maclsaac – Director

John has worked as a consulting engineer for over 30 years in the minerals industry. He has participated and volunteered in the GROW program in various roles since 2006 and is a Member of the Australian Institute of Company Directors.



Board of Directors



Sonia Di Mezza – Director

Sonia is a solicitor and human rights lawyer. She has been the CEO of the Loddon Campaspe Multicultural Services in Bendigo, Victoria, supporting refugees and migrants with settlement services. Sonia has set up and managed human rights projects in Pakistan and Sudan; worked as a Resettlement Consultant for the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees in Lebanon; worked in India promoting the rights of child labourers and as a Refugee Lawyer in Australia. Sonia worked for eight years as the Deputy CEO of the ACT Disability, Aged and Carers Advocacy Service (ADACAS) in Canberra, advocating for the rights of people with mental ill health, people with disability and older people. Sonia holds a Master of International Law, majoring in human rights law.



Steve Ryan – Director

Steve has had extensive exposure across the public, superannuation, union and not-for-profit sectors. He has held roles as a secondary school teacher, Queensland Teachers' Union President, a Trustee of the QSuper Board and a director of QInvest. He is currently the board chair of two Qld Government Statutory Authorities - Health and Wellbeing Qld (HWQ) and the Residential Tenancies Authority of Qld (RTA).



Virginia Slaughter – Director

Virginia is Professor and Head of the School of Psychology at the University of Queensland. A developmental psychologist by training, Virginia's own research focuses on social and cognitive development in infants and young children. In her 25-year career as an academic, Virginia has published more than 100 peer-reviewed articles and chapters and has received several teaching awards, including an Australian Award for University Teaching (in the category Teaching Large First Year Classes). She is a Fellow of the Academy of the Social Sciences in Australia.



Branch Reports

Victoria

Victoria has seen a year of growth, connection, partnerships and a focus on getting back to basics. It's been rewarding to experience the resilience of our Growers and groups return to normalcy after the challenges we have faced these past few years. Our Program workers have worked hard to re-introduce new groups and, with the support of our Grow leaders, see our groups return to vibrant and authentic groups. We have had a busy year of training our leaders through O&R meetings, O&R training, and leadership meetings.

One of the highlights for the year was Victoria's particular focus on social connection. The spirit for this was seen with many socials held at group, regional and branch levels. Our eGrow groups also transformed their online space and held regular online socials throughout the year.

Grow was chosen by the Ballarat Rugby 7's Annual Fundraiser to be the recipient of a very generous \$2500 raised by the Rugby club. We were proud to be involved and enjoyed presenting the winning team with a pair of Odd Socks to celebrate the win.

Within the sector there has been rapid change and transformation and we've seen the introduction of many of the recommendations from the Victorian Royal Commission into Mental Health taking place. This has created opportunities for partnership and we are excited to be partnering with Local Mental Health and Wellbeing Adult hubs and many other service providers in the space.

Get Growing is continuing throughout Victoria with six Schools participating in the program this year. Our Youth Program Workers have worked hard to foster relationships with Primary Schools, High Schools and the students who so courageously participate in the program.

Victoria is looking forward to continuing its growth and delivering our program to the Victorian community.



Victoria Youth Program workers who deliver Get Growing and young adult groups





Artwork Growers completed at Victoria Community weekend



Winning team from the Rugby 7's Charity Fundraiser event



Victoria Tasmanian Team



Paul Cooper receiving the 2022 Con Keogh Award with Dishni Fernando (Vic Branch Admin)



Tasmania

Our beloved Tasmania has had a strong year with full membership and many vibrant Grow groups. Tasmania excels in the eGrow space with many Tasmanians embracing the technology and appreciating the opportunity it presents to provide additional access to support.

The state enjoyed a much-returned Community camp with a special visit from Victorian BPT member Paul Cooper. Paul is the Con Keogh Award winner. The camp was filled with laughter, joy and connection. For many Online Growers the camp was the first opportunity to meet for the first time in person.

Grow was recognised in Tasmanian Parliament this past year with a great opportunity to meet the Premier and spread the word of the Grow program. Lots of connections were made with a special mention to the new Mental Health Integration hub that has opened in Hobart. We are proud to be introducing services at the hub and offer additional support within the State.

We look forward to another successful year with more groups and partnerships in the sector.

South Australia

Over the year Grow SA through its regular Grow groups meetings, eGrow offerings, Get Growing Youth program and Growing Resilience programs had 522 separate individual people in need become part of group meetings. This represents a 30% increase above KPI requirements. Beyond that these individuals also participated in regular group socials, Community Weekend retreats, Organiser and Recorder Training Weekend retreats, Leadership meetings and Branch Leadership days, Workshops, Promotional and Outreach activities and so on.

This was a welcome influx in Grower attendance – as people continued to flow into Grow groups in SA, SA branch was able to offer face to face, online and hybrid (online and face to face combined) meetings where relevant to help members who were unable to attend due to being located remotely, ongoing physical restrictions or ongoing pandemic issues and or illness.

Our Annual Red Faces fundraising event was able to go ahead despite the absence of long time Sponsor, Coordinator and event originator Brenton Williams. Thanks to Christie Baverstock, Dylan Jones and the Grow staff team for stepping into the breach and carrying out a great event in his absence – and raising nearly \$30,000. We welcome the return of Brenton Williams for the 2024 Red Faces event which is tipped to be bigger than ever.

The Branch Program Team in SA welcomed three new first-time members in 2023. Special thanks to Isaac Southern for stepping up to the role of Chairperson for the first time.

Current Program Worker and Get Growing youth worker Georgia Flinn welcomed her first child in 2023 and subsequently has taken Maternity leave until early 2024. As a consequence, we welcome Holly Nash and Amelia Winter as Program Workers with an emphasis on development of Get Growing Young Adults groups online and regular face to face Grow groups.

Grow SA held a 'Live in' community weekend at Mylor Adventure camp for 30 people. SA also held an Organiser and Recorder training Weekend at Port Elliot SA for 26 members to support them in their new volunteer roles.

Grow continued and created new partnerships with Seaford Rotary, Mental Health Coalition of South Australia and The Northern Mental Health Alliance. Grow also joined with Mental Health Partners in putting in a joint submission and winning a grant to run five Mental Health First Aid Training courses – 'conversations about suicide', supporting more than 100 people.





Grow Quiz Night



Celebrating Grow's Birthday



Making inspirational pet rocks



SA Grower's group Social



Program worker Douglas serving Growers



Program workers in friendship chain



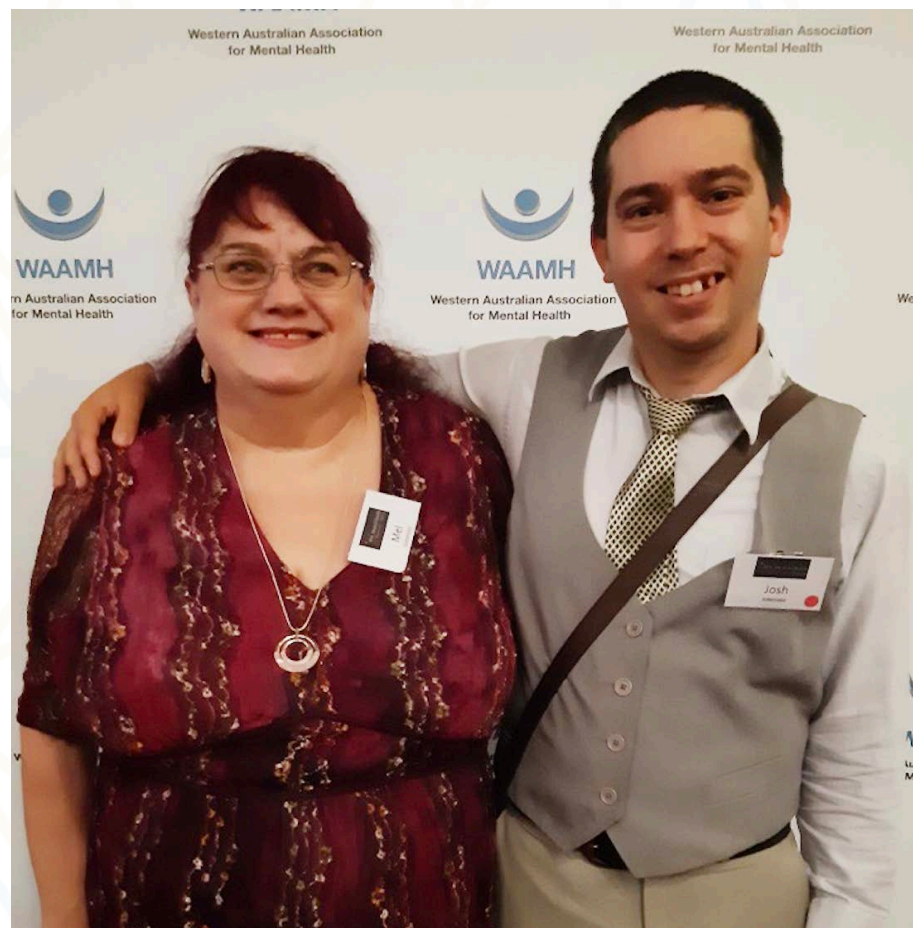
Western Australia

In WA the Growers voted to continue their Grow groups and develop the leadership of all members, even though funding became a major issue. Their decision meant the groups with leadership developed to sustainability could continue to fill in a huge gap in the WA community specifically devoted to mental health peer and mutual recovery and support by non-clinical intervention and prevention.

This is a testimony of the leadership engaged in by one of Grow WA's volunteers Mel Hayward. Mel began as a group member and eventually found the courage, with the support of her mentor, in the group to step into the role of a Recorder, and then an Organiser. Mel was nominated to be a member of the Branch Program Team and helped to build the sustainability of that team for the past six years, keeping the Grow Program authentic and developing the leadership of others. She was further nominated as the Chairperson of the Branch Program Team, a role she held for four years and was nominated on the National Program Team, where she represents WA with all aspects of the Grow Program. From taking minutes at meetings, to Chairing the WA Program Team, to engaging in problem solving at all levels of the community, she has represented the voices of her lived experience peers for continued support through the Grow Program for their mental health.

In a recent interview Mel said: "It is a fantastic way to communicate and share hope for the future and convey the benefits of the Grow grassroots program; keeping the community in contact with each other." She has developed a range of other activities in codesigned ways with lived experience peers for Grow community weekends where people who are nervous or unsure can participate in the community.

Mel remains highly aware that Grow is grassroots and people developed. By her sheer determination through the Grow Program to recover from her own mental health issues, she has been a wonderful role model, mentor and contributor to help break barriers of mental health in our WA community, at all levels.



BPT Members Mel and Josh attended the WA MH Awards event in Nov 2022



Northern Territory

2022-2023 has been another year of positive growth for the NT Branch, with opportunities present that had been absent for years prior.

Following an extended term performing the roles of Organiser and Recorders, we had newly nominated leaders step into the roles. This transition has given great opportunities for the new leaders to form and grow in their positions, maturely supported by those leaders who had come before them. The groups have gathered momentum, with regular members attending each week ensuring a quorum. The schedule of GROW's annual cycle has been successfully implemented, with both bimonthly O and R and Leadership meetings taking place and generally well attended.

The NT is also participating in SA's BPT, with 2 local representatives.

Following 10 plus years, the branch had their community weekend! The weekend was themed on Step 7: taking care and control of our bodies. With support of other community services, new ways were introduced to the attendees to activate the Step: Drama Play, Art and Dancing. 15 members attended the overnight event on the provision laid out from the onset: 'just give things a go' resulting in people stepping out of their comfort zone to discover new and fun ways of meaningful movement. Some feedback from the activity included: 'Excellent company and venue', 'loved the dancing and getting to know each other', 'I tried things I wouldn't ordinarily do'.

In the lead up and during mental health week, Darwin's Party Passport committed to donating any funds raised at Drag Bingo to Grow. Members supported the event by attending and helping sell Odd Socks and collect donations – a wonderful example of Leadership! \$550 was raised over the 2 evenings, with funds being committed to supporting those members who do not have transport to access more social and leadership events. During October Grill'd Restaurant also collected donations for GROW, to go towards the delivery of Get Growing.

Following the success of the Community weekend all members have actively focused on collecting gold coin donations over the year to dedicate monies raised to go towards another weekend in the next financial year. Their commitment and generosity have made this come into fruition. The Branch has also been collaborating with a Get Growing Champion school which, with the support of the Student Representative Council (SRC), has hosted OSD awareness and fundraising BBQs throughout the school year. At the most recent event, a young representative on the SRC approached staff advising them he had participated in the Program the previous year and it 'changed his life'. Locally, the Branch also delivered some successful fee-for-service Programs of Growing Resilience and Get Growing in the residential rehab and NDIS space.

Our inaugural Leadership Day was a learning opportunity for all! Members worked together to select some locally chosen wisdoms to be presented for consideration in the review of the Blue Book as well as vote on the NPT suggested changes and additions to be made. We would still like to encourage more NT members to consider putting pen to paper, either through recording their personal testimonies or objectively scribe a piece relevant to the GROW Program.

Last but definitely not least, it has been a great year of socialisation! Through the formation of the fun committee, we have had some wonderful all group socials and events, including sunset BBQs, Movie outings and a very successful event of Musical Bingo! Members took the lead in arranging all things associated with the event, including securing a venue, arranging the actual game, catering and contributing donations for prizes. Even more magically, on Christmas day, members decided to open the community space to host an orphans Christmas – noting how challenging the day can be for many people, the event broke down isolation and loneliness and was a very selfless example of GROW's community spirit.



Following 40 years presence in the NT, the Branch was sadly informed that their funding through the NT Government will cease at the end of the calendar year. Members have been advocating for a decision change to their local members, with staff also hoping to secure monies from elsewhere.

134
Group meetings including O & R and leadership involving **257** attendees on **1575** occasions

21
Socials were held over **105** hours

60
Get Growing delivered on five occasions supporting **60** young people

24
Growing Resilience: Four Programs online supporting **24** people

48
Two programs F2F: **48** attendees
(noting these groups were more of a facilitated conversation versus intentional Peer to Peer support).



Celebrating taking care and control of our bodies at our first community retreat in many years! Practicing mindfulness through art.



New South Wales

Another huge year for the Grow Program in NSW. The region remained strong and with a busy calendar of leadership meetings, O&R meetings, hospital orientations, training weekends and Branch Program Team meetings.

We continued upskilling our Growers with weekly Tech Time and welcomed a large number of people through our 'Welcome to Grow' sessions via zoom. Continuing our tech transformation, we now have an increasing number of groups becoming hybrid to make meetings more accessible.

One of the largest projects undertaken this year is the Blue Book Review which is being updated for the first time in 12 years. A live and large leadership example in codesign, our NSW Grow leaders have contributed papers and ideas to the review as well as attending two leadership days where they voted on proposed changes.

NSW also was successful in securing two years' funding in the Northern Rivers for our Get Growing Youth Program.



Staff from the East Region made a stop on their way home from Bundeena to meet with Sydney Growers for a picnic lunch in Hyde Park

28
Groups

670
Attendees

1150
Meetings

526
First timers



Metro region Growers enjoyed a regional social at the Hazelhurst Art Centre





Community Training Weekend held in the beautiful Coffs Coast Adventure Centre



Growers from Lismore and Ballina provided support for the 2022 Northern Rivers floods



Community training weekend in Greenhills ACT to build friendships and program knowledge



Growers from the Central Coast sharing the hopeful and healing message of GROW at the Seniors Expo in February



Growers enjoying bushwalking at the Community Training Weekend at Coffs Coast Adventure Centre, August 2022



In August 2022 The Nowra eGrow group attend the annual Thrive Together Fair to let the community know about GROW's free Peer to Peer mental wellbeing support



Queensland

Queensland has continued to build on the solid foundation that was built in the previous year. QLD now has a thriving Branch Literature Team, a new Grow centre and a newly elected Branch Program Team. We have had stable staffing and an active branch calendar with the Annual Branch Conference, Community Weekend and Blue Book Reviews Leadership Day attracting a lot of interest. The Queensland Branch also laid the foundation to open a series of new groups.

The Queensland Branch secured additional funding for the coming years which means QLD welcomes a new Program Worker on the Gold Coast for the new financial year.



Stall at International Mental Health Conference

11

Active Groups

243

Attendees

497

Meetings

79

First timers



QLD growers enjoying the talent show at the community weekend



Australian Capital Territory

The ACT has been going well with 3 regular hospital orientations and steady attendance at groups. There are first timers joining meetings at the group at Gungahlin and some great emerging leaders from Narrabundah House.

3

Groups

87

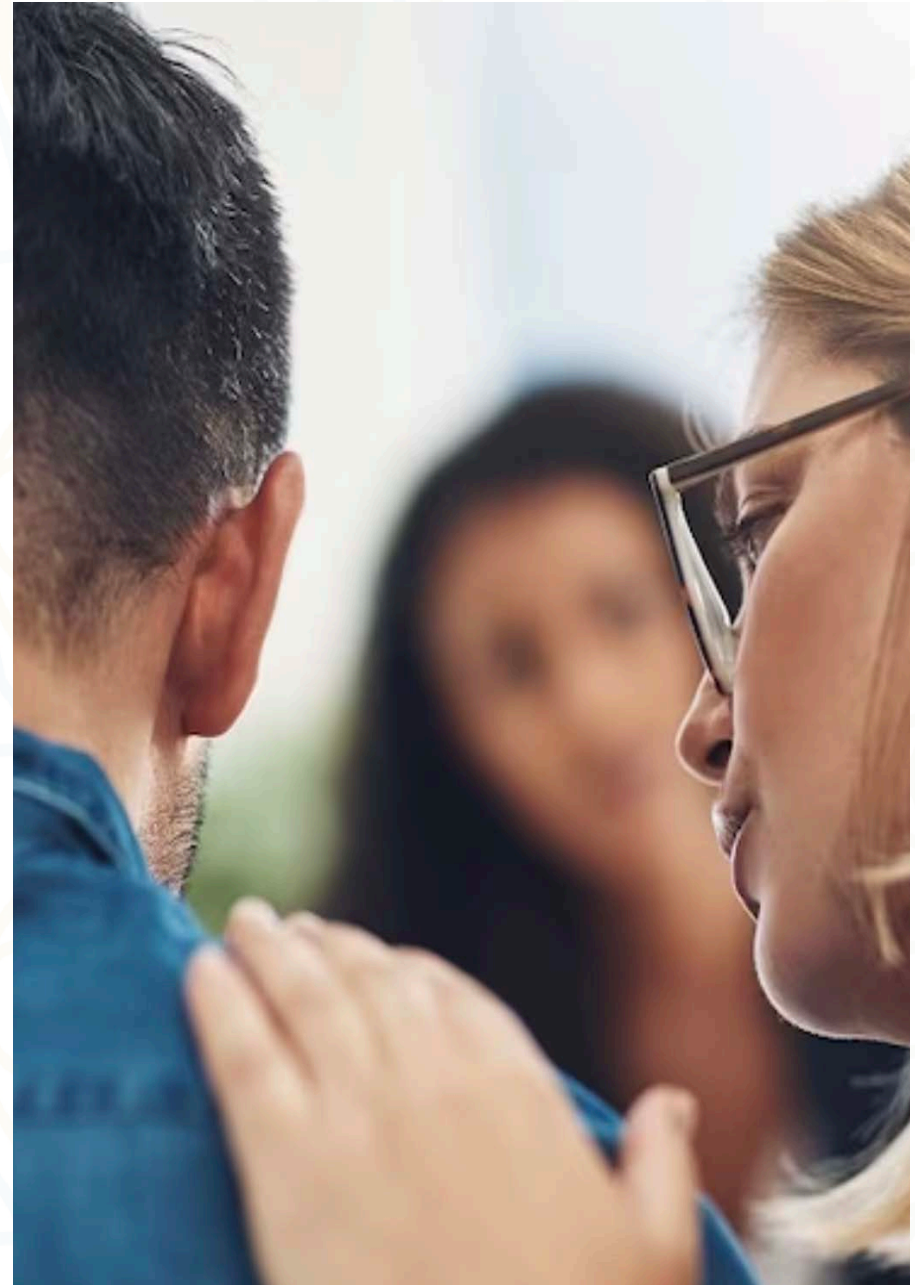
Attendees

129

Meetings

37

First timers



How has GROW been the Answer to my Recovery Journey?

Peter – Grow Resident, NSW

I come from a dysfunctional family and a broken home.

I have always had major trust issues stemming from my mother abandoning our family when I was five.

This left me feeling alone, depressed and angry as a child. My dad, a single father did his best to raise three children, however he was always depressed and frustrated as he couldn't support us the way he wanted to.

When I was 10, I started to hang around older males and started smoking weed and experimenting with alcohol and other drugs. I committed petty crimes to support my habits and was well known in the justice/police departments.

By the time I was 16 I was a full-blown drug addict and I continued down that path for another 10 years, during which time I also lost custody of my daughter. After being incarcerated several times due to poor decisions made in active addiction, I finally made the first step to better my life and come to GROW to seek help.

Since coming to GROW, I am gaining a lot of confidence that I can live and have fun being clean and sober.

My sense of self-worth is growing every day and I am realizing I am capable of a leadership type role within the community. I am starting to get in touch with my true self, the person I buried inside for all these years. That person is kind, polite, generous, sensitive, honest and caring.

Most importantly, I have learnt that every day I can choose a better life for myself and that I deserve and am worthy of a good future, being happy and healthy.

I have also learnt that I can change and can be a functioning member of society.

I now know that I am not so different than everyone else and that my ego needs a bit of work.

With the help from GROW, my future will have me studying a certificate 4 in Community Services or AOD so I can one day work with addicts to share what I have learnt at GROW and help other people that have suffered like I have.

Another goal of mine is to gain joint custody of my daughter, have my own place of residence and a car.

Nothing too fancy.

I used to make the mistake that peacefulness was boring, but now my future will have peace and stability, free of addiction.

Thank you GROW for all you have done for me.

Peter

“I have learnt that every day I can choose a better life for myself and that I deserve and am worthy of a good future, being happy and healthy.”



James – Grow Resident, NSW

I came to Grow a broken man. My marriage, career, reputation, self-respect, all gone and I saw no hope for my future. I had just come off a huge bender, where I had drunk non-stop for 5 days straight, stopping only for small breaks when I would fall unconscious. Things were bad. My family had lost all trust in me, almost giving up all hope that I would recover.

I grew up in a conservative, Christian home on a farm about 30 minutes outside of Mudgee. I loved the outdoors and some of my earliest memories are that of me running around the bush, hunting and camping with friends. It was a simple, sheltered life. I often remember those days as the best of my life.

My father was a local solicitor in town and my Mum worked as a Children's Librarian at the local library. I had an older brother and sister. I was the youngest. My family had very strong views towards alcohol. We had a long history of alcoholism and it meant that I always had a good understanding of the dangers of it. My mum sometimes had a drink, although this was only ever one or two glasses of wine over dinner and I never once saw my dad have a single drop of alcohol.

I had a solid group of friends and although we had thought that we would remain friends for the rest of our lives, this would end up not being the case.

While growing up, I had always been valued on what I achieved in life, rather than who I was as a person. I struggled with trying to find things that my dad would be proud of me for. I chose everything in life with the intention of pleasing him. What sport I played, what subjects I chose at school, what career path I wanted to go down. All of them were chosen because I wanted my father's approval.

I remember returning from a rugby game one Saturday and dad asked me what I wanted to do when I finished year 12. I said that I wanted to be a police officer. His response was "Oh James, I would be so proud if you did that".

Suddenly that is all I wanted to do. I wanted to be a cop no matter what. I even managed to convince myself that I wanted to do it for me, rather than my dad. At 19 I was at Goulburn Police Academy and graduated a few months later. My first station was to be Moree. I was disappointed at this, as I had wanted to go to a town closer to my family, friends and girlfriend.

I really enjoyed my first few months of work, however soon things would begin to get serious. I was only a social drinker before coming to Moree, having maybe a beer or two when I was out, but when I started to experience traumatic incidents such as homicides and fatal car accidents, my drinking started to escalate.

Soon drinking was just part of my everyday life. I would get up in the morning and had to drink to get myself motivated to work. This would continue upon getting home.

I soon met a woman named Lawrie and about a year later we were married. She knew that I liked a drink but did not fully understand the extent of it. It would later turn out that we were in no way compatible with each other and that the only reason she married me was that she wanted to be with a police officer and I married her so that I would not be alone anymore.

During this time my father was diagnosed with leukaemia and shortly after passed away. This threw my mental health into chaos, as the foundation of what I had built my life on was now gone. I had built up my dad's approval to be the most important thing in my life and now he was gone, I was left in the lurch.

My drinking began to spiral out of control. I was now drinking at work and stealing alcohol from friends and family to feed my addiction. I was never drinking in a social sense, it was always at home, away in my study. I wanted to hide away from the world and the way I found I could escape was through blackout drinking. On an average day where I wasn't working I could be consuming anywhere between 6-8 bottles of cheap wine a day.



Alcohol would slowly break down everything I had and eventually I would leave my career, lose my marriage and be forced to move back with family who were now living in Orange. My drinking was constant and I was now doing so to try and numb the feelings of pain and betrayal I had felt at my wife leaving me. I went to a couple of short-term rehabs, all of which were great for learning about myself, but it took no time at all for me to relapse.

It was clear to me and my family that something long-term was needed.

Then, somehow, I was fortunate enough to land at Grow Rehab. My first reaction upon arriving was to find an excuse to leave as soon as possible. I was scared, angry and bitter, but I stayed. I knew that if I left, there would be a very high chance that my next relapse could be the death of me.

My first few weeks were very difficult and I was looking for any excuse to leave and return to Orange. I was scared about what sobriety would look like and I was worried about meeting the real James, the one not effected by alcohol. At times I had to take each day hour by hour, knowing that all I needed to do was get to bed that night. Thankfully the structure of the program made it easy to break up my day into achievable goals.

As time continued, I began to surrender to the program and staff assisted me in helping me work through my resentments. There were so many of them; from my dad, my ex-wife, to the Police Force, to my old friends and even to myself. Working through each of these issues helped me to move on from them and as time went on, the pain that each one held over me began to dissipate. I still had many areas of maladjustment, that being my pride, defensiveness, and the fact that I would take a lot of criticism personally. These are things that I can still struggle with today, but I have worked on them and have found ways of thinking them through before they can become an issue. I found the therapeutic community aspect to be one of the best things about this program. It means that if I was ever struggling, needed help or even just a good laugh, I knew that there was someone like me always nearby. A fellow addict, who understood where I was at and what I needed in life.

Before coming in, there would have been a very high chance that I would have been dead within a month, either by my own hand or by the bottle, and now, with my graduation just around the corner, I can see a bright future for myself.

I have started TAFE, doing a Certificate 4 in community services, with the intention of going on to complete my diploma, specialising in Alcohol and Other Drugs. I want to start a career in this area and help those who are in addiction.

All the resentments I had which had initially caused me to drink have now become old memories of my past life. They still hurt and I think they will for quite some time, but I know now that I don't need to drink to cope with it. I have tools and ways to deal with them and I can now look to my future with hope. I have forgiven myself for the mistakes of my past. I was not a bad person, I was sick. This realisation has helped me to move on from my pain, and although it can still sometimes rear its head, I am able to get on with my day, without the need for alcohol.

I have started up a bunch of my old hobbies that drinking made me put to one side and I have even started writing my first novel. I don't know if it will ever be completed, or even if it will be any good, but just having a project to focus on is a huge deal for me and can give me something to focus on and be excited about.

I do not resent alcohol. It helped me through a lot of pain and difficulties in my life and I know that the problem is not alcohol itself, but with the wiring in my brain. The vast majority of people can consume alcohol in a responsible and moderate way, but I just happen to not be one of those people. What I can say is this. Grow saved my life and I will be forever grateful to the staff, the community and myself for giving me a new chance in life.

“Grow saved my life.”



Teena – Northern NSW Region

When I look back at my life, I can see how maladjusted I was.

There were lots of violent arguments in the house. Sometimes it was like walking on eggshells and we had to be careful with what we said so it was better not to say anything at all. Three to four times a year I was admitted to hospital with a croupe and came very close to dying a few times. It was scary for a child.

So, I grew up as a bit of a loner. I was very unsure of myself and learned very early on not to say anything. I missed a lot of school due to my health and I thought I was dumb because I was put in special classes at school. I grew up thinking that way about myself.

I suffered with anxiety and depression. I really wasn't coping well and no one understood, not even myself. I worked for some bad bosses who put me down and I was treated terribly.

I had been in a few relationships which weren't the best. I had 2 daughters and brought them up in these relationships. They developed health issues and I blamed myself for putting them through living with these relationships. My last relationship was 14 years there was mental abuse verging on violence. I had to get out of there and it was one of the hardest things I ever had to do.

I really wasn't coping. My doctor put me on medication and diagnosed me with manic depression, post-traumatic stress disorder and obsessive compulsive disorder. The medication dulled things but it really wasn't helping with my thoughts. I saw a psychologist, counsellor and a psychiatrist but I really needed more help. I became suicidal and ended up in the mental health ward. I really didn't know what was going on in this foreign place. I thought they were all crazy people. I couldn't see that they were suffering just as I was. I was in a very dark hole. It was hard for my family to see me because they did not know what to do or say.

While I was in the ward, two people from GROW came in. We were told by staff we had to sit and listen to these Growers. I didn't want to be there, but once the Growers started to talk I thought "Gee they were really sick and here they are telling their story with a smile on their faces". This gave me hope. They stayed and had a cuppa with us. They were just lovely and I got to see these people again on their next visit. I promised that I would go to the GROW group.

Once I left the mental health ward I went home to the same situation and the deep depression started again. I remembered that I had promised the two Growers I would attend the group. I had to travel half an hour to get to the group and one of the hardest things I ever had to do was to go in and sit with a group of strangers. I had no idea what was happening in the group and all I did was cry and shake. Someone brought me a box of tissues and said it was ok. Someone told their testimony and I thought "Wow that sounds a bit like me." The tea and coffee after the group was what really got me to come back to the group and the phone calls during the week made me feel special because someone cared enough to ring. I also enjoyed the socials.

It was nice being with other people who never judged and supported me every week. I started going to group every week. The psychologist I had at the time was quite impressed with GROW and how it was helping and encouraged me to keep going.

The group gave me the task to keep coming regularly to group and they also gave me a part of the program to learn. I didn't think I could remember anything but with some encouragement from the group and the fact that I wanted to look good, I started with learning two words at a time. I was astonished that no matter how badly I did they gave me praise. This encouraged me to start learning by heart the parts of the program I was given. I realized as time went on that the more I learnt the program, the more my thinking was starting to change and I was being more positive.



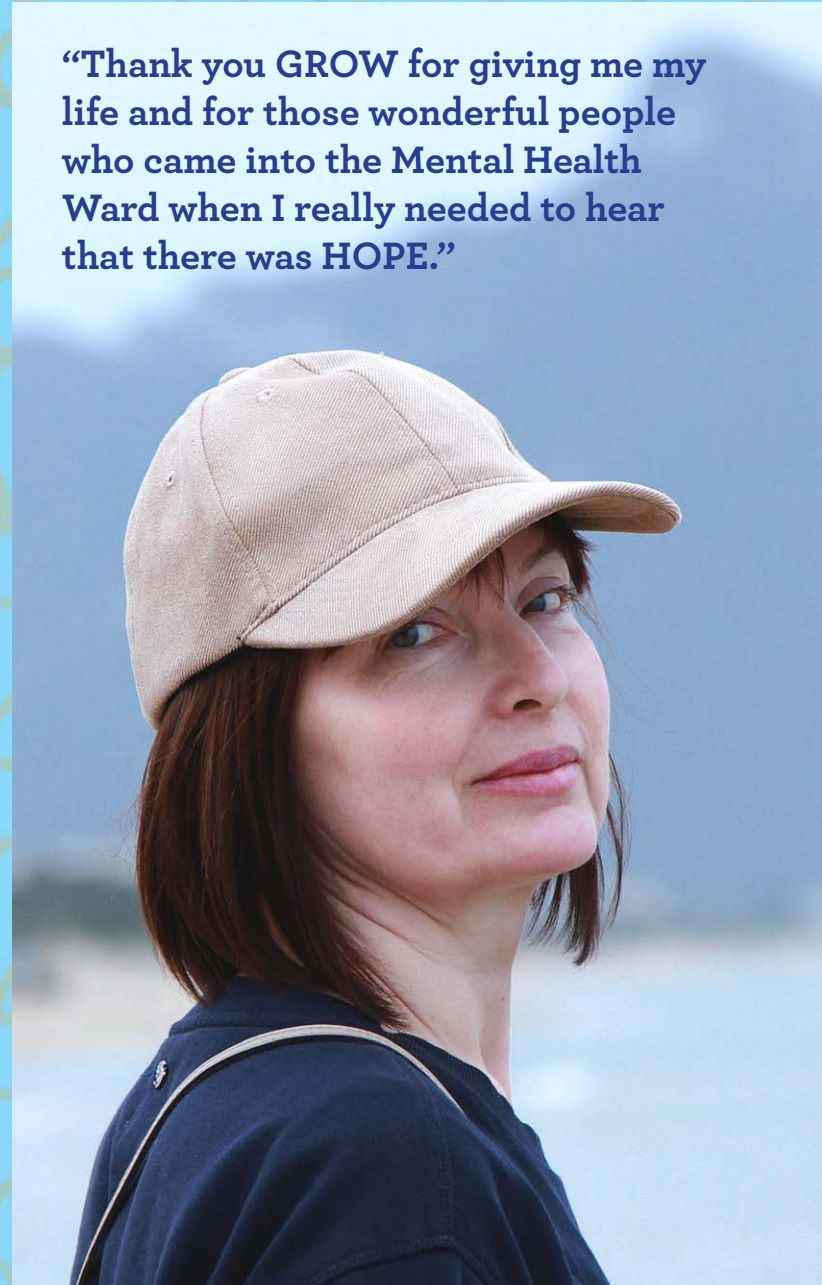
I found my voice and became a more confident woman. The practical tasks helped me change some of the things I was doing which weren't beneficial for my health. For example, I have chronic back and neck pain and was moving furniture around the house every day. It was not the right and healthy thing to do and the group gave me the practical task of letting the furniture stay where it was.

I thought a leader was someone who was the head of an organisation but I learned by coming to group, helping with setting up and taking my turn leading the meeting that this is what a leader is – someone who is helping others in the group while knowing, showing and going the way to recovery. I became a group recorder, then organiser, then program worker and now I am the Team Leader. I have grown into these roles and I was very unsure of myself at first, but I listened to my peers who said, “we know you can do this.” I now have a voice and I accept the challenges that are given to me instead of running when things get too much. I have not been back to hospital as a patient. Now it is me there telling my story of recovery through GROW and giving hope to others.

I have learnt to forgive myself and others because we did the best job, we could with the tools we had. I was in a group for two years before I became a Program Worker. I only missed two meetings in those two years.

I have found my true self for the first time in my life and I feel free to make the decisions I want to make. I had 54 years of baggage and through GROW I have worked on myself to stop looking back and keep looking forward. All up I have been with GROW 9 years. I really wouldn't be here if it wasn't for Growers that loved me back to health. This doesn't mean I don't have any more problems. I am still working on things and always will be, but life is pretty good these days and I am grateful for the people and things I have in my life.

“Thank you GROW for giving me my life and for those wonderful people who came into the Mental Health Ward when I really needed to hear that there was HOPE.”



Joanne – Wyong

I have suffered with mental illness most of my teen years and adult life. I was a painfully shy child and this continued in high school and into early adulthood. My mother also experienced mental illness and so recognised this in me, and got me the help I needed.

Throughout my life I have had a few hospital admissions and it was my last admission where I found Grow.

Five and a half years ago I came to my first meeting and with the help of the Organiser ringing me and encouraging me to come to further meetings, I persevered and it has paid off.

Until I found Grow, I relied on a psychiatrist and medication, but found going to Grow and adopting the program was more rewarding. I was reluctant at first but found the Growers friendly and like-minded. I made the commitment to Grow and regularly attended meetings and discussed my problems. I found solutions to my problems with the help from my Grow friends.

After some time, I was asked to take on the role of Recorder. I was very negative to begin with but reluctantly became Recorder of the Group. I found that I relished the role. It gave me confidence in relating to people and I felt I was contributing to a worthwhile cause.

I found by working closely with the Organiser I grew confident in organising social outings, running meetings and gradually my relationships with family and friends improved. I had a lot of problems at this stage and Grow helped me to work through them. My family seemed to reject me and I began to rely more on my Grow friends. I lost my dear son to illness four years ago and this was made worse by the family situation at the time.

I became Organiser of the Group and this gave me the opportunity to give back to people as they had helped me to recover. "Friendship is the special key to mental health": this is very true in my experience.

Keeping in contact through 12th Step work was hugely helpful as it gave me contact with people constantly. I am now Co-Organiser of the O&R team in the Northern Region. I have done many Hospital Orientations which are spreading Grow's hopeful and healing message to others in need. It is giving people the chance to recover through Grow, as I did.

I now have better relationships with people, especially my family. I appreciate life more and know that the best in life and love and happiness is ahead of me. I am still on my recovery journey, but it is a much more pleasant trip, and I am no longer dependent on professional help. Instead, I am travelling through life with my friends who are helping me along the way.

**“Friendship is the special key
to mental health”**



