

How COVID-19 is helping one man stay off the path of addiction

BY MADI CHWASTA



On the path to recovery, with thanks to COVID-19: Bryce Mold with Bluey and Bindi down by the beach at Phillip Island.

Bryce Mold's young life became a series of buried traumas – drug addiction, crime, suicide, and a gun threat in his Girgarre home while his children slept – until he discovered The Cottage in Shepparton.

Surprisingly, coronavirus has played a part on his road to recovery.

The 26-year-old left the residential rehab centre a little more than a week ago after a five-month stay, and has moved back home to Phillip Island to live with his dad Peter.

But because of social distancing restrictions, the rehab centre has begun streaming its daily classes online, which Bryce can access despite living 200 km away.

“I TUNE IN EVERY DAY TO GET MY FIX, AND MY CONNECTION,” HE SAID.

“I still get to learn something new every day.”

It's a connection he wants to maintain, after feeling helplessly alone in the grips of his addiction.

“I had attempted suicide,” he said.

“I thought it was the end of the road.

“There was basically nothing left.”

Bryce started his life "doing all the right things".

When he was 14, he lived in Merrigum, and loved racing motocross.

But then things began to spiral – he started going out with mates, which led to out-of-control drinking.

It wasn't long before he was handed a bag, and by his late teens, he was addicted.

“NEXT THING YOU KNOW, IT’S NOT SOMETHING RECREATIONAL ANYMORE,” HE SAID.

Most of the next few years was spent moving from town to town in Shepparton and surrounds, where his life was a series of close calls.

He was addicted to ice, worked full-time as an electrician, and was the sole support for his wife and kids.

When his wife left him, he began selling drugs.

It wasn't until he was robbed at gunpoint in his Gigarre home - with his three children sleeping in the next room - that he decided to leave the region to live with his dad in Phillip Island.

"I used to sleep with a gun beside my bed," he said.

"And I woke up to my own gun to my own head.

"I was essentially run out of town."

But he found the same crowd further south, and was eventually charged with a number of drug and dangerous driving offences that would have resulted in a jail term.

Awaiting his time in court, he was determined to get into rehab.

"I rang up (The Cottage) every week for a month or a half," he said.

"EVENTUALLY THEY GOT ME IN."

His life changed from that moment.

"I remember saying to my old man after one day there: this place is going to bloody work," he said.

From his first day at The Cottage, he has progressively worked through the pent-up grief that fed his addiction.

A new community: The Cottage members fresh from building fences in bushfire-ravaged Corryong back in February, including Bryce Mold, who is second from the right.

His mum had been addicted to drugs, and he has not seen her in years.

But he also realised he never processed the loss of his brother Daniel to suicide in 2011.

"I felt like I wasn't there for my brother," he said.

"I NEVER GRIEVED AND I PUSHED IT ALL AWAY."

"Until I got to The Cottage and understood the grief cycle, I wasn't able to get to the stage where it wouldn't hold me back."

He also discovered the power of connecting with others.

"The professionals say the opposite of addiction is connection," he said.

“We don’t really connect with everyone else, but you’re hurting more than anything.

“You think you’re doing well hiding behind closed doors, but the doors are just see through.”

His improvement was obvious to others, including the Magistrate - he was sentenced with a corrections order and community service.

“The prosecutor asked for jail, but the Magistrate said it would disrupt my recovery,” he said.

“I WAS VERY LUCKY – THE LAST PLACE I WANTED TO GO WAS JAIL.”

And his healing has been supported further through the online meetings, which have also helped other recovering addicts.

The Cottage general manager Aaron Gilhooley said two to three former residents had been joining the online sessions, and they were trying to get in contact with a few more.

He said they would “definitely” continue the service when the pandemic was over, as it was a way to ensure former residents could continue treatment once home, and for new residents to build relationships with people on the outside.

“People will leave and they say they’ll come back, but life gets in the way and they never come back,” Mr Gilhooley said.

“IT GIVES THE NEW PEOPLE WHO COME THROUGH A CHANCE TO SPEAK TO PEOPLE WHO HAVE GONE HOME.

“And we can keep a check on the people who’ve gone home.”

Now living by the ocean, Bryce is slowly getting back into the swing of life.

He has started picking up shifts here and there as an electrician, and has been spending quality time with his dad, his dad's new partner Catherine, and his dogs Bluey and Bindi.

“I’M FIVE-MONTHS CLEAN, AND I HAVEN’T BEEN FIVE MONTHS CLEAN SINCE I WAS 14,” HE SAID.

“(My dad said) it’s like having the old Bryce back.”

While he has made tremendous leaps from where he was at the end of last year, he still has a long way to go.

Right before he left rehab, he was dealt another blow - the intervention order preventing him from seeing his three children was extended for another 12 months.

But it didn't put him off his stride.

"I sat with that for three weeks, and I was still happy," he said.

"I had a massive kick in the guts, but I was still able to stand up strong and straight."

His goal is to keep going in the right direction, so he is able to see his children again.

"If I pick up a drug or go back, I'm that person they talk about in court."

He also has a longer-term goal to go back to The Cottage, to give back to the people who changed his life.

"I'd love to go back as a support worker at The Cottage," he said.

"Narcotics Anonymous is a 12-step process, and the 12th step is giving back to the community and addicts."

For those who are stuck in the cycle of addiction, he says going to rehab is the courageous option.

"IT'S NOT WEAK TO REACH OUT FOR HELP," HE SAID.

"If you've been there with a real issue, you'll find a solution."

And he's immensely proud of how far he has come.

"My biggest achievement is going to rehab – that's my pride and joy."

"It's how you bounce back that really defines who you are."

● For help or information, phone Lifeline of 131 114, or beyondblue on 1300 224 636.