

# Why I became a Peer Supporter

## ...a personal journey

I lived with this experience until I had to attend three funerals in the space of a fortnight in 2001 and had a mental breakdown. I contacted a mental health service provider and after some trouble, I convinced the operator that I had to see a psychologist in person as soon as possible. I then saw a psychologist and after just 2 sessions I considered myself cured. How wrong could I be?

I joined Murray SES in May 1983. In 1985 I was involved in the rescue of an 18-month old girl who had fallen down a bore hole on a property at Coolup. Her family had just purchased the rural property.

A local farmer offered to dig a 5-metre hole alongside of the bore hole. When the hole was dug, a ladder was dropped down, so we had access to the bore hole. Three of us went down the ladder and discovered that we had to dig through solid clay for approximately one metre.

While digging through this with a pick, I felt something soft, so the pick was no longer used. I continued digging with my bare hands. Eventually we had enough of an opening to insert a piece of wood into the borehole to stop the baby continuing down the borehole.

After we had enough clay cleared away, I was able to remove the baby from the hole and handed her to my two colleagues, who proceeded up the ladder to the Ambulance about 200 metres away.

I then thought, I'm down this five metre hole in the ground by myself and must pull myself together and get out of this predicament. I reluctantly climbed the ladder, and as I reached the top, I could feel the ladder moving side to side. I realised that I had to continue the climb and get on firm ground.

As I climbed to the top, I could see approximately 200 people around the ambulance in the distance, with no one considering my plight.

In 2023 I read a newspaper report of the incident, and it all came flooding back to me (39 years later). This required a further four sessions of EMDR therapy. I can now think about the incident without getting emotional.

Hopefully this will be the end of this process. **This is why I became a Peer Supporter**

Most of my time as a Peer Supporter is listening only, but I always give the information on who to contact for professional support.

There is also the situation where 1 or 2 minor jobs can have an effect when combined with another 12 or so. It's called the Cumulative effect.

*"Peer support is provided between two or more people who have similar or shared experiences, and who recognise each other as Peers.*

*Peer Support can be offered professionally (Peer Support Work), or informally (such as through friendships and support groups).*

*Mental health peer support can bring a range of benefits, such as friendship, empowerment, acceptance, stigma reduction and shared learning and insights for recovery.*

*Mental health peer support workers and programs can also bring about significant improvements in service cultures, towards more recovery-centred and trauma informed approaches."*

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