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The Association of Participating Service Users



Food

No. 47 Spring 2018

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Art:

Front page: Mural by Elle Street Art in Grey St, St Kilda
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Flipside No.47 Spring 2018

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All contents featured in Flipside are produced by people who use alcohol and drug services and by impacted family members.

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If you have any original articles, poems or artwork that you would like to see in Flipside you may submit them to:

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Editorial

Food, that very basic need of every living thing. Humans need it, and animals need it, plants need it, and even microorganisms need it. It is an essential requirement for life. So when a person’s relationship with food is compromised, it reflects a dysfunction in their relationship with life.

Why this happens cannot be fully captured by this editorial, but expert sources list a multitude of factors, including trauma, low self-esteem, mental illness, genetic predisposition and the cultural standards of beauty promoted by the media. Every person with an eating disorder has her or his own story to tell, as you will find in this issue.

Eating disorders are prevalent amongst women, although rates in men are also significant with around one-quarter of people diagnosed with eating disorders being male. Karen A. Duncan, the author of “Healing from the trauma of childhood sexual abuse: the journey for women”, maintains that high prevalence of eating disorders in women is caused by the impact of childhood sexual abuse. Thus the eating disorder becomes a way to regain control over one’s body, achieving the effect of becoming either invisible by depriving oneself of food or undesirable by overeating. But this attempt to exercise control eventually ends up controlling the person.

There are several types of eating disorders, the main ones being Anorexia Nervosa, Bulimia Nervosa, and Binge Eating Disorder. Although there are significant differences between them, the same person can suffer from any or all of these at different stages of life. Orthorexia is another, relatively new form of eating disorder, signifying an obsession with healthy food to a degree that actually damages a person’s health.

Comorbidity between drug addiction and eating disorders is very common: 35% of people with substance use disorders also have an eating disorder, compared to 3% of the general population. Conversely, around half of people with eating disorders have abused drugs and alcohol. Eating disorders often precede drug use, and, as some stories in this issue illustrate, drug use can begin because it supports eating disorders.

There is a dangerous myth that an eating disorder is a life-long condition. This is not true and there are many testimonies, including some stories in this issue, that recovery is possible. However, the options for treatment of co-occurring substance use and eating disorders are very limited. No one service in Victoria addresses both issues concurrently, so people often bounce between services, and it is a matter of luck in finding a combination of services that can collaboratively support the person to get better.

The stories in this issue are written at different stages of individual journeys and illustrate a variety of experiences. Some are about struggling, and others about overcoming. Some show that journey is hard, and others that it’s worth it. We thank our contributors for generously sharing their stories.

Edita

Slowly, gently, lovingly

I grew up in a house of dieters. I don't think my parents would think of themselves as weight-obsessed and I don't think my mother grew up being conscious of her weight, calories or her body size, but my father's side of the family are fastidious in almost every area of their lives and as his way was the dominant way, so were we.

We drank low fat milk and we ate low fat cheese. If we had fruit juice in the house, it was watered down. There were a few key dishes my mother made and the fatty meals: chicken schnitzel and toad in a hole were the ones I looked forward to most. I have always liked rich food and now that I am on the other side of my recovery, the sane side, I seek out intense flavours and I relish them!



But first there were long periods of eating very little and then eating a lot, interspersed with nights drinking, taking drugs and not being conscious of much except the dancing for six hours straight kept me slim. Little did I know that I could stay slim just by eating moderately. Everyone I knew watched what they ate.

What I don't eat very often now is confectioner's sugar. I don't pin it as "bad," or "wrong," or "out of my league," but my body, I found once I started listening to it, knows what it likes, and it doesn't like a lot of sugar.

It doesn't even like a lot of fruit. It likes healthy

fats. It likes vegetables, especially when they are slow cooked and once or twice a month, it relishes some sort of meat (usually beef or lamb because without it, I am prone to anemia). The odd pastry is good for the soul.

After a lifetime of living in deprivation, interspersed with moments of indulgence, I eat moderate amounts of the things I like and that works for me. As surprising as it is to me writing this now, I even exercise moderately.

This way of eating has not revolutionised my life as diets often make us feel they can, but it has allowed me to focus on other areas of my life that need attention: work, friendships, joy finances.

To recover from a food addiction that landed me in rehab at the age of 30, I joined Overeaters Anonymous. I stopped drinking and I don't take drugs. This allows me to be more conscious with my decisions, and although I don't feel I have mastered every aspect of my life (relationships and financials to go), I do experience a level of "recovery" I never thought possible.

I genuinely find food is in its place as nourishment and joy now (but not the only form of joy), and I have developed healthy habits I try to emulate in other areas of my life. I can nourish my body and be happy about it. I can finish a meal and leave it in the past. I can live a life that does not include obsessing about food. I can be healthy. Slowly, gently and lovingly. Easy does it.

G.G.W.



The “magic” mix

When it comes to addiction, for me, eating and appetite were the beginning to a life of substance. Growing up my siblings and I faced a multitude of fat shaming from our father, which led to varying severities of eating disorders/issues, low self-esteem and a constant craving for approval. Reputation and appearance was the epitome of my childhood and adolescent years.

First was alcohol to numb reality and to fill my stomach, meaning I wouldn't have to eat. However, this led to puffiness and bloating and eventually consequences on my health, where I had to quit in order to gain some quality of life back. One substance for another, cannabis was next, social use became nightly use on my own.

The social group I was involved in started using with me, a bunch of 'different' individuals that all seemed to need a way to cope. My closest relationship of them all had a severe, going on 10 year eating disorder, and we all started using MDMA and amphetamines. To my delight, I didn't eat for 2 days after my first use, and I lost 2kg. That became the key and the mixing of MDMA, amphetamines and cannabis was not only the ticket for my weight loss (my only goal), yet was also the ultimate fun. As a drinker I caused fights, I acted reckless and had police involvement more than I should with my inbred ideals of status. These illicit substances did the opposite, I had all the confidence in the world and I was fun. People wanted to be around me, I had lost 25kg in 3 months and I was getting positive attention. This attention and approval not only came from strangers and friends, I also received comments from my dad, "the root of all evil", confirming my need for these fat burning substances.

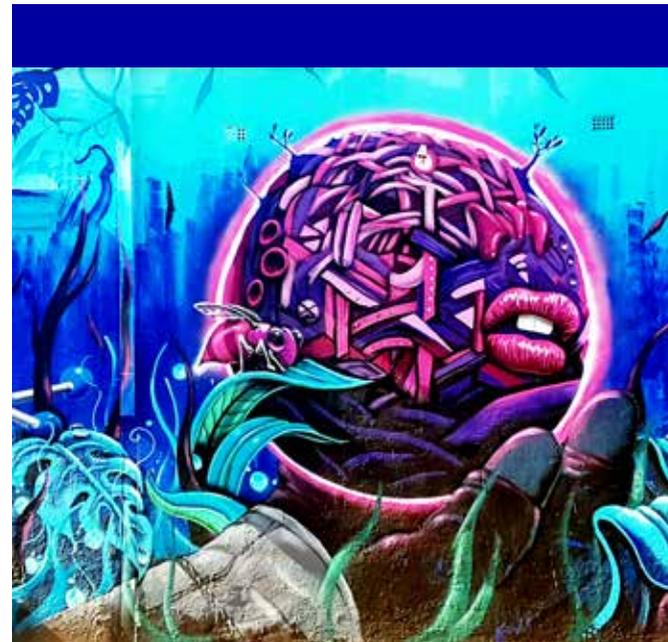
The partying took over my last year of high school, yet my main concern was my weight. I loved that I had lost so much weight so quickly that I would get looks. This set up my view on substances. They weren't bad, they were my success. I only used



amphetamines and MDMA on the weekends and eventually as a group we decided to cut back. Cannabis was a daily thing for all of us still and would continue for me even when we all parted ways. By this stage I had worked down my appetite to almost nothing, and had trained my brain to reward me when I was hungry. I no longer needed 'uppers'. Cannabis became the substance that I could maintain, no one could tell whether I smoked or not and therefore it was 'easy'. I had used long enough to get over the 'munchies' and so it got rid of any food cravings I had and was a great food substitute.

After years of balancing my addiction and my eating issues without too much notice, I got a job that meant I was very active. During this employment, I stopped having to worry as much about my weight, however, my addiction continued. I attempted to quit a few years later once I fell pregnant, though after the birth I couldn't lose the weight, and hadn't been that sober for 15 years. I couldn't cope. The weight, the hormones, the sleep deprivation... my insomnia was back and so the addiction started again. That brings me to now. Still battling with my weight, still battling my addiction, in my world they go hand in hand. I know that once I can defeat my self-image issues, I will be able to defeat my addiction.

Ocean



in the breath between
what seizures we allow
our incandescent
and blazing skulls ,
the grey and trembling
electricity of my silent
and secret self ,
believes yet in alchemy
and in ambition ,
and the immense hope
that the lost jewel
of perfect expression
is and was never lost ,
simply it is inured
to the plain sight
of what is now prosaic

by Luke Franceschini

There was no winning for me

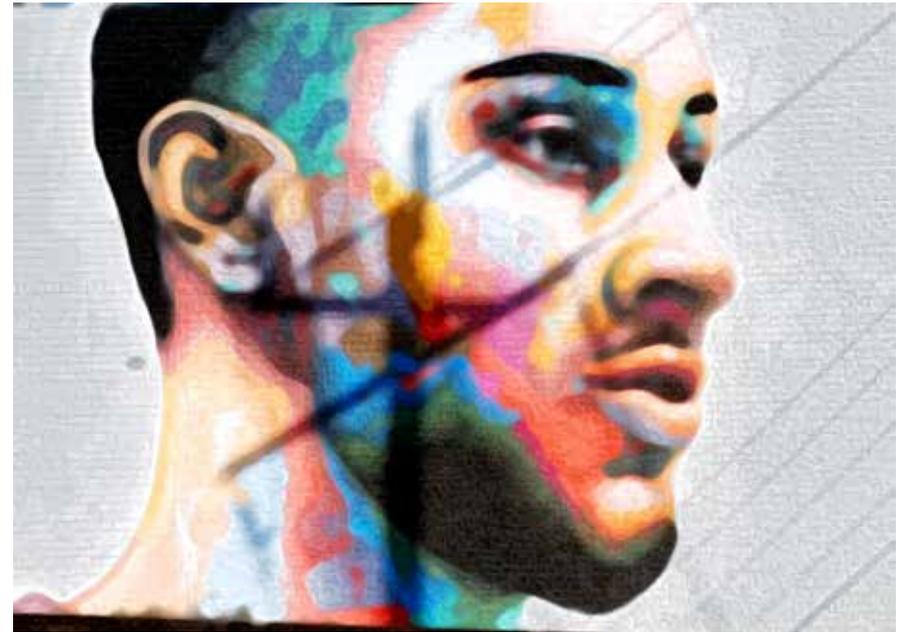
My story with drugs and eating disorders probably stemmed from when I was a kid. Being bullied in school for being overweight and having a father who would constantly dig at me for eating too fast, eating with my mouth open, looking fat or gaining weight. There was no winning for me as a kid. All through school nothing was ever good enough, and that in turn, I guess, is what made me feel like my body or my efforts in life were never good enough.

It took until year 8 until it really started to affect the way I felt about myself after I experienced some loss. The first time I ever made myself vomit was in year 9 because I wasn't happy with how much I ate and how I looked. This was about the same time I was dabbling in weed and magic mushrooms. Late that year I found myself not eating during the day and vomiting every dinner. I did not see it as an issue, as it was a way to enjoy food and be social, but not to put on weight. By the end of year ten, I would only ever keep breakfast down. When I left school and started working, I was being questioned on my eating habits and started drinking heavily.

Around half way through that year I started dabbling in speed and ice with a few mates, and soon I realized I could eat and drink as much as I wanted without getting fat as long as I was using speed or ice every day. It was then that my drug addiction started. It did not matter what it was – as long as it was an upper, I was happy. I was selling weed before this all started, so as soon as I started using speed every day I started selling that too. It seemed perfect, I was able to eat what I wanted, drink as much as I could, work harder, stay thin and make good money from it all.

This went on for a few years with only minor side effects, like moodiness. I thought it was going great, until I finally went to a dentist appointment and first saw some real side effects. I had to get 7 teeth pulled out and get 18 fillings, which cost me about \$7,500. This was a wakeup call to me, but not enough to make me stop, as I blamed it on the years of vomiting and energy drinks. It was easy to excuse my drug use and pretend to be in control, because it did not affect me financially. My friend was doing it, so it seemed normal, but he stopped Monday to Thursday, and I didn't.

I wouldn't go to work, to family events, anywhere without having a line or a bowl. I needed it to be normal and to function. It was not until late 2017 that I realised I had a problem after I lost the girl I thought I loved. She had a child and I was a dealer, so



that caused massive issues. I kept saying I was going to stop selling and using but kept making excuses as to why I couldn't just yet. Eventually she had enough and left me. A few weeks later I got my third DUI and found out my ex was hooking up with my so called best friend. This all took a pretty big toll on me, and to top it off me and my old man had a serious falling out .

I needed all that to happen to realise I need to get sober. I quit cold turkey and got rid of my friends. But when I got sober I realised my eating disorder was still a real issue as it came back with a vengeance. I started vomiting most of my meals back up. I knew it was not good for me but I couldn't stand looking at myself in the mirror. I decided I was going to join the gym, get fit and lose weight the right way. The gym and healthy eating helped a bit to slow down my vomiting, but when I slipped up, I would be straight in my throat with my fingers.

I am still battling with this to this day, and am still not happy with how my body looks or don't feel ok after I purge on too much food. Every day is a struggle, but I do what I can to keep my mind off it and worry about health. I think I am closer to having it under control.

Mark



I'll keep on going

by Brendan

It's not that things are rarely good

It's not that I've had it better of late

The things I should be doing I'm doing more often

The things I've wanted to do are starting to occur

I'm losing things in the process, I'm not sure if it matters

I'm losing time with those I care for by not being where I want to be

If it's not to occur soon then things will become more difficult

If it's not this time, not this person, then I don't know what to do

I see myself settling for less than I want

I see myself repeating the same mistakes

But I'm stronger than I give myself credit, so I take hope

But I'm also weak at times so I watch myself closely

When it turns around I'll share it with all that matter

When it turns around I'll no longer feel so alone

I just want things to turn around

Running

As a teenager growing up in a boarding school I developed an eating disorder, because I had low self-esteem and always felt that I was overweight. I became addicted to running. I ran every morning around the oval and I couldn't not do it. I lost a lot of weight rapidly and was treated for anorexia.

Even when I was tiny, I still felt fat and unlovable. I couldn't stop this obsessive behaviour and carried it forward into life. Even when I was suffering from a serious alcohol addiction, I also had bulimia and was misusing laxatives.

I married a man who treated me like I was an animal. My drinking took over and bulimia got worse and worse. I am alcohol free today, but my eating disorders persist, even though my husband left me for another woman. I have tried all my life to fit in and that is what started my drinking. When my mother died, my husband and in-laws laughed. I stayed in that marriage even when my ex-husband split my head open and bashed me, because I felt like that is what I deserved.



Slowly today I am trying to get better, but I still have low self-esteem. Even today I still struggle with my eating and exercising, as I still feel unlovable. When you start using alcohol just to cope with the self-hatred you feel inside, and you hide it like you are doing with your eating disorder, it is a lonely life as you struggle to somehow get up each morning and cope.

I have a psychiatrist now, trying to treat both my alcoholism and eating disorder. I also get a lot of counselling from ReGen, which is the only thing that keeps me going some days. I believe that the link between the two diseases is the same low self-esteem and extreme self-hate and never being good enough.

I was addicted to my running when I was going to school. I could not function if I didn't run every morning. I have spent my life running away and hiding behind an eating disorder and alcohol. I consumed large amounts of alcohol so it was easier to vomit. Alcohol allowed me to not live in the world, as I didn't want to live in the world, and have gone through periods when I thought the world would be better without me.

I didn't go to school for a long time as a child and was home schooled, as I grew up without electricity. This made school quite traumatic for me.

I believe eating disorders and alcoholism are actually untreatable diseases unless you change. I know my eating disorder is still here with me. I have used a lot of Louise Hays books etc to try and believe I am good enough. I have stayed away from men, because they are attracted to women like me who they can control. Now I just live with my two sons, aged 15 and 18, as I am scared to get into another relationship in case domestic violence occurs again. People also don't understand domestic violence and why you stay. You stay because you believe you deserve it.

Lou



I'm Not Hungry

If you took one look at me, you'd never guess in a million years that I had bulimia for nine years. It was never about body image for me, just pure and utter self-hate. I first started sticking my fingers down my throat eleven years ago when my first live-in girlfriend dumped me. She made me feel used, cheap and dirty. After she broke the news, I immediately ran to the toilet and made myself throw up. It calmed me down, and an idea struck in my mind; "What if this made me feel better all the time?" It became part of my new daily routine...

My alcoholism had reached a new stage at that point. I learned to drink alone, in secret, and then threw up all the guilt the next day. No one knew I did this until about three years ago when I brought up a huge amount of blood and immediately became a regular at the Royal Melbourne Hospital. 'Mallory Weiss Tear' was my new official diagnosis, partnered with my out of control alcoholism and my ever-raging anxiety. The alcohol soothed my anxiety, and the vomiting eradicated the perpetual guilt from the drinking. It was a vicious cycle. And, if I was lucky enough to bring up blood, I'd go back to the hospital, and get out of going back to work at the job I despised with a passion.

Don't get me wrong, I still ate sometimes, but when you're an alcoholic, you don't need to. The chef with an eating disorder - how ironic! Whilst I was working, I was up to one large bottle of straight spirits per day. After I quit my job and had my nervous breakdown, I was drinking FOUR bottles of cheap wine per day. No room for food there...

I stopped sticking my fingers down my throat when I decided I wanted to get sober. After my third stay at a withdrawal unit, my hunger came back with a vengeance. Sugar! Sugar! Sugar! Craved it like mad, but because of all the damage I had done to my stomach and oesophagus, I had to have a very strict diet loaded with psyllium and vitamins to get rid of the acid reflux. I used all natural methods and it worked. I wasn't ridiculously unrealistic with my new diet; only preparing food that I actually wanted to eat and keep down, and eating at appropriate times of the day.

I haven't turned into a health-freak by any means, but I've been sober for 18 months, and I'm learning to control my anxiety without drinking and then making myself vomit to get rid of the shame. My diet isn't perfect, but recovery is a non-stop learning experience all based on trial and error - I'm still trying to get it right. I didn't know bulimia was classified as a form of self-harm until one of my counsellors told me so last year. I wear my 'To Write Love on Her Arms' necklace with pride each day and it has a special significance to me which very few people know about. It's my new little secret.



Branka

Too much is never enough

Food is my drug. Not all food, just certain ingredients or combination of ingredients – sugar, fat, flour, any of these combinations, or all 3 together – I go nuts for doughnuts – literally! Once I get a taste of these foods my eating disorder is out of the gates and I am on a binge rampage that can take days to show any signs of slowing down. I am face down in the food, obsessed with food to the point where it's all I can think about. I will hide away to eat, go through every drive-through on my travels somewhere, and swarm around the kitchen looking for some kind of relief from the phenomenal craving I feel in my body. But, of course, whatever relief or high that I get from placing that food in my mouth is shortlived, only seconds long, I need more and more of that food. Too much is never enough. I eat to the point that I am so full and my stomach so stretched that simply breathing is physically painful. I rest for an hour or two and then I start the binge again. When I am in a binge cycle I go into trance, I am tuning out from the world, I am numbing. I don't want to mother, I don't want to work, I just want to left alone with my packet of chips.



The first time I joined an online meeting of Overeaters Anonymous, I still had a bucket of icecream in my hand and I knew I was beaten by my food obsession. It had ruled my life for years, been my best friend and my worst enemy. I had gained and lost countless kilos and was well aware of how once I took even a single bite of junk food I was on the slippery slopes to oblivion. A pity party for me was a piggy party - when I was upset, a block or two of chocolate would help me forget. The first bite was like a party in my mouth and then food trance set in. I would keep eating until that familiar feeling of

being stuffed like the Christmas turkey hit me, and then I was just full of shame and self loathing. I'd seen therapists, hypnotherapists, dieticians, rung eating disorder helplines, considered weight loss surgery, tried every diet imaginable but nothing could stop me from returning to the food for comfort.

When I listened to the other members in that first Overeaters Anonymous meeting, I heard my own story in their shares. I heard how they had been sick like me and now they were free from food obsession. I wanted what they had desperately, and yes, I was willing to go to any lengths. I initially joined OA because I wanted to lose weight and stop eating junk food. I learnt quickly that bingeing was a solution to my inability to cope with life, and there was another way to live in emotional sobriety if I followed the steps. I was shown recovery using the AA Big Book and I will be forever grateful for finding a solution that has converted me from a shame filled, insecure wreck of a person ruled by fear, into someone who can consciously make decisions from a place of love, follow my intuition and share my love and light in the lives of those around me.



Since joining OA I have not had a perfect recovery, it has still been marked by some challenging life events and relapse – food is my last addiction to let go, and I still have to eat, so the entire abstinence has by no means been easy either. But OA and the 12 steps have shown me HOW to live a life of fulfillment, HOW to process my emotions and events of the past, HOW to keep growing in this lifetime and move forward knowing I have the unconditional love of my HP, support of program and fellowship to help me keep making the next right decision one day at a time.

K.C.

If you just try hard enough

It usually starts young, the slow brainwashing of body hatred and disordered eating. For me it crept up until it felt so normal to be vomiting my food every day and constantly obsessing over my weight, calories and how to look more like other, better girls.

There is this constant feeling that one day you may be beautiful if you just tried hard enough. The problem I had was that I also loved food and associated food with safety and happiness, with my mum and so it became a constant battle of minor (and sometimes not so minor) deprivation, splurging, guilt and then beating myself up to get back in line. This battle just sort of went on in the background of my life for so long that it went largely unnoticed.



Until one day it seemed much easier. I was going through a tough time, grieving and had become really self-destructive. I had lost my appetite and instead was trying to self-medicate my wounded soul with different substances. People started constantly commenting on how small I was and how good I looked. This was the beginning of the next stage of dysfunction and disordered eating. I now had a sort of ally in the fight for what I thought was attractiveness and value as a woman....drugs.

Some substances I never even liked, and the sole reason for using was so that I could avoid eating, be more active, and basically get or stay thin. Again, I cannot even tell you how normal this felt. It felt like everyone was doing it, even worse than I did and it seemed better than constantly vomiting. I honestly did not even know how much of my substance and addiction issues were related to my body image and disordered eating until I was trying to get sober and the aftermath just persisted.

I struggled to feel worthy with my new healthier body. I struggled to not be envious of

girls that were tiny, but still haunted by addiction or fresh into their recoveries. I struggled not to be jealous of girls with eating disorders that had a more potent grip on them than me. I know it is ridiculous, but true. I struggled to date men and to sleep with partners without being able to use to something to help me starve for a while beforehand, so that at least I could lose some fluid and my stomach would be flatter. I struggled not being able to take stuff before events to help me drop weight fast. In so many ways I struggled and it hit me how much of an impact that had over me.

Now my battle is about trying to learn to separate my worth from how attractive my body is to society; about knowing, but trying to feel that women are not their beauty or their value to men, but are inherently valuable for who they are! It's about owning different forms of beauty, about yoga and body acceptance and hardest of all... unconditional body love.

Not everyone has been so lucky. I know more than one strong, stunning female in recovery who has been so tormented by their relationship to food and their body that it has contributed to a relapse, and not all of those precious women are on this earth today.

I wish that people knew how powerful that pull of being able to control your eating, your body or your perceived beauty is and how many people it effects in various ways.

Anonymous



Support services for eating disorders

Butterfly Foundation - thebutterflyfoundation.org.au

Butterfly's National Helpline **1800 33 4673** or support@thebutterflyfoundation.org.au
8am-12am, 7 days a week (except national public holidays)
Information, counselling and treatment referral for eating disorders, disordered eating, body image and related issues. This helpline provides Australia-wide information.

Eating Disorders Victoria (EDV) - www.eatingdisorders.org.au

Helpline **1300 550 236** or edv@eatingdisorders.org.au
9.30am-5pm Monday-Friday
Information and support for Victorians experiencing eating disorders.
Online Recovery Forum www.eatingdisorders.org.au/online-services provides support for people with eating disorders and for family members.

Reach Out and Recover (ROAR) - www.reachoutandrecover.com.au

Website for people with eating and body concerns.

How Far Is Too Far - www.howfaristooofar.org.au

Website for young people, teachers and families.

FA Food Addicts Anonymous - www.foodaddicts.org

International Twelve Step Fellowship for people with any type of eating disorders.
Meetings in Victoria:
Monday, 7pm – St Ignatius Church, Meeting Rm. 5, Richmond
Tuesday, 7pm – Hampton Community Centre, Hampton
Wednesday, 7pm – Salvation Army, Bentleigh
Wednesday, 7pm – Hawthorn Library, Room 1, Hawthorn
Thursday, 9.30am – St Johns Uniting Church, Elsternwick
Thursday, 7pm – St Johns Toorak, Toorak
Friday, 9.30am – Hawthorn Library, Room 2, Hawthorn
Saturday, 10am – St Kilda Baptist Church, St Kilda

Overeaters Anonymous Melbourne - www.aa.org.au

Twelve Step Fellowship for people struggling with compulsive eating.
Meetings are held at 70 Punt Rd, Windsor on:
Tuesdays 7.30-8.30pm
Thursdays 12.00-1.00pm
Thursdays 7.30-8.30pm
Sundays 11.00am-12.15pm
Saturday Business Meeting 8.00am-10.00am



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APSU believes that people who use alcohol and other drug treatment services are the reason the system exists; their needs, strengths and expertise should drive the system. APSU is run by service users for service users and has an active member base. We invite you to join us in having a say. APSU membership is **free**, confidential and open to anyone interested in voicing their opinions and ideas on the issues facing AOD service users today. We need your help to give us all a fair go. To become a member please fill out the form below and post to: **140 Grange Road, Carnegie VIC 3163** or fax to: **03 9572 3498** or go to: www.apsuonline.org.au to register online.

MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION

By becoming a member of APSU you will:

- ◆ Receive the triannual APSU FLIPSIDE magazine
- ◆ Be sent information on how to become involved

I wish to become a member of APSU.

I am a: Service user Service provider Family member Other

How did you find out about APSU? _____

Language spoken at home: _____

Cultural identity: _____

Age: 16-25 25-35 36-45 46-65 over 65

Other issues: Physical disability Mental health Visual Hearing

Speech Acquired brain injury

Name: _____

Address: _____

City/Suburb: _____ Postcode: _____

Phone: _____ Mobile: _____

Email: _____

Signature: _____ Date: _____

CONFIDENTIALITY STATEMENT: All personal details obtained by APSU will be kept confidential and will only be used for the purposes outlined above.

You looking skinny like a model
With your eyes all painted black
Just keep going to the bathroom
Only say you'll be right back
Well it takes one to know one kid
I think you've got it bad
But what's so easy in the evening
By the morning it's such a drag

Got a flask inside my pocket
We can share it on the train
And if you promise to stay conscious
I'll try to do the same
Well we might die from that medicine
But we sure killed all the pain
What was normal in the evening
By the morning seems insane

And I'm not sure what the trouble was
What started all of this
The reasons all have run away
But the feeling never did
It's not something I would recommend
But it is one way to live
Cause what is simple in the moonlight
By the morning never is
It was simple in the moonlight
Now it's so complicated

(from "Lua" by Conor Oberst, performed by Bright Eyes)

140 Grange Road, Carnegie VIC 3163
Ph: 03 9573 1736 Fax: 03 9572 3498
Email: apsu@sharc.org.au
www.apsuonline.org.au



APSU is a service of sharc.



Self Help Addiction Resource Centre