

NEWTOWN

Neighbourhood Centre

New(town) Beginnings # 12

Dear Neighbour,

Uncertainty is something we all encounter, but at Newtown Neighbourhood Centre we're confronted daily with stories of people facing it in dramatic circumstances with often tragic outcomes.

We truly never know what's around the corner: One minute you could be in a stable relationship, operating a small business, living a fairly middle class existence, and then due to circumstances beyond your control, you're homeless and seeking support from community services.

This is John's* story, but it's not a sad one, it's a story of triumph over adversity. It's about hope, rebuilding and rejuvenation. It's about his transition from being a NNC service user, as a client of the Boarding House Outreach Service, to joining the planning and steering committee for a NNC Community Linkers program in late 2018.

The innovative program is designed to connect people with lived experience of boarding houses to act as mentors for other boarding house residents. Broadly speaking, its ultimate aim is to create a pathway back into employment and increase an individual's financial security by building capacity and skills through mentorship.

"This project is close to my heart for so many reasons and even though it's only been a short time, I've already seen the profound impact it can have on mentors and residents, explains John.

"I'm aware of the day-to-day struggles that people living in boarding houses go through so in a way I can assist residents in whatever way possible, but also, empower mentors to use our experiences to help others."

These connections and individual development are some of the most successful aspects of the project, which could, in part be attributed to the co-design aspect of the program, where mentors like John were involved in every aspect including design, execution and evaluation.

"One of the biggest differences we have seen is in the mentors' confidence and their increasing willingness to take on new challenges but also their motivation and ambition has increased, explains Newtown Neighbourhood Centre's Staff Member and Project Lead, Mischa.

"One linker did not leave his unit much and was extremely intimidated by the thought of interacting in a group, but has since attended every project meeting, completed the mentoring training and now attends a local gym with two other members."

"They've gone from being passive receivers of service to active members of the community providing support and information to others."

John agrees and says he now sees co-design as the "only way forward to address some of the big issues we face such as homelessness, poverty and social isolation".

For John, the program has helped rebuild his life but also reconnect with this past by utilising his design skills. He's now not only studying a Diploma of Community Services, while volunteering, but is also starting to take on commercial work as a freelance designer.

It's inspired me and my creativity and the future feels so positive."

John is now also working with NNC on a new idea which is looking at developing a creative hub that encourages individuals who may not otherwise have access to facilities or materials to develop their creative skills.

We are so proud to have been able to support John as part of his journey and look forward to helping many more like him.

*Not his real name.

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