

Welcome to our new Lived Experience Partnership Group members



Danny Jeffery (NSW)

Danny Jeffery was medically discharged from the Royal Australian Air Force in 2018 after serving the Defence Force for 35 years. Danny deployed on nine separate ADF Operations and suffered multiple physical injuries and has adapted his life to suit them. He is also living with PTSD, Major Depressive Disorder and Anxiety Disorder. His mental health is the biggest struggle and diversity he has ever faced in his life.

Danny's mental health first fell apart in 2013 after returning from 8.5 months in Afghanistan. After 85 combat missions, Danny returned home claiming mission success, so he thought. Mentally his world fell apart without the pace of war to distract him. He finally had time to process things and just could not. *'I just didn't fit in back here at home, flashbacks consumed my days and nightmares consumed my sleep. I just wanted to go back in the hope that would help'.*

In 2014 Danny discovered the Invictus Games. He felt that good he deployed to the Middle East again in 2015. Danny suffered a major mental health episode and returned in Nov 2015 to never wear a uniform again. In 2015 Danny was not going to give up on his pathway to recovery and successfully returned to the Invictus Games Orlando 2016 and Sydney 2018. After long term rehabilitation he was medically discharged in 2018. Throughout these dark days Danny experienced what he calls his 'suicide chapter' and is a proud survivor. *'Finally in life I was not good at something, and it helped me realise that it wasn't that I didn't want to live anymore, I just didn't want to live the way I was living, and I had the power to make changes.'*

Danny is now a Licensed Mental Health First Aid instructor and is currently the Emergency Department Peer Navigator at Prince of Wales Hospital Sydney. He is embedded within a clinical team which is a first for NSW Health. Danny encourages hope for recovery and offers support and mentorship to those struggling with their mental health. He is passionate about removing the stigma and barriers people face when struggling with mental health and wants everyone to have the realisation that *'it is possible to reach the light at the end of the tunnel. The biggest thing for me when I reached the light, was accepting the new me and I actually like this version'*. His motto when encouraging people to talk about suicide is *'it's just a chat'*. Danny's legacy is to continually talk about suicide and mental health so that it is no different across society than talking about the weather. Danny is proud and honoured to be a part of the NSPO as an LEPG Member.

Heather Nowak (SA)



Heather's lived experience is informed by her personal experience of domestic violence, suicide attempts and the mental health system spanning almost four decades, along with the experience of being bereaved by suicide through the loss of her brother.

Heather commenced advocating for people living with mental illness and distress whilst residing in regional SA. She received the Dr. Margaret Tobin award 2011, for making an outstanding contribution to improvements for people with, or at risk of developing, a mental illness. Heather holds a passion for using her lived experience to inform future planning, design and delivery of mental health and suicide prevention services to ensure that the journey for current and future consumers and their families, is made as smooth as possible and enable optimal

recovery outcomes.

This then led her to advocate at a State and then National level to bring the voice of people with a lived experience to inform policy and service development. Most recently at a National level I

Heather has been involved in the Ministers Mental Health Reform Committee, Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Data Governance Forum and Co-chair of the Australian Commission on Safety and Quality in Health Care Safe Spaces Standards Scoping Study advisory group and lived Experience Advisory group.

From 2020 – 2023 Heather was appointed as one of three SA Mental Health Commissioners. As part of this role, she was a member of the SA Suicide Prevention Council and assisted in the development of the latest SA Suicide Prevention plan.

Her advocacy work has assisted her to develop strong leadership skills and form many networks at a local, State, National and International level that allow her to stay up to date and informed of initiatives around suicide prevention both in Australia and overseas.

Heather holds a strong passion for the peer workforce having worked as a peer specialist and assisted in the design and delivery of the Cert IV Mental Health Peer Work. Heather is also a Master trainer in Applied Suicide Intervention Skills Training – Living Works.

"I feel so privileged to be appointed to the National Suicide Prevention Office Lived Experience Partnership Group. The membership is made up of some incredible people who are so passionate about suicide prevention. The recently released National Suicide Prevention Strategy is an excellent document; however, it is imperative that the ideas and concepts are implemented, and I look forward to being able to contribute to ensuring that we do everything we can to prevent suicide. Every life is precious." **Heather Nowak**

Calista Castles (ACT)

Calista Castles is an experienced policy analyst and researcher with a lived experience of suicidal distress, living, working and connecting on unceded Ngunnawal Country.

Her firsthand experience of the impacts suicidal distress can have - not just on wellbeing but on many aspects of one's life - has ignited a passion to not just share lived experience but ensure lived expertise drives meaningful change and reform in systems of care and suicide prevention. That is why Calista is passionate about the work of the NSPO and is thrilled to be a member of the LEPG. "This partnership goes beyond reducing the number of deaths by suicide to ensuring prevention efforts are holistic and meaningful, and address intersecting socio-cultural, political, and economic determinants of health and wellbeing, so we can all live in this world as well as possible." **Calista Castles**

John Gobeil (NSW)



As a lived experience advocate with over 20 years of experience in community health with a focus health promotion and harm reduction, John held many senior executive roles nationally and internationally, specialising in NGO management, innovative leadership, and peer workforce development and joined AIVL as the CEO in 2023. I worked for many years in several frontline and leadership roles for community-led multicultural and drop in centres, harm reduction and HIV organisations, successfully improving service delivery and programming, building organisational capacity and increasing sustainability.

I am honoured to be part of the LEPG as I draw from my lived-living experience of suicide, DV, homelessness, poverty, mental health/C-PTSD, discrimination, marginalisation, and stigma as a neurodivergent LGBTQ+ PWUD peer and CALD migrant. I strongly believe in the importance of self-determination, advocacy and

collaboration to drive better policies and programs for our communities. I am deeply passionate about equity, social justice and human rights! ❤️ 🙌

Natalie Brown (ACT)



Being born in the 1960s, suicide has remained a taboo subject throughout the majority of my life. Conversations surrounding mental health were generally unacceptable during that era. While care and compassion existed, solutions to a range of health issues were often found in silence and institutionalisation. If we weren't heard or seen, that was considered a solution. Additionally, family members over several generations who had been institutionalised for various reasons, including Aboriginality, saw silence as a means of safety and protection against numerous threats. Despite these challenges, both my family members and I have endeavoured to discuss these topics throughout the years. Unfortunately, our attempts have seldom been met with support or helpful responses. In fact, the opposite has been true over the past five decades and even recently.

As a member of the NSPO LEPG, I aim to change this narrative. I leverage my lived and living experiences to make a difference. As understanding and awareness about mental health and

suicide continue to grow, family members and friends want to know how they can effectively respond and offer support. Many people are afraid and need guidance on how to discuss these subjects in ways that foster healing and well-being rather than causing harm.

For many individuals, talking about suicide can alleviate feelings of isolation. However, this isn't widely known and continues to be shrouded in fear. Nobody wants to unintentionally reinforce the stigma that prevents people from seeking help, especially when they need it most. Learning to talk about suicide requires an active commitment. As part of the NSPO LEPG, I am dedicated to continually learning and contributing for the benefit of my family, community, and everyone else.

Bonnie Scarth (WA)



Bonnie has several years' experience as a lived experience researcher focused on mental health, self-harm, and suicide prevention. Most recently, she worked as the State Community Engagement Coordinator (WA) for PANDA. Bonnie has worked in suicide prevention across a broad range of communities. She managed a diverse postvention team across a large geographical area of New Zealand, where she led the co-creation of the Southern Suicide Prevention and Postvention Strategy, which was co-designed and approved by the New Zealand Government. Bonnie also contributed through a lived experience advisory capacity to the New Zealand Suicide Prevention Strategy. Bonnie is currently undertaking a PhD on perinatal suicidal behaviour prevention which is co-designed with lived experience at the centre. Her research has been funded by Suicide Prevention Australia.

"Being an LEPG member is an honour and I see it as a sign of progress that lived experience is genuinely valued and integrated into practice by the NSPO." **Bonnie Scarth**