



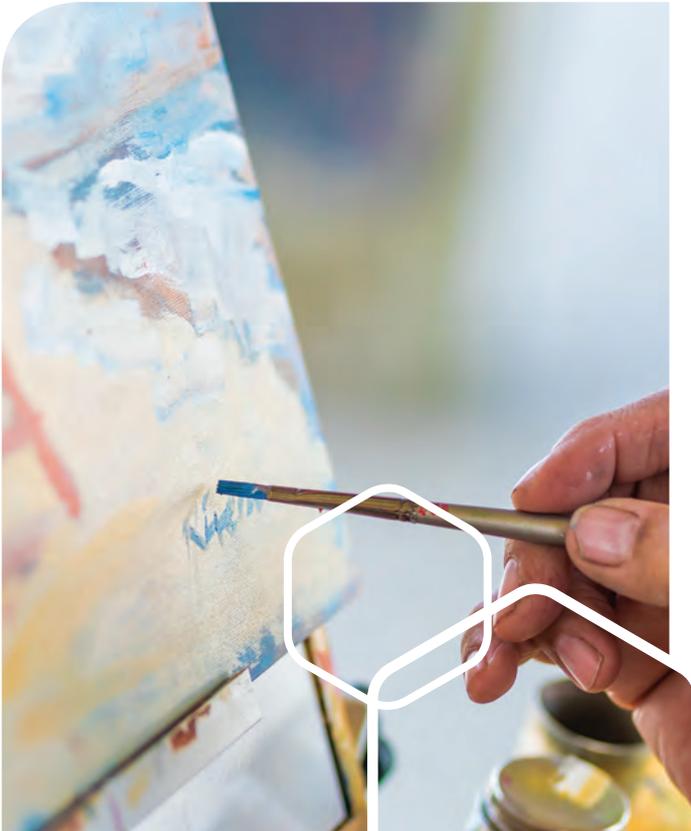
PLUS SOCIAL FOR INJURED WORKERS:

Building new social connections to overcome the effects of workplace bullying

Brad's story

Not all workplace injuries are physical. Brad developed stress, anxiety and depression after experiencing bullying in the workplace. His mood and emotional wellbeing were impacted, which led Brad to breaking point. He left his workplace of 12 years, lost contact with most of his work friends, then began nervously navigating the job market eight months later.

"It helped to have made a commitment to join an external program like Plus Social. I don't think I could have relied on myself to keep it up if my Plus Social Link Worker and the groups weren't expecting to see me."



"It was great to have my Plus Social Link Worker listening to my experience with support, fresh perspective and good advice."

Overview

Plus Social was able to:

- Suggest and link Brad into a range of existing group activities to help him address his feelings of isolation and to reconnect with people, including others in similar circumstances
- Support Brad with his initial attendance at the group activities to ensure he felt encouraged through the process
- Provide current information about alcohol consumption to help Brad make informed choices during his recovery journey
- Put Brad in touch with specialist counsellors to help address issues in his personal relationship.

Life after injury

Due to workplace bullying sustained over several years, Brad developed stress, anxiety and depression. The verbal bullying impacted Brad's mood and wellbeing, resulting in a distorted view of his self-worth. Eventually, feeling unsupported by his workplace's approach to his case, Brad felt unable to continue working under the circumstances. He decided to leave the workplace after 12 years with the same employer, and sought out a Fair Work Commission "Order to stop bullying".

After this, Brad's social network shrank. He lost contact with all but the closest of his work friends. Some of these friends supported the legal action he was taking with the Fair Work Commission, but others ceased contact with him. Brad slowly felt more adrift without the network, routine and reinforcement of self-value through work.

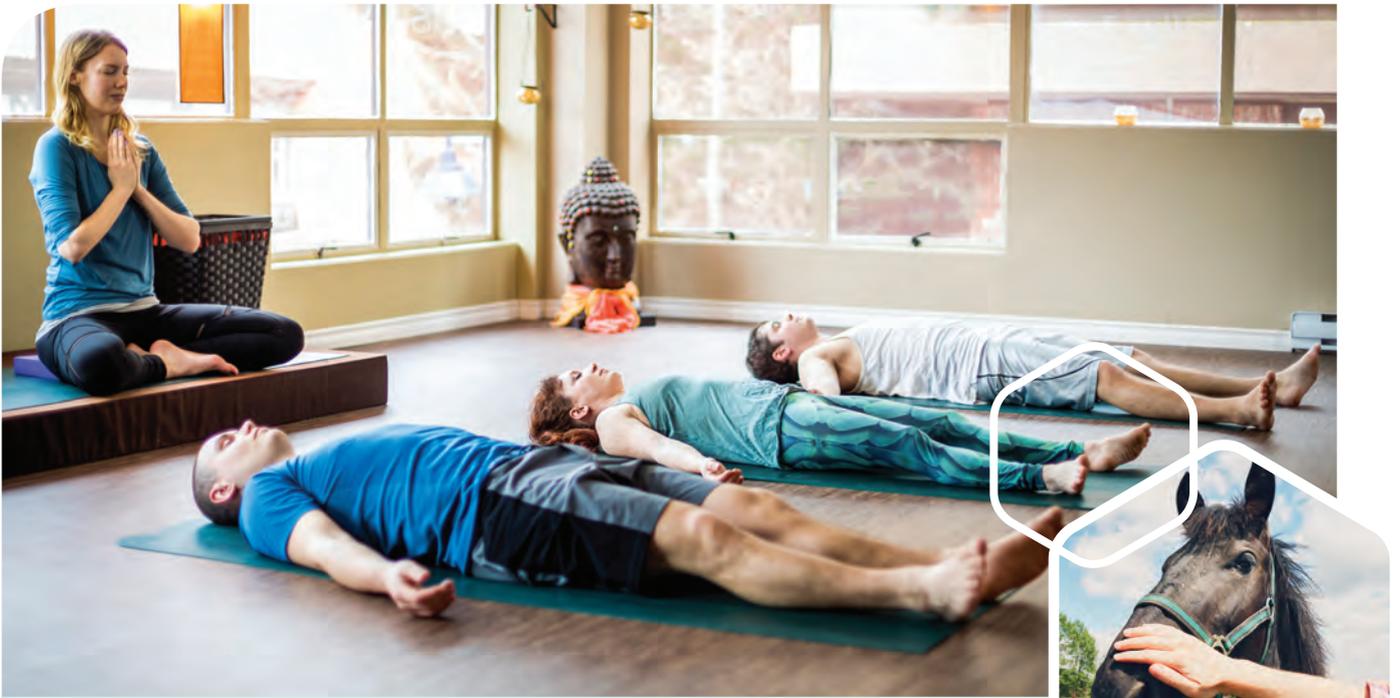
He found it difficult to enjoy outings with his friends and his partner; he always felt worried or guilty that he should be working more on his legal case. To cope with the stress, Brad knew he was drinking more alcohol than usual to unwind. He was consumed by his own troubles and, though his partner was very patient and supportive, her frustrations with him would peak at regular intervals and Brad knew he was neglecting to maintain and support their relationship.

While matters dragged on, Brad's psychologist ultimately convinced him that the protracted legal process and the negativity of reliving the workplace bullying were only causing him further harm. Financially, it was fortunate an insurance company upheld his claim and his ex-employer made corrective undertakings. This freed Brad to look to his own future, at which point he realised he had been away from work for eight months.

It had been over 12 years since Brad had applied and interviewed for a new job. With his self-confidence at its lowest, the prospect of promoting himself to new employers was very daunting.

How we helped

Brad initially made contact with Primary & Community Care Services by email and soon after, a Plus Social Link worker met with Brad at his home to discuss his needs. The Link Worker listened as Brad described his isolation and apprehension in approaching the job market again.



“As well as the activities being enriching experiences in themselves, the cooperative group dynamic helped build my confidence to face the job interviews that I was launching into.”

To support Brad’s social connections, he was enrolled into the Plus Social art, equine therapy and yoga groups in his area. Brad’s Link Worker also connected Brad to local community groups and services to increase his social networks and support his recovery journey.

Brad’s Link Worker provided current information about alcohol consumption, with contacts for further support, so that he could better monitor his intake. She was also able to put Brad in touch with specialist counsellors who could assist with the stress that was building in his relationship.

What’s better

At his first social group session, Brad felt apprehensive about attending but was committed to his recovery and resolved to go ahead. While he felt anxious in the first few minutes, this quickly wore off, helped by initial attendance and introductions by his Plus Social Link Worker and the friendly leader of the class.

“I quickly felt at ease among the other people in each group. Some were quieter than others, and from a wide variety of backgrounds, but everyone was friendly and

supportive. I realised that I hadn’t completely forgotten how to interact and associate with other people too – which was my biggest fear!” said Brad.

“I was also concerned at times, that the meetings were distracting me from the more pressing need to land a new job. However, while always encouraging your attendance, the program was completely flexible when you have to miss meetings due to interviews or other appointments. My psychologist also encouraged me with the program, explaining how your capacity for activities increases as you become more active – it’s a part of recovery. I regularly turn up to two meetings each week but can sometimes manage a third”, he continued.

Brad said he was surprised by some of the activities he found enjoyable, as well as discovering a new talent for painting.

He has also recently completed two job interviews and feels that the Plus Social program has provided a great kick-start to building his confidence both socially and on the job-search front.