

A Program
for Injured
Workers



PLUS SOCIAL FOR INJURED WORKERS:

A new brush stroke – reinvention after a serious back injury

Sophie's story

Sophie sustained a back injury at work and was not able to return to work. After the injury, she could barely walk and couldn't drive due to acute pain. Not only did Sophie have to deal with the physical impact of the injury, its flow-on effect meant significant changes to the way she lives her day-to-day life.

Overview

After her injury, Sophie needed to reconnect with other people and learn how to recover without access to the things she previously considered to be part of her everyday way of life – transport, her previous social networks, and her workplace and colleagues.

"I've found the social prescribing pilot program so beneficial in helping my recovery. It's also been one of my only positive social connections during the week."



Plus Social was able to:

- Reconnect Sophie with other people
- Reinvigorate Sophie's interest in her hobbies
- Provide Sophie with a different focus to the constant physical pain that she lives with
- Begin to explore with Sophie what a new way of working and living looks like with her injury.



"The program shows injured workers that there are genuine people out there who actually do care about them and their social needs."

Life after injury

After Sophie's back injury at work she reported acute pain and was not able to sit for more than five minutes. She was depressed, isolated and frustrated with the workers compensation system.

With not being able to work and drive due to the injury, Sophie had become extremely isolated. Living alone meant Sophie could no longer attend social activities with her friends and church group. She had serious concerns about the long-term impact of her injury and didn't believe she could return to her previous employment, which involved manual handling.

She had previous training as an art therapist, although she had never worked in this area. Sophie enjoyed her art and music but hadn't been motivated to pursue these activities since the injury.

How we helped

Sophie was connected to a Plus Social art group located a short walk from her home. The art group improved Sophie's social connectedness and sense of purpose. It re-ignited her passion for art. Participating in the art group also increased her confidence that pursuing a career in art therapy in the future was not just a distant possibility.

Sophie's experience with her Link Worker was very positive throughout her participation in Plus Social and this helped break down some of the mistrust of the system she had developed over time.

As well as her interest in art, Sophie's initial assessment with her Link Worker also identified some unmet physical needs. She was referred back to her GP for a further medical review.

What's better

Plus Social helped to decrease Sophie's isolation, improve social connections and provide a complementary, non-medical pain strategy. In her words, "Hearing other people talk while I paint helps to take my mind off the constant pain and helps me to live outside my own world for a bit and just relax and enjoy being creative and spending time with other people."

By feeling a sense of connectedness, her outlook has become far more positive. She is more able to manage her immediate day-to-day needs, as well as to look more optimistically towards the future.

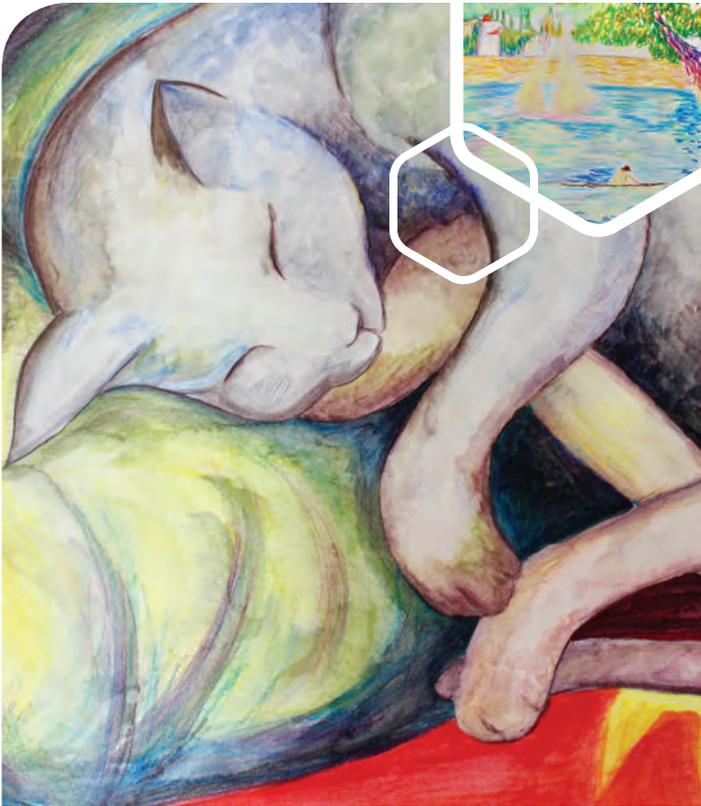
Sophie also found the art group to be a first step in returning to a regular, weekly routine that does not simply involve medical appointments. It's enabled her to think more broadly and focus on the future, including work related opportunities not connected to her previous role.

Summary

The Plus Social program supports the recovery journey of the injured worker.

Sophie stated that the program improved her quality of life and general wellbeing. These improvements are across multiple parts of her life:

- **Social:** Sophie is less isolated and more engaged in her local community with regular social connections. Sophie and some others from her Plus Social Chill Art group regularly catch up after their group and sometimes on weekends too.



"This group has sometimes been the only social contact I have all week, as I live on my own and no longer have the nice social contact with my work colleagues or clients. It'd be highly detrimental to my health and recovery for me to spend all week on my own, so this has been an essential part of my treatment that I organised because I want to get better and return to work as soon as possible. Participating in this group has helped reduce my pain levels, provided psychosocial support and refreshed my employability skills [as an art therapist]."

- Professional:** Sophie's interest in her hobbies has been reinvigorated, and the program boosted her confidence and self-belief in gaining employment using her art skills and talents. Since completing the Plus Social program, Sophie has started to engage with employment opportunities, making the most of her art skills in the arts industry.
- Physical:** By engaging in a group activity that is meaningful and enjoyable to her, Sophie forged an intentional focus away from the significant pain she experiences.
- Personal:** Plus Social supported Sophie to explore what a new way of working and living looks like with her injury. She has broadened her outlook for the future.

WHO Quality of Life (QoL) Scores for Sophie at baseline assessment and 10 weeks later while attending her art group

On 13 October, Sophie reported she was struggling through a medication change. She also withdrew from one medication which had worsened her health. This is evident in her Physical Health score.

At follow up, despite high levels of pain and continued changes to her medication, Sophie still registered considerable improvements in her Mental Health and Social Relations scores, as well as slight improvement in her Environmental score.

