

SANE

FACTSHEET

CAMERON

FAME, CHANGE AND ISOLATION

If there's a central theme to the last five years for Cameron, it's change.

He's changed perspectives: there was a time when a diagnosis of schizophrenia eighteen years ago meant that his brain was 'broken'.

In 2018 his participation in the SBS reality TV show *How Mad Are You* proved otherwise. Cameron was one of five people with a history of mental illness who was mixed in with five others for a panel of experts to observe. The aim was for the experts to observe and assess each person to determine who they deemed had mental illness. Cameron found the experience eye-opening.

"I thought that having schizophrenia meant that my brain was schizophrenic, but it's not as cumbersome as that."

How Mad Are You helped show Cameron – and the audience – that mental illness was not the whole picture to a whole person.

"Schizophrenia is just a *part* of my brain; my brain can function at a relatively normal level when it needs to. That's something that's given me a lot of confidence."

He's changed roles: becoming a dad brought with it new challenges and new rewards. Experiencing the happiness of being a family is a tangible reminder of what he has achieved.

Even so, life isn't without its challenges.

"When you have a brain that is...against you 90% of the time it's difficult to maintain your confidence. There's some very hard-wired difficulties with the way that my brain thinks that affect my confidence daily."

One of the recurring troubles of complex mental health issues (CMHI) is the isolation. Finding others to talk with has been a challenge, and the fear of other parents finding out his diagnosis made the early years of fatherhood especially lonely.

"The isolation is a very difficult part of it and it doesn't help when the illness rears its ugly head. And that's just something that we have to get through as a family."

This is when the [SANE Forums](#) can be most valuable. Something as simple as reading others'

posts can shorten that gulf of isolation and remind Cameron that there are other people out there whose experiences he can relate to.

More recently, Cameron's changed minds. Induction as a SANE Board Director has brought with it the opportunity to go beyond telling his story. It's meant having a seat at the table to say "this is what we should do". This kind of lived experience engagement is a shift he's noticed over the years.

Ten years ago, it felt like people with lived experience of complex mental health issues were looking for ways to share their stories of mental illness in an effort to raise awareness and empathy in the wider community.

Nowadays, things have evolved to more than just sharing stories – it's also about having the opportunity to create change.

"It's about more than the opportunity to say 'hey this is what happened'. It's about listening to us when we say 'hey this is what we should do'.

We've come to a point where people aren't just asking about how we can share our stories but about how we can *change* things."

For Cameron, this is the new frontier for CMHI.

"The only way we're going to solve this and cure this is to go beyond people talking about their experiences...it's about suggesting what we think might help people heal."