

SANE

FACTSHEET

DENIELLE

From the outside, my life looks pretty idyllic. I live in a beautiful part of country Victoria with my three wonderful children. But, as with many people, I've faced my share of demons. Mental illness has played a huge role in my family since my father was first diagnosed with depression over 15 years ago.

A strong, independent country bloke, his diagnosis came on the back of an illness. As his body started breaking down, so too did his mental state. My own struggle started when he took his own life. My experience has made me acutely aware of the stigma and lack of understanding that still surrounds the issue of mental health in this country.

This was particularly the case for my father – he was suffering depression at a time when there was very little support and awareness, in a community more remote than mine. As a family we found there were so many road blocks to get Dad the help he needed. There was a resounding attitude of 'You'll be right mate'. And his inability to deal with his perceived weakness, particularly when he was used to being the man of the house, was incredibly tough on him.

I knew it wasn't just a bad day or a bad week. I was emotional all the time and unable to 'snap out of it', crying in the middle of the day for no apparent reason. Any time I would go to sleep I felt like I was being sucked down to the bottom of the ocean, further and further from the sunlight and down into the cold. I was diagnosed with depression and eventually tried to take my own life.

I don't think people understand how debilitating a mental illness can be – it takes over your whole life. I really believe as a society we need to break down the stigma and say it's okay to have a mental illness. It doesn't make you weak or less of a person. I often compare mental illness to cancer as it can affect anyone, regardless of whether you have the best job or the best friends or the biggest house. When someone has cancer we rally around and support them; we need to approach mental illness the same way.

Mental illness is complex, and it can often be frustrating and isolating not being able to get the understanding and help you need from family and friends. Using something like the SANE online forums is a fantastic way to connect with a supportive, non-judgemental community. It's completely anonymous and you can simply read what others are going through, or actively ask questions and seek advice at any time of the day or night.

Now that I've come out the other side, I am passionate about putting the topic of mental health in the spotlight. I look forward to a day when it's no longer a taboo subject, it's a dinner table conversation in every household. And if I were to go back and talk to my younger self in

the depths of her depression? I would tell her she's loved and to breathe through it, it's just a moment.