



## WITNESS STATEMENT OF RODERICK (ROD) JACKSON

I, Rod Jackson, say as follows:

- 1 I make this statement on the basis of my own knowledge, save where otherwise stated. Where I make statements based on information provided by others, I believe such information to be true.
- 2 My mental health issues started around 10 years ago and during my lowest moments I attempted self-harm. I am very sorry for the pain I have caused my wife and family during this period.
- 3 The best thing I ever did for my mental health was join my local Men's Shed, which has provided me with so much support over the years.
- 4 Even though I still find my story confronting, now I often speak to Shed members, community groups and other people to help them get through similar experiences. Not all stories are the same, but if I can help one person then it makes my day.

### My mental health

- 5 When I was 16, I started work at Trans Australia Airlines as an apprentice. I always wanted to work in electronics so I later moved into communications.
- 6 I worked full time for most of my adult life until 2009 when I was laid off by a communications company. I was 51 years old and suddenly I was home alone with no one around me from 7am to 6pm every day while my wife and kids were at work and school.
- 7 I had my very first depressive episode in August 2009, after I had been out of work for about a month a half. I can remember some parts of that day but others I don't.
- 8 I don't remember that I was angry with my wife and son that particular morning. I have since learned that I started writing abusive emails to them during the day.
- 9 Things escalated and my wife told me she would not come home that night. I went into a downward spiral to the point that I wanted to self-harm.
- 10 The next thing I remember is that a policeman showed up. I had someone to talk to. The ambulance arrived and took me to a public hospital where I was left to wait alone in an empty corridor for a while. I remember looking at an open door at the end of the corridor

- and thinking about walking out to the railway tracks, but there was something that told me 'no'.
- 11 My wife has since told me that when she turned up at the hospital, I was sitting in a bed rocking. I believe that a member of the CAT team had given me medication to sleep.
- 12 After I was released from hospital three members of the CAT team came out to see me the next day (or a day later), and then a team member came out once a week for around a month and a half.
- 13 This was a really tough period for me and my family. I had to relearn how to drive and I could barely walk into a shopping centre. My wife has since told me that I would just sit in the kitchen and not talk. I have some recollection of this but not a lot. In September in 2009 we sold the house as I was unable to work.
- 14 I was really lucky to have a good GP who had done a mental health course. The GP got me to go see a counsellor and referred me for five or six sessions. With the counsellor's help I was able to connect how I was feeling with difficulties I faced when I was a child.
- 15 During 2010 I started travelling ok and I got a job. I was on anti-depressants but was weaning myself off because I did not feel like myself when I was taking the medication.
- 16 We moved up to Sunbury where I found myself home alone again after being laid off again in 2013. Straight away my wife Jen said "*you have got to get out of the house*" and convinced me to visit the Sunbury Men's Shed. At first, I didn't want to go, but it was the best thing I ever did. Suddenly I met all these people and started talking to them.
- 17 Since then I have had an up and down battle with my thoughts and actions, but have had a lot of support from the Men's Shed and the other members.
- 18 In 2014 I went on the TV show "Who Wants to Be a Millionaire". During filming I told the host Eddie Maguire about my passion for talking about depression and said that the best place for men who need help are Men's Sheds.
- 19 After the episode went to air I was at the Timber and Working with Wood Show where the Australian Men's Shed Association had a stand. Someone from another Shed came up to me and said "*you gave us the biggest plug ever for the Men's Shed*". I felt like talking about the situation would really help other people. All the boys from the Shed were wrapped.
- 20 I won some money on the show, so Jen and I were able to buy a house. Unfortunately, this wasn't a happy ending. I had another major depressive episode while we were

- renovating in 2014. I am pretty hands on and that day I was pulling out the kitchen with two Shed members (Peter Wilkinson and John Hunter) when it turned out the whole area was full of termite damage. It was absolutely devastating.
- 21 I can remember having a fight with my daughter and my world started crumbling down again. I started to try and harm myself again.
- 22 The police and ambulance turned up. The ambulance took me to a public hospital and on the way I got talking to the paramedic. I like talking to people and this lifted my mind off of things. It turned out that the paramedic's dad had been an apprentice at the Trans Australia Airlines too and I remember chatting to her about that.
- 23 When I got to the hospital a member of the CAT team spoke to me and said I had "settled" and that it looked like I did not need to be admitted. I said that I was ok, to a point, but made an appointment to see my GP the next day.
- 24 I had so much support from Shed members after this episode. Peter Wilkinson and John Hunter came around again the next day to carry on with the renovations. Another member, Dida Jetovik, dragged me out for a walk and while we were out I received calls from seven other guys. My mate Gary Peddit called and took me out of a coffee – I just sat there with him for an hour and a half crying and talking. I know that they were all worried for me.
- 25 After the episode I went back on medication but it did not seem to be effective. My GP referred me to another counsellor through Medicare who tried to help me, but not in the way I felt I needed.
- 26 A mate recommended Community Health who would only charge \$9 a session because I was not working. I went along and after about two weeks I started seeing a counsellor there, Terry Hollingsworth. Every time I have seen Terry I have felt better – at first I was tense but I think Terry could tell and over time she gave me tools to get over depression like meditation, exercise, talking and listening to aps and music.
- 27 I still have my ups and downs though, and I started to go into a hole again after a while. I can remember I was at Community Health waiting to see Terry in December 2018 and I was trying to fix a phone for my mate Jimmy Moffitt. I was getting frustrated and did not feel like myself, when my mate said to Terry "*Rod's not well*". I thank him for that, I really do.
- 28 After that session I went to see my doctor who increased the medication and I feel a hell of a lot better than I was before.

- 29 During the past six months I joined Sons of the West, which is a group run in the western suburbs by the Western Bulldogs. Terry had suggested it to me for a long time but I didn't feel up to it then. Now I feel up to it. It is on a Thursday night. We chat about issues like depression and perform low impact exercises. I also walk 11km over every couple of days to deliver the local paper and I go the Shed three days a week.
- 30 I know that another episode could surface when I least expect it. It is hard for family to see you have an episode and deal with mental illness on a daily basis.

### **The Men's Shed**

- 31 The Sunbury Men's Shed has been the best therapy for myself. Men don't always find it easy to talk about themselves and they don't want to burden you with their problems. The Shed is a great outlet for men to discuss mental issues, health concerns and just say to each other "are you ok"? It's like our video says: once you join a Shed you have 100 friends. The Shed helps men connect and have company.
- 32 There are 125 members at my Shed aged anywhere between 18 and 92. We don't all go to the Shed at once, luckily, but we all pay \$35 a year in member fees. We are all different and not all the men are in my situation. When you retire, the wife may still be working, and she wants all the jobs done around the house, some men don't have anyone to talk to like they did at work. That is when they start finding it hard.
- 33 Our Shed is set up for enjoyment, full stop. There are the guys who aren't hands on and others who jump in. We make things like easels and children's toys, we do wood turning. We have computers, a full welding shop and a veggie garden. Some guys aren't interested in woodworking but want to work in the garden. The produce is shared with everyone and we use it for things like a lunch we run every Friday, which is often when men in their eighties come down (recently two members made a curry which I missed, but I heard it was amazing). We also have a poker table and run a game on Friday mornings for a block of chocolate. Everything shuts down 11am on a Friday for the lunch.
- 34 We are all there to help each other. Everyone is a volunteer.
- 35 For example, I am on the wellbeing committee at my local Shed and I'm there if people want to talk. Recently I was approached by one member to speak to another member – the first guy thought the second one was struggling and going to kill himself due to a medical issue.
- 36 I went to speak to the member with Chris (another member who used to be a doctor). The member told Chris and me that he wanted to die; Chris and I talked about his health issues and I said we wanted him at the Shed and "not six feet under". When I

was at the Shed a couple of weeks ago the member thanked me and said "if it was not for you and the doc I would not be here today".

37 The president of the club told me that another mate said to him "Rod helps me every time I come down. We don't talk about depression. We talk about anything. And just by talking it lifts me up for the week." If I can lift them up, I feel better.

38 I have also spoken about mental health at the cluster meetings when all the sheds in an area get together. I give them information like many people commit suicide each day and tell them about my story. First thing I say usually is "*can you look at the person to the left or right and tell if he's got an illness. Now look at me – can you tell if I have an illness?*" I joke that I might look a bit rough but ask whether I look like I have a real illness. This stumps them and I tell them I have the depressive illness.

39 I went through my story recently at a cluster meeting. I was having lunch after and five guys I had never met came up and thanked me. If I can help anyone, if someone wants to listen, it makes my day.

40 The other shed members are like a second family to me and their support means the world. We are all there to look after each other, no matter what the situation is.

41 If someone is not at the Shed for more than a couple of weeks we start to ask questions. If a member's wife is unwell, we will do what we can to help – take around a meal, write a card or send a gift (one of the wives knits slipper socks).

42 We are not medical or anything, but I think we are saving lives especially up in some of the regional areas. There is no glue to put me back together again, but I don't know where I would be today if I didn't have the Men's Shed.

### **Recommendations**

43 The main thing I would recommend is that men talk more and join groups like Men's Sheds. I feel real proud to tell my story, even though it brings up difficult emotions. All I hope is that it helps someone.

44 It would also be nice for community groups to have more funding.

45 The Sheds get a lot of support from local businesses who give us donations and grants.

46 But we don't get a lot of funds. I know there is no money out there for anyone, but we would like to grow just so we can help more people.

sign here 

print name Roderick Jackson

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