

TRANSCRIPT OF INTERVIEW

**ANDREW**

SA HEALTH

2020

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*Hello folks, welcome to Roses Radio, Layne Stretton here and today I'm here talking to Andrew or Andy, as we're going to call him. Welcome Andy.*

Welcome everyone and g'day Layne. How are you?

*Nice to have you. I'm very well mate. Nice to have you on Roses Radio today. I'd really like to explore mental health with you. Just to start with maybe a quick question around how has your perception of mental health and by extension your perception of suicide changed as a result of your lived experience?*

Yeah thanks, I guess looking back at my life and my personality and everything, it's been a bit of a journey. Growing up always got the teachers remarks that I had potential and also a bit of the class clown. So I've always had a pretty boisterous and excited attitude and persona. So growing up, happy outlook on things a bit of a happy go lucky attitude and loved to muck around and love to have a joke.

*Did you grow up in Adelaide? Is Adelaide your home?*

No so born and bred in Tassie... I grew up there and I guess you know mental health, I'm only 32 years old and obviously in my short time on this earth, I have seen a change. I've seen the landscape change around it and especially the subject of mental health and suicide. I guess my first experience of it was in high school, hearing of a head prefect of the high school I went to, that had died from suicide. And at that age, Year 7, roughly 14 years old, 13 years old it was a very vague subject.

*Did you know what suicide was? Did you know what that meant?*

As a kid then you know it was probably a suicide bomber from World War 2, you know it was a phrase you heard. It was someone had killed themselves and I didn't understand it. It was just words. It was also a bit of, "why would you do that?" and I was a kid and I didn't understand it and that played on my mind. I saw the young man from our high school and as a young high schooler, "Hey like that guy is cool, he is the head prefect. What an awesome dude." As you do looking up to the older senior kids at school and I never fully understood it. My next experience was knowing some people within my church community that have lived experiences but once again I wasn't involved. It was hearing my parents talk about it, hearing my friends talk about it.

*It always felt like it was arm's length?*

Arm's length, yeah. It wasn't affecting me but I was hearing about it. Two young fellas my age that I went to school with, Year 11 and 12, both individually lost their brothers to suicide. And even then, well one, it wasn't



talked about. I felt like I couldn't ask them about that. I wanted to understand about it but no one talked about it. It was us talking about them behind their backs, it was a taboo subject. And then after that was an ex-work colleague here in Adelaide. So years later, I'm working in the construction industry and a fella I worked with there, he left the business and I kept in touch with him through some common interests, motorbikes, things like that and got a phone call one day from another mate at work that he had died. So I went to his funeral, talked to the other guys at work and it was this – that was my first getting closer to it, it was getting closer to my life. That probably started me on a bit on a journey of researching and reading a little a bit more about it but still hadn't touched home yet.

*What were some of the learnings that were starting to emerge for you or what was interesting to you?*

A bit of a pattern I suppose that those four experiences were all blokes, all similar age which I am now learning there's statistics that throw us into that category and age group, which is a higher percentage. I guess maybe the reasons and that kind of thing was still a bit uncertain and foreign, I still had a bit to learn there but definitely a pattern of young men dying too early and that was something that hit home as me being a young man. And then I started noticing it in other areas so I guess in the media, you know some of those celebrity, you would call it, deaths; being Robyn Williams and Heath Ledger and others that have happened since then. And you start sort of putting the puzzles pieces together and that journey was picking up speed, so to speak.

*And still it was a process of becoming more interested and understanding it but at the end of the day, it hadn't hit the heart yet, it was more a kind of cognitive process for you.*

Probably that and also the subject of death. I had been cruising along pretty good other than my grandma passing away from cancer which was sad at the time but still it was kind of – cancer was kind of talked about. We all talked about it as a family when it happened and so death was put down as that was sickness and that was a result of that sickness. And up until then a couple of years later with the exposure to some more community deaths, those two subjects I'd been – I had to experience. And that, I just guess my life up until that point, I hadn't experienced it so.

*Why do you think, so you grew up in faith based environment, as I did, why do you think in some of these environments the subject of mental health, before we even get to suicide, in some of these environments mental health is not even really talked about?*

Yeah, it is a funny one. As of right now today, I've done a lot more research and looked into the subjects and I think there's that cultural, different cultures around the world. There's that sort of mentality of, 'don't show weakness', especially with the blokes but also women as well. "If we don't talk about it then maybe it's not there, maybe there is nothing wrong with me." "If I don't ask, I don't need to deal with someone else's problem." In my faith community and church groups, yeah, I think it was put down to maybe that old English conservative view of, 'keep it bottled up, don't put your problems on someone else'. Don't let anyone else know that there's a problem at home or with you and just deal with it internally.

*Because of what mate?*

Probably judgement. It's a sign of weakness and it's a sign of people – "what are people going to think of me? What are people going to think of my family?" and that's sad. The more research I do, communities and



cultures should be looking at it from the point of view that 'reach out to your community, reach out to your family and your friends and those around you and actually get them to help you through it'. But it's the opposite way around and it has been here for a long time and I think that was built on that whole, 'we don't want to be judged by others, we don't people to know our business, we don't want to be thought less of so don't let anyone know'.

*When it comes to faith based environments, I often wonder whether there's a perception that somehow the expression of mental health and maybe even suicide is an expression of a lack of a relationship with God and a lack of faith in God's capacity to be able to deal with things in your life. Do you kind of sense that that's a prevailing thought process?*

Yeah, I am religious and I obviously have my faith and beliefs so I can only speak for myself and my community but yeah, there's a view that obviously, suicide has been put into boxes and categorised in certain ways by certain cultures which we're learning isn't the right way to do it. And people have tried to play it off as there's reasons for not talking about it and there's reasons for not going there and that maybe cultural or faith-based opinions. And it's a sensitive so I don't want to elaborate on that because I know that can be distressing for some people but, it's not, it's a part of life is what I am learning. Mental health and depression and anxiety and they are normal sicknesses that need to be treated just like everything else, like a broken arm or any other type of sickness, the flu. And we go and we all get help for that and we all talk about it but for reason this other category has been pushed aside and hasn't been helped along in the same way.

*So why aren't we as communities, whether it's cultural or faith-based communities or even social structures, why aren't we talking about these sorts of things openly?*

I think it's because it's been mis-skewed throughout time but you're right. If you read the Bible and that is something that you are interested in and you believe in, there are fantastic stories there about the characters and the lessons in there. Whether you take it as a story or take it literally as being real, it talks about people being at their lowest points and reaching out for help. And whether that was to their community or to their God and what they believed, they did it and we can do that in society today. We've got to reach out for help. It's not a taboo subject and there's nothing wrong with it. It is another form of dying and unfortunately though if you look at statistics, if you look at it, it's actually one of the most – not easiest but there is a way to stop it. I mean we look at cancer and we look at some of these other sicknesses out there and they're still try to find cures. There's things that are out of our control but we can stop our young men and our young women and people dying too young, prematurely from suicide.

*So maybe if you would like to give me a bit of a sense as to the story around your brother James and what your lived experience was.*

I'm one of six kids, so we were all born in Tassie and mum and dad and we all lived down there. And so there was three boys, three girls and I was the second eldest and as a family we lost James, my little brother, the youngest of the boys, we lost him to suicide.

*How long ago was that?*



That was just over five years, everything turns into a bit of a blur, it flies by but yeah it was November 2014 and James was 22 years old and that was my lived experience that hit home. All of a sudden that subject wasn't at arm's length, it was right there in the middle of our family, in the middle of community and it was rocking our world.

*Tell us about James, what was he like?*

James was the life of the party and that's probably a story that people are so used to hearing now, he was. He was a real fun, loud character. My kids, I have got four kids and probably the two eldest are the ones that remember him the most. I had three at the time of James being with us and even they just go, "Oh, he was fun, he was uncle James." He was crazy. Every time we went over to the house he was the one they would seek out to see what he was up to, what he was wearing, what music he was listening to, what posters he had in his room. He was fun. He was working as a hairdresser, an apprentice so doing really well with that.

*He enjoyed that?*

Yeah he enjoyed it and he was doing great. He previously worked before that in the pizza industry, making pizzas locally and everywhere he was working and everyone he was touching he was having an effect on them. He was on the pictures on their wall, he was on their Facebook pages, he was the life of the party and he had good group friends around him. He owned his car, had a couple of cars, had the job and yeah, he was plodding along, going well so to speak.

*Did you ever notice any behaviours associated with his life that were concerning for you prior to him taking his life?*

Looking back now, yes. Hindsight is a great thing, we can look back now but at the time I wasn't – I didn't know enough to be picking up on the signs and hearing the triggers and knowing what I know now. So yes, there were signs, talking to mum and dad as well. Mum's really good to chat to about it. There were signs and there's things that we can look back on now but at the time for example myself, I can only speak for myself, no, I didn't notice and I didn't pick up on things that I could have.

*Retrospectively, what are some of the sign that mum spoken to you about or things that other people have noticed that might be helpful for our listeners to know about their own sort of complex situations?*

Yeah I guess the basic things are, people doing things differently to what they would normally do.

*For example?*

So those signs can be anything from eating patterns to mood swings. Someone that's normally very happy and up and about and boisterous suddenly isn't that way or someone that's normally down, quiet maybe the more solemn type of person at work or at school are suddenly happy and talking about things they don't normally talk about.

*Have people said that about James? Have people said they noticed some changes in behaviour?*



Yeah, probably a couple of things especially for me, look, as his brother, physical changes. So I look at photos of him a year before and then in the year that he passed away and you could see a change obviously in his eating by his weight and his face. There's a change there, you can physically see it and mum said his eating habits did change. His opening up and talking to people, people have said, he's had conversations with us in that year leading up to it that now we look back...

*Conversation of?*

You know bringing up how he was feeling.

*Okay and that was unusual for him, he wasn't someone who needed to talk about those things?*

Not just that, I think he was a great talker but maybe the subject of what he was talking about and eventually getting to the point where he said, "I'd like to talk to someone about more than just day to day activities and how I'm feeling," and that was that tipping point. I look back at a moment where – look, me and James didn't see each other a lot. I was married, I had kids, I was heavily involved in my work, in my church. I was very busy and I didn't see my siblings a lot, I didn't see mum, dad a lot. It was more just family events here and there, dropping the kids off and I look back on a couple of moments in the months leading up to James passing where we contacted each other backwards and forwards and it was more than what I used to.

*So he was reaching out?*

Reaching out to chat, to talk, I don't know what for to be honest because we didn't do it.

*You wouldn't have considered that unusual?*

No, I look back now and go that was unusual for the time because it was pretty basic transactions and conversations we were having and so I look back now and I go that's something that I know now to pick up on. Someone is reaching out, they're talking to you more than they would normally talk to, they're ringing you, they're texting you. Couple of conversations I had with him the way he was responding to me. The day that it sort of changed for me is when I was down in Mount Gambier for work. I'm a sales rep and I was down there and my mum rang me and I answered my phone. I was, 'why is mum ringing me for Tuesday morning?' for example. And mum sort of said to me she goes, "Look James isn't good, just letting you know he's reached out to me and he's feeling unwell mentally and we've gone and we've started the process of seeing the GP and talking to people and going through those steps of a GP and a psychologist and that kind of thing." And we chatted about it, I can't right at this moment recall the details of the phone call, but I remember sitting there with this feeling in my stomach and it hitting home. "Oh, James my happy go lucky brother is depressed or he's having mental health." At the time, in my head going, "He's sad," and in my head going, "Why?" I'd had that outlook in life of if you're sad, be happy and I don't say that disrespectfully. I've learnt a lot since then but it was kind of like, "How can you be sad when there's so much good stuff going on? You've got a good job, you've got cars, everything is great." And so it really hit me, I remember sitting in my car after I got off the phone to mum and I reckon I had a cry and I was like trying to comprehend it all in my head. "Why isn't my little brother okay?" But even then I didn't know what to do, I hadn't had exposure enough to it. I hadn't done any training, I hadn't read up on it and the next time I reached out to him, I think I shot him a text message, at the time we were maybe talking about bicycles and I think that was one of those moments where we'd been



talking about it but the responses I was getting back to him wasn't about buying a bicycle, it was, "Hey, what are you up too? What are you doing? Do you want to grab lunch?" So I went around to see him that week when I got back and I reckon I took him a nice coffee and maybe a magazine or something and sort sat there with him. I didn't know what to say. It was, "Hey how are you mate?" and, "I got you a nice coffee," and just being a blokkie bloke. I didn't know what to say or how to start that conversation or how to check in.

*What do you wish you had said? I am sure you given that a lot of reflection.*

Yeah I have and I don't beat myself up, I don't blame myself, I don't think I could have changed it. I think that's all fine but I look at it and just go I could have actually asked him questions along the lines of, "How are you?" and "Are you okay?" and "How can I help?" and then listen for the answer because I know I am like James. I'm boisterous, I'm out there, I fire off at the tongue a lot before I listen and I know I'm like that. And I've learnt a lot that it's very powerful to ask the question but then hang around for the answer and actually show you're listening and show that you care and that's something I've had to learn and something I've got work on and I'm still working on.

... I remember a few of those events really clearly. There's other stuff that's not clear and it's blurred over the last five years but I remember that conversation clearly and I remember going away from that one thinking, "Gee, I butchered that. Like why was that so awkward? Why was he acting awkward back to me? Why weren't we interacting normally? Why wasn't he giving me anything?" Like I was asking – I thought I was asking the right questions and he wasn't giving me anything but I look back now and I was asking the right questions and I probably wasn't listening properly either. I think I was hoping that he was just going to snap out of it and I say that definitely with respect that you can't just snap out of it and that's something I've learnt. And then in those – you know it was a short period. It was that phone call and about five weeks until I got the worst phone call of my life. So that was pretty a short period for me.

*What do you remember about that day?*

I remember a fair a bit about that one. I was at home, Mel had gone out maybe to the shops or something. I was at home with the kids and when my phone rang it was one of those – there was that other moment, probably there's a group of phone calls in my life I can clearly remember and that was the other one, where my phone was ringing, Mel was calling and I thought why is Mel calling me. She's just gone to the shops, I've got the kids, she's having the morning off like I don't think she wants to speak to me right now and as soon as I answered the phone something in my stomach clicked.

*Was it her reaction?*

Yeah, she didn't sound right. My mind was already racing, 'why is Mel ringing me?' and what she said to me about, "I'm on the way back home, we got to go out, friends are coming around to watch the kids. We got to go to mum and dad's house." And I don't know, it's one of those things, I knew something was wrong. My mind started racing, my mind just went straight to James. And that's the weird thing, even though I didn't understand enough about the subject of anxiety and depression and suicide, my mind started racing and all I could think in my head was, "Yeah, something's gone wrong." And I think one of the other things that was hard and the lesson I've learned is that two days before that we were all meant to catch up, so me, dad, James and my other brother Peter. And we tee'd up to go out for lunch on, I think it was the Thursday, and just to



have a catch up. And you know I was busy, I was busy at work, I was a rep, though I should have been able to clear out my schedule and go, "Yeah, I got an hour out. I will meet you guys down at the café," and I just did the old, "Look, I'm too busy. Let's take a rain check." And look that is what it is, once again you can't do anything about that. But you go, we've got to look out for each other, we've got to look out for our family, we've got to look out for our friends, we've got to look out for our work colleague and life's not too busy, 1) to be safe, you know because safety is a big thing in the construction industry. And 2) to make time for each other and that falls under safety too as well, safety and wellbeing of mental health. And I look back at that and just go if I'd known more of the signs and known how serious it was, I would probably would have made that time to go and catch up with him and I didn't. So that was sort of my last chat, was right there and then of me interacting with them over text messages, not even seeing them face to face and then rocking up to mum and dad's house and getting told the news James had died. And you know that's life shattering. That right there is the rock in the water and the ripples just start going from there and life hasn't been the same since then. It's been a real journey the last five years. But yeah, that was it, it was a phone call, it was five weeks later I got the worst phone of life and everything changed.

*How has it changed you do you think?*

Yeah, it's been an up and down journey. I, looking back now, I went into probably protective mode. I shut out my feelings.

*What were you protecting?*

I think I'm still working through it but I shut out my emotions definitely. I did the real blokkie thing of going, "Right, I'm going to step up here and help mum and dad and help my siblings." I was kind of telling myself, "I'm okay. I have got me and Mel, my wife, I've got my kids." I've sort of got it together so I need to step in here and help my younger sisters and mum and dad through this tragedy and I tried to be strong and put on that strong persona and everything. And I did that well for a while. I don't know, other people might say I didn't but I think I did it well for a while. I just shut it all out and went, "Come on, let's kick into action and help everyone else." I like helping people, that's how I grew up. I'm bad at a lot of things, maths, science, all those things but I like helping people and I like people. And so that's what I did. I jumped into help mode and I shut out my emotions and the next sort of year went by real quick. We went through all the other things that come with it, the family fall out, the funeral, the community and all that but me, for myself, I went on that journey of then having to fight grief.

*What did grief feel like for you?*

The grief I'd felt before that of obviously grandma and then friends in our community which I won't go into, obviously because that's not my story, but that was sadness, those ones. I was sad. I was sad for them. I was sad for who had passed away and I wanted – I just constantly felt sad for them and that grief was a journey of probably more sadness and empathy. Whereas in this grief was, after I sort of let it in, was confusion, sadness, real deep, deep sadness, that knot in your stomach that doesn't go away for months at a time, questioning things, so questioning I guess the events and why everything happened, questioning maybe my faith. So the sadness which probably turned into a bit of depression type sadness like as in feeling blue and feeling down. Then probably going in the waves of managing to get on top of it and pushing it out and trying to go back like everything was normal. Anger, frustration, that kind of thing and it hasn't stopped if I am being perfectly



honest. And only recently as of three weeks ago, 2020, I went back to the GP and just said, "I got to do a self-care check in," and that was due to feedback from Mel and the kids and people around me, people at work.

*What was that feedback if you don't mind me asking?*

That I wasn't acting like normal.

*Like what were the behaviours?*

Yeah probably just my persona and how I was interacting with people at work, how I was at home, little things frustrating me and feeling down, those classic things. Not into the things I'm normally into and that's okay. That's what I've had to learn in the five years is it's okay to not be okay and you've got to talk about what's going on. And I'm a shocker for that, you know everything that's happened, I've got to put my hand up as much as I preach the message and I share it. I'm actually just as bad, not just as bad, but I do the exact same thing that other humans do, I bottle it up and I don't talk about it. And so that's, I think, part of my grief journey is that I've got to keep working through that and so I'm doing that at the moment and it's tough. I say to anyone out there that's listening, keep going and keep trying to do it, put your hand up. There's lots of different options out there to talk to and to get help from.

*You started with the GP?*

Yeah, in that case I did because I think if you can get onto a GP that you feel comfortable talking with and that openly tells you that they're open to mental health discussion, because they're some that aren't and they're getting trained as well. But if you can find the right GP, they're a great place to start because they can recommend you to people to talk to and course of action, mental health plans, that kind of thing.

*What did they recommend to you?*

The ones that I've been to speak have done the little – sort of spent time with me and got to know me, done some little questionnaires and chat to and asked where I'm at and made sure I'm okay and I'm in a good place. And then said, "Right," they are openly telling me that they've got to their limit of saying, "Hey, I think it would be good if you went and spoke to someone now who specialises in grief from suicide and I know others that have spoken to people, they've gone. It's good if you go and speak to someone about grief to do with relationships," and there are people out there that specialise in this but you don't know that if you're not out there seeking it and asking for help

*And you took that on board and you went and got some counselling?*

Yeah, I've done in the past. I've had counselling and seen a psychologist and now I'm just on that journey again right now and it's good. I feel better for the - every time I do it and so that's obviously me on my journey with it. And all I can say is that everyone I've spoken to that's doing that same thing or has been on that journey of asking for help, it's been good and it might not fix – it's not going to fix overnight but what it is, is it's going to – there's going to be people there to help you through your journey. It's like grief, it's not going away and people say you might get over it. You get over it. People say you might learn to live with it, some people might



not learn to live with it but it's going to be there forever now and so it's about working with it and working how you can live with it and how you can just go through each day with it.

... and look regret's a hard one. Definitely not the blame game regret but just the regret. Just looking back and just going, "I wish I spent more time with that person," or "I'd had those catch ups," or "I'd done that." James left lots of different little writings. He was a real character, he loved trying to write music and poems and stories and songs and he left some writings that mum and dad have gone through and that I've read through with them. He left some writings and just some thoughts that he was obviously having.

*What stands out for you when you think back about some of those thoughts that he left?*

Yeah well probably the biggest one is he had a small list of people he wanted to talk to about how he was feeling and what he was going through before he died. And one of the list said, "People I want to talk to about how I'm feeling," and at the top of the list was my name. Now whether that was in order or not, I don't know but I was on that list. 'Andrew, my brother', along with a couple of other names and reading that, you know it's one of those kicks in the gut moment where you go, "He wanted to talk to me," and then I think back, "Did we talk much?" No, we didn't and that's a hard one because there's nothing I can do about that now and I'll never know what it was. It's like one of those old unopened letters, you're never going to know what's in it. But what that has done is made me fight for and want to never have to do that again, to never have to see my name written down, there's someone wanting to talk to me and I wasn't available to them. And not to say that you can't – you can't be available all the time to everyone and you can't fix everyone and you don't have all the answers. But I look at that and just go we can all try harder and we can all learn more and we can all make a difference, even if it's a tiny little bit, even if this podcast today or that post you share on Facebook next week or that card you give out at work, you don't know how that's going to affect someone or how they're going to be able to open up to you because of that.

*What was the impact for your siblings and James's siblings and the family more as a whole?*

It is the ripple effect, it's a tough one but it's real. It's probably the biggest thing that goes alongside the subject of suicide is the fall out. I can't speak for mum and dad and for my siblings but I can say that and our extended family the aunts and uncles, the cousins. He, James – just funnily enough quickly I mean, when James passed away I had messages from country SA. I then had messages as far away as WA and Tassie. I then received messages from America and from somewhere in Asia over Facebook of people that James's life had touched. So just on that ripple effect, you don't know how big it is and that's how big it was for us. I couldn't believe it, it was rippling hard around the world so to speak but yeah, it's changed our family because we've all, like I said, I don't think anyone of us probably had had it hit home like it did with James. And so yeah, it's changed our environment, it's changed mum and dad, it's changed my siblings.

... personally think I probably look out for my family more now. I notice more things about them now. I think I interact with them a bit more now. I make sure I don't use that whole excuse of being busy and having other stuff on anymore or putting my life and my interests and my time first, got to make time for them and I've seen them do the same. But I've seen them all go through grief which is just that subject that hits everyone differently. Relationships, probably everyone's had to revisit how their relationships are with people, but look, as a gut feeling I think it's all made us stronger but not to say that everyone's okay because I don't think any of us are okay so to speak. But we're all more aware of life and death and suicide and everything that comes with



it and they're all on journeys as well and I need to keep checking in on them and they do on me as well which is nice. Get the little messages here and there and that's all different things since James has died.

*What about faith? You talked before about how it challenges our concept of God and challenges faith. What impact has it had in terms of challenging your faith?*

I can definitely only speak on mine on that one and my journey and my family and my wife and kids. So we're obviously religious and we go to church each week and we got a community here in Adelaide and around Australia and the world. And I poured myself back into it after James died - very heavily. Kept saying yes to everything and being involved in youth group and camps and all the good things. We're in a good positive community there, it's great. The support was good, it was great. Some people, I felt for them because it's that subject that's still hard to talk about and you could see people either wanting to talk about it or not wanting to talk about it and you've got to respect that. I look at me before I had my lived experience and I have to think of it when I think of other people. You can't have a go at people for saying the wrong thing or for not saying anything because it's hard. It's been a journey from me probably pouring myself back into it, going, "Yep, everything's alright, everything happens for a reason, I've got this, I'm going to find the answers, it's all going to be okay," to maybe two years later going, "It's not okay, I don't have the answers, everything doesn't happen for a reason and I need to question all this and I need to make sure my faith is being steered in the right direction and that I am doing the right thing by myself, my wife and my kids." And so I've been doing that probably the last three years then. So say five years, two years of just pouring back into it and just accepting everything and then the last three years of now searching, and that's been hard too. But it's been good, now that I've gone through some high points and low points. And I've had to learn things like not being a yes man which I've always been good at and saying no to things. Taking time for myself, re-evaluating things, testing my faith and what I was doing wasn't just blind and wasn't just me going with the crowd and doing things to keep other people happy. I had to make sure my relationship with God and Jesus, which is what my belief is, was on the right track and I was doing it for the right reasons and not worrying so much about what other people think. And that's what I was talking earlier about the suicide subject maybe not getting spoken about in cultures and in religion, people care so much about what other people think, not care about what God thinks or what their family thinks, they're worried about what everyone else thinks and gossiping and putting on that face. And I think I've learned that don't worry about what other people think, in a nice sense. You've got to look after yourself, you've got to look after your family, you've got to look after your mental health and you've got to get those things in check before you start pouring your time into serving other people and doing those things. And that's out of the best interest of the people you trying to help and serve and out of your own best interest. So for me, that's where I'm at with God and with Jesus and making sure that I have myself in a safe space, in the right space to then help others and to do works of any kind.

*Speaking of work, work is such an important part of our existence as human beings. We spend so much of our time in our work and we spend a lot of times with our colleagues. I know you've become an advocate for change and an advocate for talking about mental health. How did you find the work environment?*

Yeah, I feel for my work colleagues at the time. I obviously rang my boss, a good mate of mine, and told him and he was great and supportive and I hated calling him and having to dump that on him. That's probably another thing is when you dump the info of a suicide on someone, I feel for that person. But I took some time off, I took a couple of weeks off, didn't sort of interact with the guys from work other than just texting my boss about when I'd come back and that kind of thing. And then when I came back I didn't know how much



everyone at work knew or what had been spoken about and it was sort of that awkward standoff of I didn't really want to dump it on them either and they probably – I think what I learnt then was that a few people didn't know, they just knew something had gone wrong in my life and there was a tragedy or whatever. A few people knew exactly what had happened and others had no idea. And so it's one of those where you don't – at the time I didn't walk in and just announce to everybody or send an email or something like that but then it was that hard moment of they didn't know what I was going through and I didn't want to dump it on them kind of thing. And I was still very green to the subject and all that kind of thing. So that was a funny one. It went on for a while where I only sort of only spoke about it with people at work if it came up or if I was close enough to them or if they maybe asked and that was it, we kept it pretty tame. I then changed jobs, I went away for two years and then ended up back at the same company. And so that was a good journey as well that I went on there and in that time I just started seeing mental health in the work place and how much time we spend with each other at work. A lot of cases it's more time than you spend with your family or at church or at your sports club or whatever. And the importance of 'well maybe we do need to all talk about this and share it more because then you can share it with your families at homes and that kind of thing and you don't know what the guy or lady next to you is going through'. So things like R U OK Day came up, Beyond Blue doing days where they'd send out packs to workplaces, fundraises, initiatives, that kind of thing. And I thought, "Hey, let's try and push this a little bit," and the more I pushed it, it was getting a good response, people were reacting to it. You don't always get a reaction if you hold morning tea or something like this for other things but all of a sudden there was response to it so I kept pushing and the response has been phenomenal. People are wanting to talk about it and they're wanting to know things about it. So I've done the training with mates in construction here in Adelaide, that's really great. I have done the three levels of training with them.

*So it's assist, safe talk, mental health, first aid, those sorts of...?*

Yes and so you do your...

*Would you recommend someone to do those programs?*

Look I would recommend that straight away. That's probably been the best one I've done and I'm looking to do more. I'm looking to learn more and that was fantastic. The last one is a two day event you do to become assist trained and you suddenly find yourself learning what to do in a crisis moment. If you're with someone that is in a crisis and funnily enough I only did it end of last year, so maybe four or five months ago, and last week I had my first intervention accidentally.

*Wow, what happened?*

Me and dad driving home from a round of golf here in Adelaide and we saw a gentleman that was in distress on the side of the road and we had that further moment where dad went, "Hey, does that guy look alright?" and I went, "Uh, I don't know," and I got to chuck a U-ey. So we went back round and he wasn't okay. He was having a panic attack and some of things he said were triggers and I jumped into action, my training jumped into action and it was tell the person you're there with them and we calmed him down, we got him a drink of water. And funnily enough it was out the front of a fire station and all of sudden the fire-ies came out and we supported him. We got him in a safe place, we told him we were there to listen, we sat down with him, we let him catch his breath and that moment evolved there and I just tried to think of my training and what I needed to say that was the right things to say and we got him in a safe place. We then got him home and we did the



steps of giving him some numbers of people that he could call and we rang the emergency services to go do a welfare check upon him. We did everything we could at the time, you can't always do everything you can but at the time I think me and dad did the best we could at the time. And I don't know how that all ended up but you can only do what you can do at the time but that's where that whole training and knowing – like five years ago, I would not have had a clue what to do. I may or may not have stopped if I'm being honest and I wouldn't have known what to do. And so that's where I can recommend training, I can recommend reading and listening to podcasts and going on to websites. There's fantastic groups out there. Instagram, Facebook, you can follow these groups like Living' and R U OK Day and all these guys, Roses in the Ocean, and you can see the work they're doing and all those little snippets here and there can help you build a little library of your own thoughts and ways of helping people because everyone's on a different journey. Like you guys are doing, you're talking to people from all different walks of life and you don't know how you can affect someone on the journey that they're on. And like you said, it's not a 100% success rate and knowing the right thing for the right person but I feel like it's that message we've got to give to the world is, "We've all got try a little bit and we can make a difference." Now however big or small that difference is, we don't know.

... Like I said, it's all I can do and I share a lot of stuff on Facebook and Instagram and LinkedIn and I don't do any of this for the accolades. I've felt the pain, I've felt hurt, I'm still hurting, it tears me to pieces but I'm also at the stage where I want to know of what more I can do in this world to help other people. At the moment all it is in my circumstances is sharing those little things and pushing the message and I've had a couple of people message me and reach out to me and even then, it's not about that, that wasn't the reason for it, but that also helped me keep going. When someone tells me they saw that and it helped them on their day, that it put a smile on their face or it was just the message that they needed, it's not my messages, it's things I'm sharing and quotes I'm finding. That helps me keep going. So I guess to anyone out there that's why talking is important. Mention to someone if they are helping you on your mental health journey, share it if you're trying to help someone else, put a little note in someone's letter box or at work share a card with numbers on it and don't be afraid to ask the question. The worst answer you're going to get, as in the most negative answer is, "No, how could you ask me that?" but the best answer you're going to get is someone saying, "Yeah, I'm in trouble, what do I do?"

*You don't lose either way.*

You don't lose either way.

*Someone says, "Why you asking me that?" it still illustrates how much you care about them so there's no loss.*

Exactly and that's the biggest thing and the training I've been doing is, the hardest question you ask someone is, "Are you having thoughts of suicide? Are you thinking of killing yourself?" And even when I say those words I feel – I'm like I can't believe I just said that. That's a really, real harsh thing to say to someone but the answer to that is the most important answer you're going to get. It's either yes or no and if it's no, there's nothing been lost and if it's yes, you can start helping that person on their journey.

