

Media statement

13 May, 2016

Every canvas has a silver lining during Schizophrenia Awareness Week

Queensland artists living with mental illness have charged their paint brushes to challenge social stigma and share their journey of hope at the annual MIFQ Art Exhibition, on display in Brisbane's King George Square from tomorrow (Saturday 14 May).

Coinciding with Schizophrenia Awareness Week, "Silver Lining, a retrospective" celebrates 25 years of artistic achievement by people with lived experience of mental illness. The exhibition features works by more than 150 artists.

Queensland Mental Health Commissioner Dr Lesley van Schoubroeck said the exhibition provided an opportunity for artists to be recognised for their talent and not their illness.

"Enhancing social inclusion, reducing stigma and discrimination and addressing socio-economic factors are essential to improved mental health and wellbeing," she said.

"Through their work, these artists are speaking volumes for those people living with severe mental illness who continue to be among the most economically and socially marginalised in our community."

"Like all of us, people living with mental illness need a purpose in life."

Schizophrenia Awareness Week is a national week which calls for action on the issues faced by people experiencing severe and persistent mental illness.

Schizophrenia is a condition characterised by disturbances in a person's thoughts, perceptions, emotions and behaviour. It affects approximately one in every 100 people worldwide and commonly begins in adolescence or early adulthood.

The MIFQ Art Exhibition runs until Thursday 19 May and is attended by more than 3,000 people. All artworks on display are for sale.

[Click here for more information about Mental Illness Fellowship Qld \(MIFQ\) and "The Silver Lining, a retrospective" art exhibition.](#)

About QMHC: The Queensland Mental Health Commission was established to improve the mental health and wellbeing of all Queenslanders by driving ongoing reform.

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Carissa's story



Like others who exhibit at our Annual Art Exhibition, MIFQ participant Carissa is proud to showcase her journey with mental illness, in the hope of increasing understanding.

She describes herself as fun-loving, and an aspiring entrepreneur. Certainly when she moved to the Sunshine Coast for

University 11 years ago, at the age of 17, her future looked bright.

However she soon noticed a gradual shift in her moods and mental state. She lost her boyfriend who, after a couple of years of dating, broke down and told her he couldn't continue the relationship. He felt he always had to look after her. She hadn't considered the impact of her dependency and moods.

Heartbroken, she struggled to move forward, completing her degree and returning to Brisbane where she found a job as an education consultant. She persevered in a high pressure environment, but one day broke down physically and mentally and was taken to hospital by a friend. She believed she was just stressed and tired, so quickly returned to work.

Carissa made plans to go to a friend's wedding in Hawaii. Her excitement and emotions ran high, and although she doesn't recall much about this time, she found herself in hospital having experienced her first manic episode.

There was no diagnosis at this point and her family struggled to understand what was happening. She moved to Canberra for a fresh start, staying with her sister and starting a new job. Within twelve months, she again found herself in hospital after another manic episode. The third time, a year ago, doctors officially diagnosed bipolar disorder. At first she found it hard to believe and worried that people would not accept her condition.

Thanks to a diary she kept during manic episodes, she began to understand patterns of emotions, internal, external pressures and high expectations that seemed to be her triggers.

Carissa finds it hard to deal with the lack of control over her behaviour and actions in a manic phase, and says her greatest regret is the loss of friendships due to erratic behaviour or aggression.

She is fortunate now, at the age of 28, to have a supportive network of family and friends.

Carissa still feels that she is 'owned' by her bipolar, but is working on getting her life back and becoming successful in all aspects. Although it is hard not to sink into a depression when coming to terms with such a serious diagnosis, she is determined to find a way to live in harmony with her illness.

Carissa first came to MIFQ as a participant in our PIR program. She now participates in and facilitates art groups and provides input into the PIR Recovery System Reform Project.

**Carissa's story reprinted courtesy of MIFQ (<http://www.mifq.org.au/>)*