2022 Mental Health Month ACT Community Ambassador

Mark Brosnan (he/him)

I'm not what most people think of when they picture someone with a mental health condition.

I'm an ordinary bloke, a husband and father. I've also been through some bad stuff and would like to help others learn from my mistakes.

I grew up in a healthy, happy home with devoted parents and loving siblings. My parents were determined, strong people who raised themselves out of humble beginnings, became soldiers, and then had successful careers as an engineer and Registered Nurse. Our home was a place of refuge for others, and my family was all about community service.

It was a great upbringing.

But if there was a 'sin' in our household, it was being a 'sook'. Showing weakness was considered pathetic. So when I first realised that my mental health was deteriorating, I was ashamed. I started hating myself and didn't discuss it outside my immediate family.

I suffered alone and, by not getting the help I needed, ended up spending five years consumed with suicidal ideation.

My first career was as a behaviour modification expert working with people with disabilities and acquired brain injury. But an attack in the workplace left me with severe trauma and CPTSD. I spiralled and eventually tried to take my own life.

It was during this attempt that I realised that I didn't want to die. I now use that narrative to combat suicidal thoughts.

I worked (unsuccessfully) in a variety of roles until I landed a job as the drive-time radio announcer at 91.9 and 94.3 in Canberra.

One day, I accidentally 'outed' myself on air. I was filled with shame and thought that people would detest me as I detested myself for this 'weakness'.

Instead, I received calls from many people thanking me for my courage.

I was stunned. People knew who I really was and accepted me.

I began sharing my story, slowly and cautiously, with the listening audience. Eventually, I became known as a vocal advocate for people with mental health concerns.

This gave me the courage to believe that my mental health condition wasn't the end. It made me realise that mental ill-health is not weakness.

I now talk freely and openly about mental wellbeing. I wrote a book on my experiences and now write and produce a podcast that had over 50,000 listens this year. I also volunteer with Mental Illness Education ACT (MIEACT) to raise awareness of mental health, reduce stigma and encourage people to seek help.
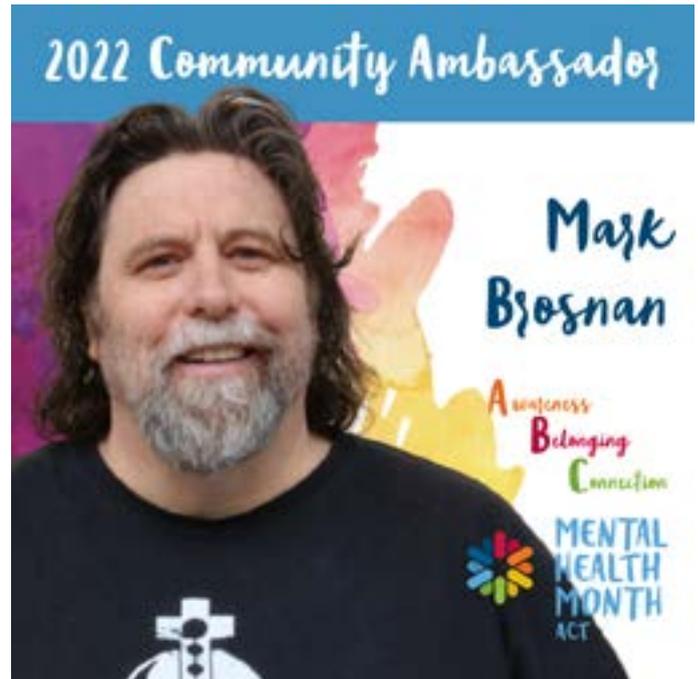
I don't want anyone to go through what I went through, and can think of no greater calling in life than to help normalise the conversation around suicide prevention and mental health.

I now know I wasn't the only one in my family who suffered in silence. As the son and brother of veterans ashamed of what they considered weakness, I feel very strongly about changing the culture of self-stigma.

I wish I had spoken up sooner and found my support network and mental health team years earlier. Not only would I have been healthier, but it would have also spared my loved ones many painful experiences.

I can't change that. But I now know that having a mental health condition is not the end. And I hope that I can help others see that too.