

## Social Prescribing Initiatives: Calvary Health Care Bethlehem

**Service:** 'Photovoice' Communication Group

**Main Component:** Photovoice is a communication group addressing the social determinants of health, specifically the communication and social connectedness of its participants. Photovoice uses a participatory action research (PAR) methodology in which the participants share photos related to their lived experiences. These lived experiences are then used to self-reflect, advocate for change, influence policy, raise awareness and spark change at an individual and organisational level, as well as for the community themselves. In the most recent MND group, each of the participants shared photos of how they use nature to support their wellbeing. Collectively as a group, they wrote a letter to Parks Victoria, sharing their personal photo narratives as a way of increasing awareness of how connecting with nature helps to increase their wellbeing. The letter was also circulated via the MND Victoria newsletter to build community capacity, highlighting the large range of accessible parks and nature spaces that Parks Victoria offer for people living with accessibility needs.

**Who is this for?** The Photovoice program has been developed for families living with life limiting progressive neurological diseases such as Motor Neuron Disease and Huntington's Disease. Patients and their family members participate in a 4-week group program.

**Outcomes:** The Photovoice program was successfully piloted (n=46) which then progressed to a joint research project (n=19) with CHCB and La Trobe University (Master of Public health). The program is now being upscaled as part of CHCB's mainstream Living Well initiatives. The primary outcome is improved quality of life. The research results revealed that the Photovoice group program does have a positive impact on communication, social connectedness, and social participation, which resulted in improved quality of life for 100% of participants. Thematic analysis highlighted 5 themes from the participants lived experience that were instrumental to wellbeing:

- Identity, self-care and emotional wellbeing
- Communication and connection
- Networks of Support for wellbeing
- Maintaining social participation ("stopping your universe from shrinking")
- Taking action

The research resulted in formation of a 'health promotion' model of care, incorporating social prescribing as a key factor in creating sustainable benefits for participants following completion of the 4-week program. Whilst all 'photovoice' group participants are effectively co-designing their own 'social prescription', CHCB and MND Victoria are currently collaborating to design a systematic social prescribing pilot for families living with MND. Stay tuned!

**Organisations-involved:** Calvary Health Care Bethlehem (CHCB) developed and runs the group. Key stakeholders include MND Victoria, Huntington's Victoria and CHCB's overarching Living Well Program which is supported by our extended community of support known as Friends of Bethlehem.

**Keywords:** photovoice, communication, social connection, participatory action research, social action, social prescribing, wellbeing, quality of life

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