

## Ben writes about his volunteer work with MIEACT

November 2010

I found MIEACT through volunteers ACT —a that time I didn't know what to expect, but I was curious as to what this organisation might be about. I certainly had plenty of experience with mental illness and could have written a PhD on the stigma that I had attached to it, both internally and externally. So I did the training and got stuck into doing sessions.

From the first session I was blown away; it had it all for me, believe it or not I find the sessions great fun. Getting maximum interaction with the groups is a challenge and once you have them hooked in, it is really special. Like all the presenters I have spoken to, I find presentations have a magical way of helping me, even when its emotional —sharing my story puts me out in the world in a way I have never experienced before.

My past pain becomes the currency of attention with 20 -30 people for a few minutes. They share my illness in an intimate yet very public way and for that small amount of time we care for each other. I care about how my past can make a difference to them and they care about me, they give me unconditional attention and in doing so honour the shared experience that takes place. This is the power of a human reality and is why doing this helps me so much.

The other half is the people that make up MIEACT; the co presenters and staff. What to say, I'm sure it has been said before but Ill say it again, they are all incredible. My co presenters helped me, nurtured me and most of all gave me a sense of being part of a very special community.

To describe the difference that all the staff have made to my life in such a short time is difficult; words are such a primitive and clumsy form of expression, they have helped me find a of confidence in myself that has been buried for a decades, their encouragement and kindness help me reconstruct my dignity and self esteem.

I am a very lucky fellow to have MIEACT in my life.

That's all.

Ben Mathews

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