

Helping Lucy over the Invisible Hurdles

Turning your life around takes a real commitment. But often this commitment needs clear air to allow you to focus on what you need to do. When you are trying to get on top of many issues, that air is hard to find.

Lucy* is now in a strong place through the help NESAY case manager Ruth Nugent and HRCLS lawyer Ang Georgiou gave her at a time when she needed it. With confidence, self-esteem and a sense of belonging restored, Lucy has a future that she can not only see, but also appears bright.

NESAY referred Lucy for legal help to sort out some issues. It was daunting for Lucy but she took the advice and sought out the lawyer based at NESAY.

“I was freaking out before I saw her. It was a really big deal to take the first step in getting some help. But Ang was absolutely fabulous. She was calm and lovely to talk to. It came across like it was more than just a job to help me, she genuinely cared.”

Fine sorted

Lucy had a fine but was not sure how she got it or what she could do to get rid of it. Ang tried to source a local sponsor so Lucy could ‘work off’ the fine through the Work and Development Permit Scheme. When this avenue stalled, Ang asked for the fine to be put on hold until Lucy got her Victims of Crime Assistance Tribunal (VOCAT) Award and then helped her contact Fines Victoria to pay out the fine.

“Ang was able to figure out where the fine was, and worked out what to do. When they were gone, it felt like I finally had this weight lifted from my shoulders and I could start getting my life back on track.”

Debt cancelled

A significant phone bill was causing a huge amount of stress for Lucy. It wasn’t her fault, but she didn’t know where to start because the account was in her name. Ang worked out what had been going on, was able to fix it and explained everything in a way Lucy could understand. Lucy felt like Ang had her back “110%”.

Fixing this problem was a major turning point for Lucy. With this one issue resolved, Lucy finally felt free from the relationship she had ended, and was really able to start getting control of her life.

Help to recover

HRCLS assisted Lucy with a successful Victims of Crime Assistance Tribunal application, which allowed Lucy to get a few things that helped her move forward.

While COVID-19 closed the doors on accessing her gym membership, just having this was a motivating force to take steps when it would have been easy just to go back into her shell. “It gave me the ‘oomph’ to want to get out of bed, or maybe even leave the house. I told myself, ‘I can do this, and I need to do this for myself’.”

Lucy is unsure what state her mental health would have been in during the COVID lockdown without the Award compensation. It was because of this, Lucy could find “the right counsellor

to click with”, someone who understood what she had been through, could talk at her level and help her make positive strides. “There is no way I could have afforded the counselling I needed without that compensation.”

And a new laptop couldn’t have come at a better time. With COVID-19 forcing people inside under restrictions, Lucy used Facetime to stay in touch with family when she felt up to it. “I could talk to my little sister and help her with her homework. If I didn’t have the computer, this wouldn’t have happened.” Lucy called it a ‘second option’, in case her anxiety forced her to stay inside, even when she was eventually allowed to visit.

Patience and understanding

Lucy felt like a bond had been quickly built with Ang. “She could tell when I was having a bad day, so she would write down everything she was going to do, and give it to me to read later, so I could remember what we talked about.”

Ang would always get permission to talk to the people she needed to discuss Lucy’s problems. “She understood what needed to happen and would go about it the right way.”

Trust with her lawyer was such that she contacted Ang to seek her advice on buying a car. Along the journey, Lucy went from feeling alone, stuck and not knowing where to turn for help, to being in a better place.

“I know Ang is there in the background, just in case and ready to support me if I need it. I didn’t even know there this was support out there for me.”

Connection with community

Her NESAY case manager, Ruth, organising a stint at the local Carevan proved just the recipe for Lucy improving her self-esteem, health and experiencing how it feels to give a hand to a person in need. Helping preparing meals in a team, serving people their food, gave Lucy plenty of food for thought, along with the skills to cook for others and herself.

Despite having a real fear of talking to people, the experience was a blessing in numerous ways. “Ruth motivated me to get out and have a go. I’d never done anything like that before. But it showed me that volunteering is not a dangerous thing to do, and to get close to other people. I also found out doing something nice for someone else could make me happy.”

Finding a home

Just getting a place of her own was a massive outcome for Lucy. It shows how big the difference is between having a roof over your head and a place that feels like home.

Ruth supported Lucy in getting public housing, and gave her the skills she needs to do it all again in the future if the time comes. “Now I could fill out a form and do an inspection if I needed. It’s really given me some independence.”

But the biggest impact was the lifting of anxiety of what could be around the corner.

“It’s taken away the fear of being homeless. Once I was in my place, I could start doing positive things in my life and actually work towards stuff. Not having an end date to get out of somewhere is a great feeling.”

Better health, bigger smile

As Lucy’s self-belief grew, getting back on her feet also meant getting fit. That involved doing something that Lucy often dreaded, because of her anxiety: getting out of the house. She

decided to start walking, and with the desire to now connect with people, she took to the streets with a specific goal in mind.

“One of my targets was to smile at as many people as I could, even if they didn’t smile back.”

And there were a couple of benefits that Lucy hadn’t expected when she hopped on the exercise bike. “My self-esteem improved, I had more happy feelings and I found I could sleep better.”

*name changed