

All the latest info from Self Help Queensland

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Helping people to help each other...

Self Help Queensland supports people to find their own solutions to improve wellbeing. We connect people to support groups across a broad range of health issues, assist people to start new groups and work with support groups to build their capacity. SHQ promotes community awareness of the benefits of self help groups for the wellbeing of individuals coping with adverse life circumstances.

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Welcome to September and Spring from Self Help Queensland

Welcome to spring, such as it is in Queensland. It often said that there aren't many different seasons in Australia, but at the QCOSS conference in Caloundra last week, Brent Miller from the Gubbi Gubbi people reminded us that there are hundreds of seasonal changes, shown by migratory birds and fish, and vegetation changes like the red stringybark tree. Brent's storytelling was a great reminder to be aware of our environment, a mindfulness exercise with heart.

It's also another time of renewal... membership! You can join or re-join Self Help Queensland as a member [on-line](#) for \$10-\$30. We welcome as many people as possible to support us and build our work together. Please consider being a formal member. We support people and groups regardless of whether they are members, but as everyone knows, regular members make groups sustainable. Our AGM will be held on October 31st at 6pm at Sunnybank Hall, we hope you can make it.

The Self Help Queensland team

Q&A: What SHQ was asked about recently...

Q: Is there a group to help me with depression/anxiety/mental health?

A: In August, referrals were made to mental health peer groups support in Ipswich, Gold Coast, Mackay, Maroochydore and Coorparoo.

Fortunately, in July, Self Help Queensland was able to support a free Emotional CPR course at Mount Gravatt Neighbourhood Centre (pictured below). Selina and Shiwei attended, and this has helped SHQ to respond more effectively to phone calls about finding mental health support. There are some [resources on-line](#) if you are interested in understanding this listening and support technique.



What's News

Peer support for hoarding

From time to time, Self Help Queensland is asked about research evidence concerning the effectiveness of peer-led support. One example of the evidence is a study comparing peer-led to therapist-led groups for hoarding support. The [study](#) found that "peer-led group therapy helped as many patients with hoarding disorder as therapist-led CBT did."

Walking for your brain

[Research](#) published this month, studied walking endurance and brain function in young adults. This study presents the evidence of a positive association between physical fitness and better cognitive function. Time to join a walking club around you?

Music music music...

Creative and cultural participation has emerged as the largest contributor to wellbeing in a survey by AgeUK. Did you know there are more than 50 ukulele clubs in Australia? And over 1000 choirs and singing groups? We hope you encourage each other to join one! Or, go to Mosaic to see others in concert for free.



Weighted blankets - a non-talking therapy

A [recent review](#) of the efficacy of weighted blankets for improved sleep quality for people with autism spectrum disorders, concludes that the current data "slightly favors the use of weighted blankets for improved quantity and quality of sleep in those with ASD." Weighted blankets are a commonly used intervention by Occupational Therapists in treating psychiatric conditions.

"Fish and forget"

[Fishability QLD Inc.](#) is a not for profit organisation assisting disadvantaged groups. Our aim is to break down the impact of social isolation and loneliness. We can take individuals or your whole group fishing, from Bribie Island to Wynnum. Our boat and events are wheelchair accessible. Costs range from free to \$20 per person.

Fishability QLD is hosting a Community Fish Off at The Hornibrook Jetty in September. Join us for a bite to eat, have some fun, have a fish, and have a chat! Rods, bait and facilitation provided.

WHERE: Hornibrook Bridge Fishing Platform Inlet Terrace, 4019 Clontarf

WHEN: Thursday 19th September

TIME: 10:30am – 2pm

COST: FREE (BBQ \$3, Drinks \$1.)



One happy customer!

Info contributed by Emma

Get in the swim...

For many health conditions, swimming and water based activities are recommended, for both physical and mental health. Benefits include being able to exercise longer in water than on land, absence of joint pain, reducing depression and many more. The [Ankylosing Spondylitis Group of Queensland](#) meets regularly for Tuesday evening hydro sessions in Brisbane.

[Masters Swimming Queensland](#) has clubs right across the State, open to anyone over 18. Their groups include people who learnt to swim at 60 and people who competed at high levels. You can race (against your own times or other people) but you don't have to be any competitions,



Connecting via DNA

Some groups may never talk to each other or meet face-to-face. This is the case for groups like [Towns-Brocks syndrome support](#) group, where DNA has linked people and families together. This is very rare genetic condition, and the group's 200 international members connect on-line. Reaching out through DNA testing has become more common, but has some pitfalls, as Professor Kim Summers explains:

Where do you come from?

There is a lot of interest in family DNA testing to see what countries your ancestors may have come from and find links to distant relatives. Already more than 25 million people have sent a saliva sample (and paid the fee) to one of the consumer genetics companies (like Ancestry, 23andMe, Family Tree DNA and others). This is up from less than one million 5 years ago.

What do you get back? Well, the first thing is that the company will tell you where it thinks your

ancestors are from essentially your ethnic group. For many Australians this will be known: largely English with some Scottish and Irish and usually a bit of Scandinavian. Some people get a surprise when they are given a proportion of their DNA from Spain or Africa; some are disappointed when the Italian or Jewish ancestry of family legend doesn't show up in their report. And some people are angry when the company updates its information and the fascinating 11% from Asia or Spain disappears from the record.

These companies are using information from all the people who send in their samples. Since most come from North America, Europe and the UK, they have very good information about the genetic variants that are common in those groups. But they may have very little information about other groups: Ancestry says that Australian indigenous ancestry will be reported as a broad region covering Polynesia/Melanesia, because very few people with lots of indigenous ancestors have been tested. When they update the database they are adding all the recent tests.

That is also why different companies can give you different results. One man was annoyed when 23andMe did not pick up his Indian subcontinent ancestry, while another company said he had 8% from that region. The second company must have more samples from people with Indian ancestors.

You can also find relatives you didn't know you had, because the report will show you other people with DNA matches to you, and suggest the level of relatedness. This is based on how many variants you share, and how long the shared stretches are. While this can be fun to follow up, putting you in touch with groups of distant cousins in Canada or South America, there is also a down side. Lots of people have found relatives they didn't know about, coming from secret relationships or sperm donor conception. This can be quite shocking to the family.

When you sign up for the test, the companies will warn you that you might find things you didn't expect but the warning is usually not very strong (they don't want to discourage you). Some companies allow police forces to submit samples and more than 70 crimes have been solved by tracking families based on DNA from the crime scene. But people sending off their samples aren't always aware that their result might be used to hunt criminals. And the companies are likely to sell the data to other commercial organisations, if you tick the box that asks whether your sample can be used for "medical research". So you are paying to get your ethnicity result and find family members, but you are also paying the company to make money from your sample.

A while ago I wrote about using these same results for health information ([SHQ Newsletter, July/August 2018](#)) and suggested taking the information with a grain of salt. The same is true for your ancestry results. Using your DNA to find your ancestry and ancestor groups can be a bit of fun, but don't take it too seriously!



#MOSIAC celebrates world music, dance and culture of our diverse communities.

Support for your group: change it up!

While talking and listening mostly do remain the core activity of support groups, we can pay attention to our other senses too. The list below has been contributed by group members and facilitators, let us know if you have any other suggestions, so we can share them on facebook.

Adding some non-talking and variety to your meetings...

1. Change your environment - meet outdoors, change the seating plan, wear a colour, bring a flower.
2. Show and tell - everyone brings an object and explains its meaning for them (work in pairs if you have a lot of people), bring something that can be touched and passed around.
3. Go on a road trip - check out community places together, so that the next time you feel confident to visit alone.
4. Show a video or movie or youtube clip or listen to a song, and then respond to this together.
5. Include movement ... yoga or dancing or stretching.
6. Make something together... a quilt, a playdough collage, a rap song.
7. Rent a massage chair or a massage therapist.

These are just some suggestions. Reflect on your activity, maybe it was challenging for some, what did you learn, what would you like to change next time. For some groups and health conditions, the safety and belonging of having all meetings the same way is what members are looking for. However, think about how your members may want to change it up!



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