Suzanne shares personal journey to reduce mental health stigma and help others

Posted on:
30 September 2022

Suzanne is an Australian-Vietnamese fashion and mental health advocate who is empowering and inspiring others to take control of their mental health – and she's also a fierce supporter of the NDIS.

The 31-year-old Brisbane local and NDIS participant, who was diagnosed with Bipolar disorder just a few years ago, was only 14 when she had her first psychotic episode. She was hallucinating, hearing voices and had frequent panic attacks.

"I really struggled with getting assessments in on time and was really stressed all the time around school. I remember calling 000 and needing emergency help. I then stayed for three months for my first psychiatric ward admission," Suzanne said.

"I remember I was always using the hospital system as the only way to cope. I didn't know much about community support and understand how to reach out to the community instead of the hospital system.

"It was not until I was 25 or so that I started taking control of my mental health. I use my Bipolar diagnosis to advocate, empower and inspire others through my survival and storytelling.

"My mental illness is my superpower and I am no longer ashamed about my mental illness. I speak openly, confidently and honestly about my experiences."

Suzanne said she was "one of the lucky ones" who was able to access the NDIS during its trial in Queensland, thanks to support from Carers Queensland's NDIS Local Area Coordination, Partner in the Community program.

As a person from a culturally and linguistically diverse background, Suzanne says she's always felt supported in the right way.

"I am very lucky and blessed. I also have a really good support team and, especially, a wonderful support co-ordinator who knows and understands me," she said.

"The major highlight of getting the NDIS was how the NDIS helped support me in my driving and building up confidence in driving. I am a confident driver now; I drive to work for my full-time job."

Suzanne said given her heritage, one of the biggest challenges was feeling as though she needed to suffer in silence and pretend everything was okay.

"It is so common in the Asian cultures to just 'harden up' and 'get over it'. Therefore, the work I do as a Vietnamese person, I try to break the stigma and share my story."

As a highly sought-after mental health and fashion advocate, Suzanne's story of courage and perseverance has touched the lives of thousands of people, with many reaching out to thank her for sharing her experiences.

"I've had people come up to me and shared that my story was very relatable. I even had one lady who started crying, I believe it was tears of joy, in front of me and said that she, too, has Bipolar and feels alone in her diagnosis and my story really resonated with her," Suzanne said.

"I love when others come up to me after hearing me speak. It makes me feel so empowered and amazing that I can touch lives in different ways positively.

"I get so nervous before each talk but the feeling afterwards is just amazing. Another good part is the people who come up to me and say 'thank you' is just amazing."

Suzanne said the best part about being in the world of fashion is going to events, meeting people and telling them she's a mental health and fashion blogger.
"I try to create that conversation around mental health at these fashion events, I have an elevator pitch I use too. I openly share I have been fashion blogging since 2013 and also that I have Bipolar and share my story openly through my 'fashion blogging'."
For those living with mental health disability who are yet to embark on their NDIS journey, Suzanne urged them to hold on to hope.
"There's a light at the end of the tunnel. There's always a silver lining. Keep on going and don't give up on life," she said.

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