

MEDIA RELEASE

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A mother's fight for support helps bring The Power in You to Portland

For Portland mother Susan Roll, the push to bring The Power in You Project to Portland was never simply about establishing another support program.

It was personal.

Susan watched her son's life unravel following an abusive relationship and significant trauma. What followed was a complex journey through mental health challenges, alcohol and drug dependence and repeated attempts to find the right support.

Before his life changed, Susan describes her son as a young father who worked as a disability support worker. As his circumstances deteriorated, alcohol initially became a way of coping with what he had experienced, before developing into addiction.

What surprised Susan most was just how difficult it was to find help, even when her son was actively asking for it.

"I teach Mental Health First Aid, so I knew some of the places to go and some of the back doors into the system and I still couldn't get him the help he needed," Susan said.

"He continually tried to find help and continually got knocked back."

Susan said her family's experience also opened her eyes to the shame and judgement that can surround addiction, not only for the person experiencing it, but for their parents and families.

Searching for support herself, Susan connected with another local mother experiencing similar circumstances. From those conversations grew a private support network of mothers.

"It just kept growing. There were so many mums," she said.

"Some would message me privately because they didn't want anyone else to know. There is so much shame and fear around it."

Through those families, Susan began to see common threads, trauma, mental health, addiction, family breakdown, homelessness and involvement with the justice system. She also witnessed the devastating consequences when people could not access support early enough.

It strengthened her determination that Portland needed another option.

That advocacy contributed to The Power in You Project establishing its support program in Portland, funded by \$5,000 in funding from United Way Glenelg.

The pilot has operated across Terms 2 and 3, providing weekly support for adults experiencing addiction, mental health or justice-related challenges. The program is free to participants and provides a safe, structured and non-judgemental environment.

Importantly, the program has been co-designed and is delivered by people with lived experience, something Susan believes can make an enormous difference when someone has reached the point of asking for help.

The Power in You approach is designed to build trust and hope while helping participants better understand their behaviours, develop coping strategies and begin rebuilding positive connections with family and community.

United Way Glenelg Executive Officer Nicole Carr said Susan's experience highlighted why community-based, early intervention support matters.

"Behind addiction or mental health challenges there is a person, and very often there is a family desperately trying to help them.

"Susan didn't just identify a gap, she kept advocating for something better. United Way Glenelg was able to provide the initial funding to give The Power in You an opportunity to come to Portland and show what this type of support can look like locally.

"We have seen growing awareness and conversation around mental health, suicide and substance use in our community. The next challenge is making sure that when someone reaches out and says, 'I need help', there is somewhere for them to go."

For Susan, one of the strongest arguments for continuing The Power in You is seeing what can happen when someone is given the right support at the right time.

One young mother who has participated in the program had spent several years navigating illicit substance use and the consequences that came with it. Through her own determination and the support provided by The Power in You, she has begun rebuilding her life, regained access to her son and, importantly, can now see a future for herself.

Her journey is still continuing, but Susan believes that is exactly why programs such as The Power in You matter.

"This is a young woman who has been through some incredibly difficult years, but she is getting her life back on track," Susan said.

"We often hear about people when they are at their lowest. We don't hear enough about what can happen when someone is given support, is believed in and is ready to make a change."

The outcome also reflects one of The Power in You Project's stated measures of success, helping people reduce or stop substance use and reconnect with family and other important parts of their lives.

With the United Way Glenelg-funded pilot approaching the end of its current term, attention is now turning to what happens next.

Following discussions with The Power In You Project CEO Kane Nuttall, a further \$5,000 would enable another program of group sessions to run through until Christmas and the end of 2026.

An additional \$5,000 would provide one-to-one support, giving people experiencing more immediate challenges access to individual assistance and follow-up support alongside the group program.

Mr Nuttall said providing group support consistently throughout the year would require a larger investment.

"To run the groups for 40 weeks, four 10-week programs, we are realistically looking at around \$20,000. That covers wages, room hire, travel, delivery of the program and the follow-up support that happens around the groups," Mr Nuttall said.

"Our longer-term goal is to establish a permanent presence in Portland, with an office space, a local manager and team. We want people to know that support isn't here for just a few weeks or months – we're working towards something that can be part of the community for the long term."

United Way Glenelg Executive Officer Nicole Carr said the pilot had also helped demonstrate what could be possible with further community and philanthropic investment.

"The \$5,000 Community Fund grant was about opening the door and giving this approach an opportunity in Portland. What we're now seeing is a very clear picture of what is required to keep that door open."

"There has been significant awareness raised around mental health, suicide and substance use in our community. Awareness matters, but we also need practical, accessible support behind it, particularly for someone who reaches the point of saying, 'I need help now'."

"The opportunity now is to build on what has started and work towards having consistent, locally based support available in Portland."

The original project was designed around lived-experience-led support for adults experiencing mental health, addiction or justice-related challenges, with the broader aim of helping people reconnect with family, sporting groups and community life.

Photo: The Power in You Project. A general program image has been used to protect participant privacy.

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