

Do You Use Or Have You Ever Used Drugs? Would You Like To Improve The Relationships You Have In Life?

In a safe and supportive environment the group covers

**Healthy Relationships
Communication Skills
Healthy Boundaries
Self-Esteem
Mindfulness
Self-Care**

The group will be run by an experienced counsellor and a peer support worker. We also offer referral to other services and resources.

If you would like more information please contact Melanie on 8354-7300 or email melaniej@nuaa.org.au

The Women's Wellbeing Group qualifies as a Work and Development Order Provider Activity.

Come To NUAA's Women's Wellbeing Group

Any One Can Join The Group at Anytime!

**Every Wednesday
2 pm to 3:30 pm**

414 Elizabeth Street
Surry Hills



@nuuansw

NUAA
NSW USERS
AND AIDS ASSOCIATION

Danielle's Story

I'm With Women Who Get Me

Danielle was referred to the Women's Wellbeing Group by her psychiatrist. She now volunteers at NUAA but still attends the group.

When I say that I only feel comfortable with drugs in my system, I know the other women who attend the NUAA Women's Well-being Group know exactly what I mean.

More than that, they are there to help me get beyond that, to build my self-confidence. This world is full of people who put you down, so you feel you can't fulfil what you want in life. It's amazing to find people who want you to feel good about yourself, to have goals and reach them.

At the women's group, I am with women who get what I am trying to say, and respect my experiences and opinions. Because of that, I've been able to open up about things that bother me.

I started using at 17, had hep C by 18, and by 21 I was pregnant and on methadone, with my partner providing top-up. I was on and off methadone for several years and this last time, I've been on a program for 13 years. I've spent time in jail. I currently use ice and opioids.

There are people who would judge me based on that info. I've been lucky enough to find people who understand it and even respect it. They know that I can have that history and still care about my health and want to be the best person I can be. They know, because they share a lot of those experiences.

Being around people that get you is a powerful thing by itself. When you meet as a structured group, it's also about safety. The group is led by women who are trained to help us stay focused as a group and move ahead as individuals.

An awesome team of a psychologist and a peer worker lead the group. They have given me many insights. For example, they have taught me not to imagine I know what other people are thinking about me – a really big one for me. I finally admit I'm not a mind reader!

I have been able to talk freely about things I've kept bottled up

I have been able to talk freely about all sorts of things that I've kept bottled up. Like that I often feel uncomfortable and allow myself to be intimidated by people more confident than I am. That I can't say "no". That, as a user, if something goes missing, I worry everyone thinks I took it. That I find it hard to take compliments and am suspicious of people's motives.

I can talk about how uncomfortable I feel about people looking at the scars on my arms, slash marks I made to try and take some of the emotional pain away. I can tell them that when I did a Certificate at TAFE, I was so stressed at having to do a speech that, even though I was nearly finished the course, I left and never went back. And in talking about these things I own them, I am no longer ashamed of them, and I can change them.

What we women who attend the group have in common is that we all need self worth. We give each other support and confidence. I can talk about my stuff, get it out. Not only do I feel supported, it's been good to find out about other women and realise I'm not the only one with issues.

Since I started going to the group, things have changed for me. I'm finding it a lot easier to talk to people about my stuff, to open up and to trust. I feel more confident and I've learned how to talk myself up when my head is doing me in. My anxiety levels have gone down and I actually enjoy contributing to a conversation now.

I'd really recommend the group to anyone who has stuff they need to get out and don't know who to talk to. Come and talk to me and my group of amazing women. We even have Tim Tams. You can't get more of a welcome than that.



WHAT IS CONSUMER REPRESENTATION?

A consumer representative is someone who uses a particular type of service and can draw from their experience to speak for fellow service users.

The major role of a consumer representative is to bring a consumer perspective to decision-making and work with others to help fix problems. This is done by:

- presenting and advocating for the consumer's point of view
- coming up with alternatives or compromises so consumer needs can be met
- contributing to the overall direction of the service/s.

Consumer reps are the voice of their peers. They are not there to represent themselves, but everyone who uses a particular service whether it's a rehab, needle and syringe program or a health clinic.

It's important that consumer reps stay in touch with service users and that they are supported by a relevant consumer organisation such as NUAA.

Consumer representation is all about the principle of "nothing about us without us". Consumer input is proven to help build better services and the value that our lived experience brings is better recognised every day.

HOW DO I GET INVOLVED?

Want to get involved with your service as a consumer representative?

Attend NUAA's Consumer Academy and learn all about how to be a great consumer rep.

Look out around the services you use for posters or flyers advertising for consumer reps.

Ask staff if your service has a consumer group. If they do, ask how you can get involved. For help with your application, call NUAA on **02 8354 7300** or email **nuaa@nuaa.org.au**

If they don't, suggest that they start one! Writing a letter to the most senior manager of the service is the most effective way to make this suggestion. NUAA can support you and help you with your letter

Lindy's Story

I Got Loud!

Lindy is having her say as a member of a consumer group.

I've been a part of the Medically Supervised Injecting Centre (MSIC) Consumer Group for just under a year now. I use at MSIC a bit, which was the main qualification for membership.

I was told about it by one of my friends who was on the group. I thought I should be there having my say, because of my experience as a drug user, a volunteer at NUAA and an Aboriginal Elder. I said "Cool, how do I get in?"

I was told to speak to the manager who organises the MSIC Consumer Group, so I told her some of my ideas for improving things. She thought my input would be useful and invited me to the group's monthly meetings.

As well as consumers, there are four staff members at Consumer Group meetings. We talk about how to make MSIC a better place for the people who use the service and how we can improve the health of people who come there to inject. We have also made the physical spaces more welcoming. We have found better ways to get information to service users about things like the new hep C treatments and overdose response. For example I've helped with a lot of naloxone training there with both peers and staff

Another priority is working with the broader community to let them know we are friendly, not scary! We want to get the message across that people who use MSIC are more than drug users, we are human beings with many interests. One strategy is the annual Art Show, which features the amazing works of many talented people who use MSIC. I was an Art Champion for the most recent show "Art from the Heart of the Cross", which was really magical. You might have seen the huge billboard at Kings Cross Station – it has the tag line "Sometimes a painting is more than just art"... and of course, a person who uses drugs is a person who does many things with their life.

The Consumer Group also talks about how we can connect people who use the MSIC with other health services. It's a two-way street – it's about helping people get onto services they need as well as helping those services understand the MSIC's work. MSIC wants to get across the message that it's not just an injecting centre, it offers a range of services for people who inject drugs.

I am so proud of myself that I have come this far

MSIC is now looking to get peer volunteers working in the service. Because I have been a PPP for about 3 years, I've been able to share my experience of volunteering at NUAA. I think involving peers is the difference between an OK service and an amazing one.

Had I not been involved in NUAA, I'd never have been involved in MSIC. Not only has it given me the knowledge and experience about providing services to people who use drugs, it has also given me the confidence and tools to express my opinions. Before I started with NUAA, I was the quiet one in the background, anxious and shy. Now I am the one who is loud and proud, telling it how it is and how it should be!

I even attended a large meeting as one of only three peers to talk about the value of injecting centres and that helped lead to the establishment of an injecting centre in Melbourne. I am so proud of myself that I have come this far, that I am making a real difference for my community.

Connecting with other Aboriginal people has been a special opportunity for me. As an Elder, I understand where Aboriginal people are coming from, especially the Stolen Generation. We all have that brother/sister connection and there's no judgement. We respect each other's beliefs and lifestyle. I'm so grateful for all the love and understanding I get from the Aboriginal community, and the chance to give back.

Through being a NUAA PPP, I've learnt to believe in myself. I really believe that if I hadn't become a NUAA volunteer, I would not be the advocate for people who use drugs that I am. I would be just another number in the Aboriginal community. Instead, I've learnt to be outspoken and to stick up for people who are quiet like I was.

I really enjoy representing people who use drugs. As well as being part of the MSIC committee, I have spoken at Memorial Day, which commemorates people who use drugs who have died. I do Welcome to Country for events. I have spoken to the media about being a peer worker. I walked in Mardi Gras for a community organisation. Now I am applying to be on other consumer groups. I'm also looking at a career in organising volunteers!

I am so happy. But it would never have happened if NUAA hadn't helped me find my voice.

NUAA CONSUMER ACADEMY

What is it?

The Consumer Academy is a series of training workshops for people with a lived experience of Alcohol and Drug treatment services.

How does this benefit me?

Through attending the workshops you will start to recognise and value the skills you have gained through your lived experience of using alcohol and drugs and accessing treatment services.

Now I am starting to value and recognise the skills I have gained from my lived experience what is next?

Well now it is time to harness your skills and start to think about how you would like to participate in AOD Treatment service design and delivery. There is a variety of choices about how you can use your skills: you may want to be a peer advocate or some of you may want to write policy, another person may want to be on the front desk to meet and greet and be that warm friendly face that understands how they can make a difference to a person when they are coming to a service, you may want to be called on to speak publicly about your experience to politicians and doctors. What and how you use your skills is your choice.

Some of us are wanting the public spotlight and some of us are better in the background supporting the people that take on the public roles.

How much will this cost me to attend the workshops?

The workshops are free, Amazing.

How do I find out when and where the workshops are being held?

NUAA promotes the workshops on their webpage under events, on Facebook, twitter and

through your local health service and feel free to call the office on 83547300 if you want to chat about the workshops.

Why is NUAA doing this?

As a Peer based organisation NUAA advocates and promotes the value of people's lived experience and through the Consumer Academy we want to empower AOD service users to participate in the design and delivery of alcohol and drug treatment service.

What happens after the training?

NUAA will keep you informed about opportunities that come up for peers both voluntary and paid roles. NUAA will invite you to events/forums and provide ongoing support and mentoring for people who request it.

Who funds this?

The Consumer Academy is a new initiative being rolled out by NUAA funded by Went West Primary Health Network in Western Sydney and Central Eastern Sydney Primary Health Network in the East.

Watch this space!

In September 2018 NUAA will be hosting a Consumer and Peer Forum bringing our community together from all over New South Wales and Australia to celebrate the great work and achievement done for and by the community.

You will have the opportunity to share your experience as a consumer and peer, here other people's stories, attend workshops to enhance your skills and knowledge, or bask in the company of your community.

We look forward to seeing you there.

The background of the entire page is a photograph of several hands of different skin tones stacked together in a pyramid shape, symbolizing support and community. The image is in black and white with a slight color cast.

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CONSUMER ACADEMY

**Funded by Went West and Central Eastern
Sydney Primary Health Networks**

Empowering Consumers to participate in alcohol
and drug treatment service design and delivery
through training

To find out more information,
please contact Melanie at NUAA
on 02 8354 7300 or email
melaniej@nuaa.org.au

Anastasia's Story

Being Useful

Anastasia attended a two day workshop of the Consumer Academy in Mt Druitt early this year. UN asked her: What did you get out of it?

I am a proud participant of NUAA's Consumer Academy Workshops.

The main thing I took away from the workshops was the exciting idea that I could be useful, that as a person with a lived experience of drug use, I have value.

When the workshops started, we all introduced ourselves and I was blown away that the NUAA facilitators could be open about drug use and talk about using without it being a shameful thing. That's a new thing! I so often tell people what they want to hear, to avoid stigma or legal consequences. It was so great to be able to relax in a room of people who have a lived experience of drug use and be honest and let go of the shame for a while.

The workshops covered topics including What is a Peer, Consumer Engagement, the Power of the Narrative and how we can use our stories to connect with people, Advocacy and more. We talked about the sorts of things peer workers do and what we bring that is different from what other workers bring.

As I get older, I feel like I have been getting more marginalised as one brick wall goes up here, another there. As I lose contact with another relative, lose another job or stop seeing another doctor because of discrimination, I get further and further

removed from society. You get it in your head that you are useless.


It was wonderful to be given the tools to turn that on its head, to be told that my story could create change and that there is a job where talking about my experience using drugs is helpful. I was amazed by the idea that I could be welcomed because I use drugs, not in spite of it or because I have kept that dark.

The workshop helped me focus on the skills I can bring to the table. I forget that I have any sometimes, but my using taught me things like persistence, flexibility and negotiation skills. I also have all sorts of skills gained from jobs, sports, hobbies and relationships. I have personal qualities to add into the mix as well.

It was really heartening to know that those things I thought went against me – my using experience, jail, all that stuff – can actually be of benefit to others.

I spent two days at the NUAA workshops with a great bunch of people who were as enthusiastic as me. It is always good to meet new people who share similar ideas and values.

If I can add value to someone else's life, then I want to do that. If I can influence someone to stand up for themselves and to let go of the shame of using, then I want to be there.



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Rohan's Story

My Voice

Rohan attended the Consumer Academy workshops and has since become a consumer representative. UN asked him about his experiences.

I really enjoyed attending the Consumer Academy workshop. I was made feel very welcome and enjoyed hearing the stories of the facilitators. It was pretty interesting to be in an environment where you can talk freely and without judgement about your drug use. I liked that there was a good spread of age and experience. I learned a lot.

I have always thought risk minimisation is the way to approach drug use and through my studies I'm even more convinced. My drug experience has been around daily use of cannabis and using that on top of a mental illness has been really harmful for me. I'd like to learn to use drugs without them overtaking my life, but it doesn't seem possible for me. I felt suicidal. I tried all sorts of therapies, psychologists and rehabs to stop using. I've learned that for me, I need to replace using drugs with other things that are more important to me.

Studying has been a positive thing in my life. I went to the workshop to find out more about how to help people and to learn more about my own struggle. I really enjoy working with people and I have been doing different courses and workshops to help me build my skills up. A few years ago, I decided to do a course to learn how to be a carer. After I graduated, I was caring for my grandmother until her death just recently. I also did a Certificate IV in Alcohol and Drug Counselling and now I'm doing a Diploma.

The Consumer Academy taught me that I can have a voice. I learnt that my history is important, that we all have a story, each and every one of us and that all of us, no matter our background, race or gender have experienced hardship and have learned how to overcome. I learnt that all people have value, no matter where they are in their story and you shouldn't judge a book by its cover - we are all on a journey and we can support each other.

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Throughout the workshop I really felt wanted and needed, that I have useful information that can help people. I feel 100% like that is what I want to do – share my struggle so that I can help others. I've lived that struggle, so I understand what it's like to be there.

Since doing the Consumer Academy workshop, I have become a consumer representative on a committee that looks at improving the health system. Most of the people on the committee are doctors and I'm the only consumer so it's a big responsibility. Being a consumer rep gave me a chance to speak directly and clearly about things that are important to people who use drugs. I really feel that I am helping people by contributing what I know about the gaps in the system and the way I have been treated.

I feel safe in the forum but I learnt from the Consumer Academy that these spaces - whether you are the only consumer rep on a committee or you a peer worker talking with another person who uses drugs - are professional spaces. They are not your friends; you have to have boundaries. You should be aware of what you have in common so you can be helpful, but you should also realise that it is a work space. It is always about the goal, not about you.

The Academy taught me some useful things about advocacy and how to do it. I learned that having a voice is important and knowing when to speak up and how to do it makes your voice more effective. It's good to be passionate, but you need to do it the right way.

Going to the workshop made me feel useful and worthy. When I left I was holding my head up a little higher than when I arrived.

Genevieve's Story

Less Judgement

Genevieve increased her self-esteem because of NUAA's Stigma and Discrimination Workshop.

I heard about NUAA when I was recently in rehab through a Stigma and Discrimination project they were running. I was interested because I had always felt a lot of judgement around my drug use experience, even when I was abstinent.

I have been in and out of drug use throughout my life, including a 7-year period when I didn't use or drink at all after having my child taken because of my drug use – a wake-up call that led me straight to rehab. When I got her back, I didn't risk using for a long time.

I began using again a few years ago. It was just a little at first, but my drug use escalated to a degree that I did crime to pay for it. After 3 police raids through my house, I ended up in jail for 5 months. I am still on bail, with sentencing for another offence coming up soon. My Mum has been caring for my child and I was bailed to her house so I can parent. I have been trying hard to make up for lost time, attending to my child's needs and showing her my love and support.

I have done all the suggested things to get my life on track and stay out of jail. After I finished my previous sentence, I went to rehab and have become abstinent again. I am doing Narcotics Anonymous meetings. I have connected with several services and organisations. I am volunteering to give my skills and my time in helping other people. And I am doing a lot of courses.

I did the NUAA Stigma and Discrimination Workshop for several reasons. I have been attending courses not only to add new tools to my toolbox to make me more skilled and employable, but also in the spirit of relapse prevention - keeping busy so I don't use. I try to fill my days with positive things and the NUAA course includes inspirational trainers and useful information. I also wanted to learn how to give back to my community and share my experience to support others. A bonus is finding that by doing short courses and workshops I have become more confident. The NUAA Workshop has increased my self-esteem in particular by helping me let go of my own judgement around my drug use.

It helped me understand that my lived experience is important

I really enjoyed the Workshop. It helped me understand that my lived experience is important and I feel empowered to be able to talk about it without suffering from discrimination. I learned that I can use my experience to assist other people who use drugs as a Peer Support Worker.

I didn't even know what a Peer Support Worker was before I did the course, but I did know that I felt a bond with people who shared my experiences. In the rehab I went to, there were 4 counsellors. They were all great with boundaries, with text book stuff, with making referrals. However only one had lived experience and because she understood the feelings associated with use and abstinence, I connected with her. That made all the difference to my progress through the rehab program. From the others, I always felt a bit of judgement. It really was a case of discrimination vs understanding. I think that those of us who share the drug user experience can really help each other. There is trust in that relationship, so we can open up more quickly about our own stories and take advice more readily from each other.

The Workshop also made me more aware of the language that is used to describe drug use and I think it is essential that we describe ourselves as people first. I've been finding myself picking up on things that my friends in NA say and challenging judgmentalism when I hear it. I realised it's important that those of us with experience of drug use are understanding and tolerant of each other, then we are better equipped to protest it where we find it in services and the wider community.

I am not sure what my immediate future will bring. The fact is I'm accountable for my actions and I may have to go back to jail, regardless of all the work I have done on myself. I don't know if I will end up doing Peer Support work. But I feel so much stronger now and I am more at peace with my own experience.

Abigail's Story Fighting Back

Abigail decided to go to NUAA's Consumer Academy and Stigma and Discrimination workshops because of bad treatment by a health professional.

Last August I experienced really bad treatment by a psychiatrist.

I had been severely assaulted in a domestic violence situation. It catapulted me into a mental health episode. I was drinking and taking a lot of drugs to try and block out some of the distress I felt. I did some crime and ended up on charges. It got to a point where I decided I didn't want to live anymore. I gathered together a lot of oxy-contin and several bottles of alcohol.

Before I could follow through, my mother tried to get me some help. I had been in this emotional space before and she recognised the signs. On the previous occasion, I was assessed by a psychiatric team, diagnosed as psychotic and sent to a lock-up ward for 2 months. I came out with better mental health. Based on that experience, my mother thought it important that I be assessed by a psychiatrist as soon as possible.

The appointment was a disaster. The psychiatrist did not look into my previous mental health history and didn't even read any of my medical files from that hospital. He would not let me speak and would not listen to my mother who was trying to explain the situation. Instead he focused on my drug and alcohol use and my legal problems. He told me I was a junkie who needed to be put in jail, that I was just trying to use a "get out of jail free" card.

I had been completely shut down by this man. His report was based on stigma and discrimination and contained no mention of my mental health or domestic violence history.

My mother was so distraught that she had a mini-stroke when the police took me away in the paddy wagon. She ended up in Emergency and still has issues with facial palsy. I should have been in a mental health facility not a jail. That psychiatrist's discrimination did not just affect me, it affected my whole family.

After being so rudely shut down, I was given my voice back



As for me, I ended up in Silverwater on his recommendation, still in a psychotic state. My mother fought for me and I was thankfully accepted by a rehab.

When I was in there, I saw a NUAA flyer in the hallway advertising a stigma and discrimination project. My experience was still very raw so I rang the NUAA worker. Once I was out of rehab, we met up to talk about what training was on offer.

I ended up at a Consumer Academy course. It was fantastic. I felt very comfortable there. After being so rudely shut down, I was given my voice back. I wanted to express my views and share my experience. I was interested to hear about other people's experiences of discrimination limiting their access to services. The trainers' stories were so inspiring I felt empowered. I really want to become a Peer Support Worker and stand up for my community.

After that course, I attended a specific Stigma and Discrimination Workshop. That was amazing both for the opportunity to share my story and in terms of getting fired up to support others. It makes me so angry that so many people who use drugs are looking for help and support but are not able to access services because of discrimination.

One thing I learned at the Stigma and Discrimination Workshop was that people judge us because they don't really understand. I know how that feels.

I also learned that we don't have to put up with it. I now know how it feels to be inspired to fight for my rights and I am working on a formal complaint against that psychiatrist right now. I hope sharing my experience of discrimination will inspire others to stand up for their rights.

I thoroughly recommend NUAA training. I feel supported by my community and I believe that I can support others too. I can't wait to do more workshops.

WHAT IS THE CONSUMER AND PEER FORUM?

Making History

In September 2018 NUAA will be hosting a Consumer and Peer Forum bringing our community together from all over New South Wales and Australia to celebrate the great work and achievement done for and by the community.

For the first time ever, NUAA is holding a special conference designed specifically for people with lived experience of alcohol and drug use and treatment. If you are a person who uses alcohol and drugs or has a history of using alcohol and drugs, this forum is for you.

At the forum, you will have the opportunity to share your experience as a consumer and peer, hear other people's stories, attend workshops to enhance your skills and knowledge, or bask in the company of your community.

We look forward to seeing you there.



CONSUMER AND PEER FORUM

HOW DO I GET INVOLVED?

MAKE HISTORY WITH NUAA!

Get ready for

The 1ST Consumer and Peer Forum

In Sydney

September 2018

**FOR EVERYONE WITH EXPERIENCE OF
DRUG AND ALCOHOL USE**

We look forward to seeing you there!

WHAT IS DANCEWIZE NSW?



DANCEWIZE:
NSW



DanceWize NSW is a NUAAs program that started in November 2017. DanceWize NSW promotes safer partying at music festivals and events across NSW. A lot of the events we attend are focused on electronic music and targeted at people under 30.

With our huge team of peer volunteers, DanceWize NSW attends festivals all over NSW to give harm reduction information and peer support to people who use drugs. We attend indoor and outdoor events from one night only parties to five day bush doofs with thousands of festival goers. Events happen during a single day/night, right through to five consecutive days/nights. DanceWize NSW hosts a chill space and roves around the crowd.

The DanceWize NSW team has 2 staff members – Dan and Jessie - and we have trained over 60 volunteer Key Peer Educators (KPEs) in First Aid, drug science, harm reduction techniques and legal issues. We make sure our peers are skilled to provide support and assistance to partygoers who are experiencing difficulties related to the use of various substances.

At each event, the KPEs host the chill space, where they discuss harm reduction and hand out drug-related information and resources to our visitors. They also give out things like condoms, lube, sunscreen and

earplugs. They monitor and report on health and safety standards, make sure people get to medical or emergency services if they need them and provide sterile injecting equipment.

At large commercial events and multi-day festivals, our roving crew provides crowd care. In pairs, and with radio contact to the chill space, rovers walk around the festival and camp grounds to check on safety issues, tell people where they can get help and hand out resources.

NUAA also holds harm reduction education workshops with an emphasis on using party drugs more safely. We run these at the festivals and plan to tailor the workshops for health services, high schools and wherever we're invited.

DanceWize NSW is a new program for NUAAs. NUAAs staff think it is awesome that we can use our skills and connections to keep a whole new group of people safer when they use drugs. That we have attracted over 60 volunteers so far shows that a lot of people agree with us. At a festival we can chat up to 3000 people about safer partying and care for 70 or more people. As we become better known, we expect these numbers will increase.

The community of drug users is a broad one and we're getting stronger every day.

JANEY'S STORY UNDER THE DANCEWIZE TENT

Janey is a Dancewize NSW volunteer who has finally found something worth giving up her weekends for.

When people ask me what's it like volunteering for Dancewize NSW, I actually get a little bit emotional. Granted, I get emotional about a lot of things most of the time, but the truth is, it's actually really moving (happy feels!) to be a part of the Dancewize NSW team at festivals and other events. The team are friendly, the work is interesting and it is incredibly rewarding to be at the forefront (and on the ground!) as this invaluable drug-education and harm-minimisation initiative rolls-out around NSW.

One of the most memorable moments of my volunteer stints with Dancewize NSW so far involved helping a man who had finished his shift at work at 5am, driven 2 hours to the festival site, taken a cocktail of substances and promptly lost consciousness at a stage while dancing with his mates. Once the medical team had cleared the man's airway and put him in recovery position, my job was to sit with him, assist when he needed to vomit, check his pulse and breathing were OK, and monitor him, taking notes, until he was safe and happy to leave with his friends.

Most of my favourite moments of being in the Dancewize NSW tent have come from feeling the relief and gratitude of fellow-drug-users who just need a place and people who understand to help them calm down or chill or crash out when things have gotten too much for them in the general event space. A lot of the time the gratitude comes from organisers and punters, too, who are so happy to know their poor, spannered* friends are being looked after while the show goes on.

I have wanted to be a volunteer for a not for profit organisation for many years, but just had never found the organisation that I would happily give up my weekends for. Not only has the training been interesting, thorough and relevant, but the constant support from co-ordinators is both genuine and generous. After three festival attendances and a variety of enriching experiences with Dancewize NSW so far, I can safely say that I will continue giving them my time and energy.

If Dancewize NSW sounds like something you'd be interested in, I strongly encourage you to contact them today!

* "Spannered" means really messed up! Alternatives are "spangled" and "munted"! – Ed



**My fellow drug users
often just need a
place and people
who understand...
when things have
gotten too much**

Oscar's Story

That New Year

Oscar is a volunteer with DanceWize NSW. UN wanted to know what attracted him to working with NUAA at festivals

We were eight hours into the New Year and I was tripping pretty hard, having set up camp along with 500 other doofers at the foot of Mount Lindesay, up near the border of Queensland and NSW. From my (admittedly altered) perspective, it seemed as if though the air around me was shimmering in sync with the bassline pulsating from the sound system. In retrospect, perhaps it actually was, similar to a mirage over hot bitumen; it was already pushing 28 degrees Celsius, and increasing with every passing minute.

Between October 2016 and January 2017, a series of notably similar overdoses occurred in multiple areas of Australia, that lead to 16 people hospitalised on the Gold Coast, three fatalities amongst 20 overdoses in Melbourne's Chapel St district, and one fatality amongst three hospitalised at a bush doof I attended in NSW. News articles from the time are pretty dodgy in their reporting of the instances, with the Gold Coast Bulletin writing that the drug taken by those affected "may have been 'bad trips', a combination of LSD and MDMA known as N Bomb." Other reports (and rumours that I heard) attributed such overdoses to novel psychoactive substances (NPS), specifically the amphetamine-like synthetic cathinone series which includes alpha-pvp, also known as 'flakka'.

I was no stranger to NPS use – at age 16 I cut my psychonaut teeth on nBOMES (sold as LSD), and have definitely dropped some very dubious caps purchased from equally suspicious dudes, but I'd never personally had an uncomfortable or dangerous experience with them. At this doof however I was a first-hand witness to some heavy shit resulting from NPS usage.

I was riding the peak of my trip when I saw the guys down at the d-floor freaking out; I was tripping so hard that it was hard for me to understand what was going on. I distinctly remember three of them together, shouting incoherently and falling over themselves. One of them was scratching at the ground and grabbing and clawing at his own face – it was a truly horrific sight to see, with other witnesses describing their behaviour as "demonic". There were people trying to help them and approach them, but the men were acting incredibly erratic and hostile.

I was back at the campsite later when we saw a helicopter circling the site. At the time, we assumed that it was POLAIR coming to sus the party out. However, the helicopter landed, and shortly after the rig was turned off. It wasn't long before the word spread amongst those at the party – one guy was dead at the scene, and the others were being airlifted to hospital. I was down at the dancefloor with a friend later, and we saw them loading the man's corpse onto the helicopter. I will never forget that.

When fucked things happen like this it's natural to look for someone to blame - but that doesn't stop a friend or fellow partygoer from overdosing

Since I started using drugs, I had always had an interest in harm reduction. This experience solidified that for me, and made me decide it was an avenue I needed to pursue somehow in my life. My first reaction was anger. I heard from a friend that the guys who overdosed had been sold the substance as crystal meth, and had smoked it. If drugs were decriminalised, maybe they would have been able to get legit gear easier; if reagent/pill testing was the norm in this country, maybe they could have checked what they'd been sold before taking it.

Looking back, I can acknowledge that while my anger and frustration may have been misguided and rooted in conjecture. I felt (and to an extent still feel) as though our backwards-ass government and archaic drug policy is to blame for these deaths and many others. But it's all too easy to point the finger. When fucked things happen like this it's natural to look for someone to blame - but that doesn't stop a friend or fellow partygoer from overdosing. We hear a lot in rave and doof communities – as well as the wider drug using scene - about the importance of looking after each other. This is the primary reason I decided to volunteer with NUAA and Dancewize NSW. In my role as a peer-educator and care provider I potentially stop even one person from putting themselves or others in a life-threatening situation then I would feel as though my partying is not grounded in the hedonism that people who use drugs are often accused of, but rather can be a positive thing that I can do for myself, my friends, and those around me.

I've only been working with Dancewize NSW for a few months now, but with the education and care we offer at music events, parties, raves and doofs, I already feel as though I'm making a positive impact in my community. We know that prohibition has failed; people will always use drugs. I believe that we owe it to ourselves and our communities to look out and be responsible for each other, help where we can, and make sure that when we use drugs, we do it in a safer way to avoid tragedy wherever possible.

Molly's Story

Owning My Peerness

Molly is a NUAA staff member who also volunteers. She talks about being a peer, lateral violence and NUAA's inclusiveness policy.

I started working at NUAA a few years ago in a role that didn't need peer status. At the time, I considered NUAA to be an organisation created specifically for people who inject drugs. I've been a drug user for over a decade, but the fact that I had never injected, combined with low self esteem that always makes me feel like I don't belong anywhere, made me think I wasn't a peer.

NUAA staff and supporters talk about what it means to be a peer constantly. Being a peer-driven organisation means that we define the term again and again in different contexts. The definition always lands somewhere in the ball-park of being the most inclusive, while having experience of the particular issue or lifestyle of drug choices that we're dealing with at the time. It's not as tedious as it sounds, and we do approach it with humour – when it gets a bit intense we ask each other "How big is your peer-ness?" - because apparently we are all children when it comes to jokes.

When NUAA started running DanceWize NSW last year, I was so excited about the program, but I was still a bit reluctant to join. Even though I'd been to festivals, doofs, and other celebrations of all things loose, it didn't feel like I'd been to enough. Even though I've held the hands of plenty of friends while they've been sick off too much MDMA and I've had people sit with me for hours while I've had a bad acid trip, it felt like it wasn't enough. These young kids and their encyclopaedic knowledge of electronic dance music and intimate experiences with research psychedelics seemed intimidating as fuck.

Of course, they aren't. They are a lovely crew who genuinely values each other's different experiences, level of knowledge, and skills. But that thought can creep up occasionally – the idea that someone is a 'better' drug user than you. Whether it's the variety of substances, or how spiritual their experiences have been, or how Velvet Underground their habit, it's easy to feel inferior when comparing yourself to people.

We are better, more capable, more colourful, more romantic, kinder and stronger together.

The riskier flip side though, is feeling like you're better than other people who use drugs. The reasons can be the same, and they come up again and again. Buying into the ice panic makes people who are mostly trippers feel superior, never blowing the last of your pay on blow makes more organised and well-off party people feel superior. Volunteering for DanceWize NSW, I butted up against this first hand.

We call this tendency to throw other marginalised people under the bus 'lateral violence'. It's violence, which includes blame and disparagement, done to people like ourselves, in the hope that we can earn some cookies from the powers that be, if only we can demonstrate that we aren't the bad ones – those 'other' drug users are. This tendency doesn't live out there in the world though, tragically enough, it's inside us. I found it in myself when getting a bit mad at people who were getting too spangled at festivals. 'Spangled' is a term I learned from a punter at Dragon Dreaming, meaning 'well fucked', and it's a learning that I cherish almost as much as this – the pride I had at never being as messy as some of the people at festivals was just a form of lateral violence. It's a way of excluding people, and it was the same process of exclusion that I was doing to myself when I first joined NUAA.

Fuck that. We are better, more capable, more colourful, more romantic, kinder and stronger together.

WHAT IS A BOARD?

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF BOARDS?

Board members are “custodians” of an organisation on behalf of its members and stakeholders. It’s not the job of the board to run or manage the organisation. The board’s role is to focus on the vision, mission, values and strategic plan — in essence, what the organisation stands for, rather than what the organisation does. The board makes sure an organisation stays focused on its purpose, meets its funding requirements and is protected by overseeing financial and legal requirements. The difference between governance and management is sometimes described as being like steering a boat vs rowing it and the role of the board is to have “noses in, fingers out”.

WHAT SORT OF ORGANISATIONS HAVE BOARDS?

All incorporated bodies have boards – even Westpac, NRMA and the like. Here are some community organisations governed by boards that people who use drugs may be interested in:

- NUAA
- Sex Workers Outreach Project (SWOP)
- Positive Life (for people who are HIV positive)
- Hepatitis NSW
- ACON (LGBTI health organisation)
- The Gender Centre (caring for transgender and gender diverse people)
- Phoebe House (rehab for women and children)

WHAT KIND OF COMMITTEE MEMBERS ARE NUAA LOOKING FOR?

We’re looking for peers who may currently use drugs or have used drugs in the past, and others who support NUAA’s aims and objectives. We want people who are passionate, and willing to participate in governance. People with special skills are very welcome. The NUAA Board

includes experts such as lawyers, accountants, educators, researchers and administrators. NUAA Board members have come from a variety of backgrounds but lived experience, dedication to NUAA’s goals and a willingness to get stuck in and work are huge assets

NUAA members who have no experience with Boards or administration, but are keen to learn, are invited to become involved and gain new skills in becoming an effective Board member.

WHAT DO I HAVE TO COMMIT TO?

You are elected to the NUAA Board of Governance for a period of one year but may be re-elected as often as NUAA members vote for you. The NUAA Board meets monthly for 2-3 hours at the NUAA offices in Surry Hills. It is estimated that realistically, attending the monthly board meetings, plus sitting on working parties, attending events at NUAA or on behalf of NUAA and reading documents to prepare for meetings probably works out at about 2 hours per week. You may have a larger workload if you hold a position like Chair, Secretary or Treasurer.

HOW ARE NUAA BOARD MEMBERS CHOSEN?

Nomination papers are sent out with the AGM papers every spring. Using that form, NUAA member can nominate themselves or a NUAA member can nominate another member if the person agrees. Another member must support or “second” the nomination.

Nominees then attend the AGM and speak about why they should be on the board. Members at the AGM then endorse the board or take part in a vote if there are more nominations than there are positions.

Board positions like Chair, Secretary and Treasurer are then decided based on skills and experience by the elected board at their first meeting.

HOW DO I GET INVOLVED?

Do you want to contribute to steering the NUAA boat and help keep NUAA strong and healthy?

Are you a member of NUAA or willing to become one?

Do you have skills to offer or want to learn new skills?

Can you reliably attend meetings well-prepared, every month for a year?

Are you willing to sit on working parties and represent the NUAA Board at special events?

NOMINATE TO BECOME A NUAA BOARD MEMBER!

FIND OUT MORE

Check out the NUAA website www.nuaa.org.au

Get your questions answered and make a time to talk to a current board member by calling NUAA on 02 8354 7300.

PUT YOURSELF FORWARD

Fill in a nomination form. All members are sent one with the AGM papers in spring.

Attend the AGM and tell other NUAA members why you should be on the Board.

Brian's Story

It's My Community

Brian is an Aboriginal man and a member of the NUAA Board who cares deeply for his community.

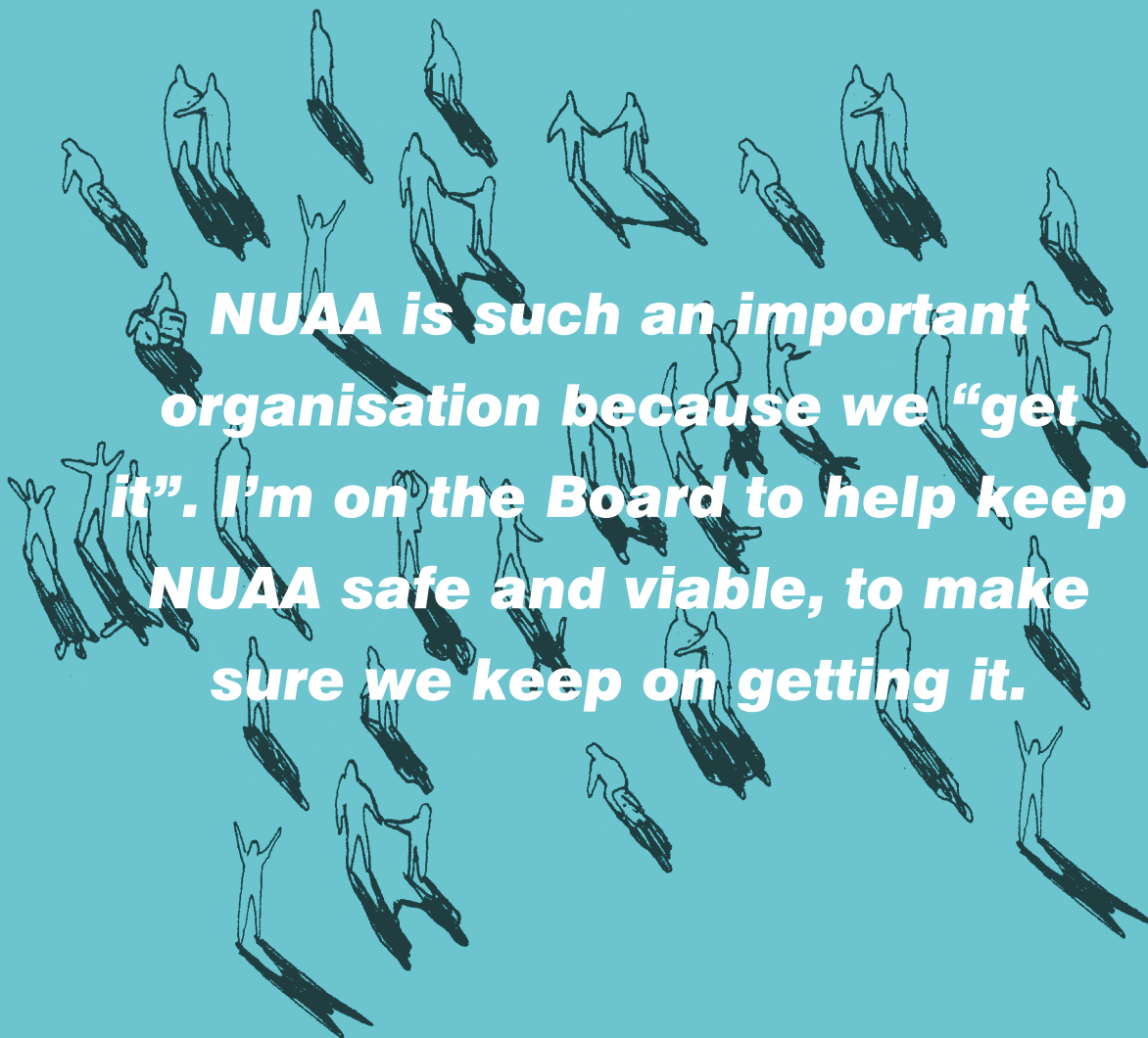
I've watched my family die from substance use – there's actually an average life span of 35 - 40 years in my family, especially among men. It made me realise how important harm reduction is and I want those tools in the hands of Aboriginal people.

My experiences inspired me to work as an Aboriginal Health Education Worker and I was proud to spend 10 years at a quality service. But by the time left, I had a book full of people who had passed on over the years. At least half of them were Aboriginal. Given that only 10 - 15% of the users we saw at the service were Aboriginal, this is an outrageous inequity. I was finding it harder and harder to deal with the deaths.

During this period, I was getting a lot of support from NUAA workers. They understood why I cared for my community so deeply and why each death hurt and reconnected me to the death of my own family members.

I eventually went to work at NUAA as a Peer Worker in a service out west. Working for NUAA was a wonderful experience and I developed some rich friendships. I felt so cared for there. Many services seem to focus on a medical and academic approach to drug use, but NUAA is all about people – about compassion, understanding and respect. I have always felt valued by NUAA and never felt like I was different – I was just part of the family.

When I realised I needed to work at something entirely different for a while and got a job outside of the Drug and Alcohol sector, a NUAA staff member suggested I join the Board to keep my connection. That reminded me that I could still be a useful, caring member of our community even though I was not working on the front line. And it meant a lot to me that another member of our community suggested it to me. She told me that she thought I would be a good Board member partly because she admired the work I had done over the years, but mostly because I was a warm and sensitive pathfinder, not just for Aboriginal people who used drugs but for all people who used drugs. That made me feel wonderful not just about myself, but about the qualities valued by NUAA.



NUAA is such an important organisation because we “get it”. I’m on the Board to help keep NUAA safe and viable, to make sure we keep on getting it.

So I put my name forward and I attended the Annual General Meeting to speak up and say why I wanted to be a Board member and found myself elected. And every month I front up at the meetings and will continue to do so as long as I am needed.

For me, being a Board member is about finding a way to keep contributing to NUAA. NUAA is such an important organisation because we “get it”. I’m on the Board to help keep NUAA safe and viable, to make sure we keep on getting it. I want to support NUAA’s work in the community even though I can’t work directly with the community at the moment.

But more specifically and more personally, it’s about that book I have that is full of people who used drugs who have passed on. It is always going to be with me. Being on the NUAA board is about not wanting anyone else to fill up a book of RIPs of people who use drugs.

Neil's Story

It's About Community

Neil has a history of volunteering in member-based organisation Positive Life, and now works there. He is the Secretary of the NUAA Board.

2012 was a chaotic year for me. I had just ended a destructive relationship and was left feeling mentally and physically ill.

After a few weeks of flu like symptoms and no energy, I spoke to a GP at my local medical centre. He told me I had scarlet fever and sent me home with antibiotics.

I had a feeling the GP was wrong and suspected I knew why I was actually sick. I decided I needed a second opinion and went to the Rapid Testing Site on Oxford Street for a HIV test. I found out that yes, I had HIV and what I'd been experiencing was a seroconversion illness.

I was lucky to have friends who were HIV positive and they were helpful. Their peer support was invaluable. They really listened to me. They recommended doctors, told me their experiences around things like treatments and understanding test results.

I had a lot to process with the end of the relationship and now my new diagnosis. I decided I had to put my health first, which meant letting go of a demanding job in computing.

The break from employment helped, until I started to feel isolated. I had always worked, and I missed achieving and interacting with other people. My self-esteem and confidence soon plummeted.

I was familiar with Positive Life, a peer-based organisation supporting people with HIV. I knew their Speaker Program was an important way of getting out health messages and breaking down stigma and discrimination to present a human face of HIV. Through the program, people living with HIV volunteer to go into schools, unis and the community to tell their personal story; talk about HIV prevention, testing and treatment; and answer questions.

Volunteering seemed like a great way to get out of the house and be part of a community, so I signed on as a Speaker. I also volunteered in the office of Positive Life, using some of the skills I had learnt working with computers, but in a less demanding way.

I also felt I had to look at my drug use, which was causing me problems in several areas of my life. I had been using heavily — I am a poly user and had been having a long run on ice. I checked myself into WHO's, a 12-month rehab that relies heavily on peers to support each other with their goals. WHO's gave me the time out I needed to focus on my health and I soon started to feel like myself again.

There is no better place to volunteer than for your own community

I had a few false starts at returning to work. As jobs came up, I applied but found interviews challenging, even though my role as Speaker has given me more confidence. When I didn't get a job, I asked about my strong points and what was holding me back. I also did my homework, like reading the organisation's public documents like the Strategic Plan and Annual Reports.

I eventually landed a role at Positive Life with the HIV Work Ready pilot, something I could really get my teeth into. I had become passionate about wanting to help people navigate volunteer work and get back to paid work.

I took my transition back into the work force carefully, starting with three days a week then building up to a full week. After a couple of years of working full-time, I am now ready to add education to the mix. This year I'm starting a Tertiary Preparation course at UNSW, to get me ready for a science degree.

I also wanted to volunteer again and was asked to run for the NUAA Board. I am a huge fan of the meaningful involvement of peers and admire peer-led organisations. I had been a staff representative on the Positive Life Board, so I understood why governance by peers is important. I was elected and am now Secretary of the NUAA Board, a time-consuming role.

If I had to make one argument for going into volunteer work, it would be that doing something is always better than doing nothing. Contributing definitely increases your self-esteem, and there is no better place to volunteer than for your own community.

For me, the support I get and give as a peer has been the most powerful part of my story. If not for my peers, I might still be struggling with my health, drug use and working life.

My changed relationship with HIV and drugs, and my improved work-life balance are all thanks to the peer relationships I have made. Some are formal — through my job, being a Speaker and being on Boards. Others are informal — through my friend networks, like the group I go on long motorbike rides with.

Both peer groups support me and allow me to support others. After all, that's what community is.

WHERE TO SCORE FITS

These are only some of the NSP outlets in NSW. If you can't contact the number above, or don't know the nearest NSP in your area, ring ADIS on (02) 9361-8000 1-800-422-599

Location - Phone Number - Clinic/Nurse - Dispensing Machine - Hep C Testing/Treatment - Naloxone Training - Outreach

Albury	60581800	X	✓	✓	X	X
Armidale (Inverell/Tamworth)	0427851011	✓	X	X	X	X
Auburn Community Health	87594000	X	✓	X	X	X
Ballina	66206105	X	✓	✓	X	X
Bankstown	97802777					
Bathurst	63305850	X	✓	✓	X	X
Bega	64929620	✓	X	✓	X	X
Blacktown	98314037	✓	✓	✓	X	✓
Bowral Community Health	48618000	X	✓	X	X	X
Byron Bay	66399675					
Campbelltown, Liverpool, Camden Hospital ED	87386650	X	✓	✓	X	X
Canterbury HARM	97182636	X	X	✓	✓	X
Cooma	64553201	✓	✓	X	X	X
Dubbo	68412489	X	✓	✓	X	X
Gosford	43202753	X	✓	✓	X	✓
Goulburn S East	48273913	✓	✓	✓	X	X
Grafton	66418712					
Hornsby	94779530	X	✓	X	X	X
Ingleburn Community Health	47822133	X	X	X	X	X
Katoomba / Blue Mountains	47822133	X	✓	X	X	X
Kings Cross KRC	93602766	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Lismore HARM	66222222	X	✓	X	X	✓
Liverpool	87386650	X	✓	X	X	X
Manly	99772666	✓	X	✓	✓	X
Marrickville HARM	95620434	X	✓	X	X	X
Moree	67570000	X	✓	X	X	X
Moruya	44741561	✓	✓	X	X	X

Mt Druit	98811334	✓	X	X	X	✓
Murwillumbah	66709400	X	✓	X	X	✓
Narellan Community Health	46403500	X	X	X	X	X
Narooma	44762344	✓	X	✓	X	X
Newcastle Harm Min Prgm	40164519	✓	X	X	X	X
Nimbin	66891500	X	✓	✓	X	✓
Orange	63928600	✓	✓	✓	X	X
Parramatta	96875326	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Penrith/St Marys	47343996	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Port Macquarie	65882915	✓	✓	✓	X	✓
Queanbeyan	61507150	✓	✓	✓	X	X
Redfern HARM	93950400	✓	✓	✓	✓	X
Rosemeadow Community Health	46334100	X	X	X	X	X
St George	91132944	X	✓	X	X	X
St Leonards	94629040	X	✓	X	X	✓
Surry Hills ACON	94629040	✓	X	✓	X	✓
Surry Hills NUAA	83547343	✓	✓	✓	✓	X
Sutherland	95221046	X	✓	✓	✓	X
Sydney Hospital	93827440	X	✓	✓	✓	X
Tahmoor	46836000	X	X	X	X	X
Taree	65929315	✓	✓	✓	X	X
Tweed Heads	0755067540	X	✓	✓	X	X
Wagga Wagga	69386411	X	✓	✓	X	X
Windsor	5605714	X	✓	X	X	X
Wollongong/Port Kembla	42751529	X	X	✓	✓	✓
Yass	62263833	X	✓	X	X	X
Young	63828888	X	X	X	X	X

NUAA is the peer-run
drug user organisation

GET INVOLVED!

BECOME A
MEMBER!

Members, including people in prison, receive print editions of User's News and Invitations to community events including training and consultations

VOLUNTEER

NUAA is looking for volunteers for its Needle and Syringe Program and DanceWize - our new harm reduction program at NSW music festivals

PARTICIPATE
IN TRAINING.

NUAA conducts harm reduction and overdose prevention training across the state – register your interest and we'll let you know when we're in the area

Register your interest via our website www.nuaa.org.au or contact Lucy Pepolim on **02-8354-7300 (freecall 1-800-644-413)** or email lucyp@nuaa.org.au