



*"We're not on our journey to save the world but to save ourselves.
But in doing that you save the world ..."* — Joseph Campbell

In an ever-changing and challenging world, it is often easy to lose one's place or one's sense of purpose. Amid the stresses inherent in everyday living, which include day-to-day problems as well as sudden change and adverse life events, it is all the more difficult to find constructive and helpful paths to navigate one's way in the world.

Men Being Well is a program for men to assist in this ongoing journey. The program is run by Relationships Australia Victoria and Life Is... Foundation and hosts monthly **Men's Gatherings** or conversation groups, **Online Events** and several all-day **Men's Retreats** throughout the year with discussion about emotional wellbeing, life issues and challenges, as well as specific topics and including guest speakers at times.

Men Being Well is focussed on wellbeing and positive mental health. It is founded upon several simple principles, supported by research and many years of experience:

- Increased wellbeing has proven physical, psychological, and emotional benefits over a range of measures, including increased resilience.
- Some authors use wellbeing and happiness interchangeably, but generally happiness is seen as more fleeting, similar to pleasure or joy. We like to use the term wellbeing as encompassing a broader, foundational, more sustained positive mental state.
- While different people may inherently have different wellbeing 'set points', wellbeing is a skillset that can be learned and developed.
- Wellbeing is enhanced by positive social connection, psychoeducation, personal reflection, and commitment to meaningful change.

While the MBW program is aimed at the individual, the focus is also on the *individual in relationship* - to partners, to children and to community. We know that positive shifts in an individual flow on to positive change in all aspects of life.

MBW offers a relaxed, welcoming and a safe place to reflect on your own personal journey. Good conversations with other men, sharing space and stories together have been found to enhance wellbeing. Often too, there are many benefits in just catching up.



Men Being Well Group Process

Much of the MBW group process is in the form of a *talking circle*. Sitting in or 'being in circle' is probably as old as human history and traditionally families, small groups of people, clans or tribes sat in circle during the day or at night around fires, talking together, discussing important issues, and telling stories. This way of communication was not simply a product of the housing arrangements or need for warmth or even protection at that time, it was the foundational way of being together that was central to the health of individuals, families, and the community.

While talking circles varied in different cultures, they generally embraced similar principles, some of which are:

- Recognition that a circle is *non-linear* which coincides with a traditional non-linear view of the world – one that accepts the cyclical nature of life, that seasons change, that all things pass...
- Many circles do not necessarily have a leader or an 'expert' and are *non-hierarchical*. However, a circle can be called or 'held' by a particular person, or persons, and they may act as conveners or facilitators who 'hold the space'.
- Talking circles are essentially a shared space, belonging to the group, with every member sharing some responsibility for how it develops, and it is recognised that conversations that occur 'in circle' are often very different to those 'outside'.
- While everyone has the opportunity to talk (or not as they may choose), there is also the great opportunity to listen, reflect and to learn. There is an understanding that learning to listen has great power.
- It is also recognised that simply telling one's own story, 'putting it into the circle' so to speak, already begins to shift that story whether there is comment or not. Some circles encourage feedback, others allow each person to talk without comment from others.
- Some circles incorporate *ceremony* and a recognition of the greater *mystery* that surrounds our lives, including the 'seen' as well as the 'unseen'.
- Circles can be called for many purposes, some are ongoing, while others are for a specific issue or duration. Whatever its intent, the same basic principles apply.

In some traditions, every man (and woman) belonged to a talking circle, and this was what supported them through both the good times and the more challenging ones. Being part of a talking circle was the foundational element in creating and sustaining Community and in that respect was pivotal in maintaining personal health, connection, and wellbeing.