

# Deafblind mental health

By [Deafblind Victoria](#) on 18 May, 2022



Deafblind Victoria held a mental health event on 18<sup>th</sup> May 2022 that was attended by 14 Deafblind Victorians, and supported by 12 interpreters, 2 commguides, 2 DBV support staff, one Auslan student on work placement and one volunteer.

Trudy Ryall, a deafblind person who has experienced mental ill health, introduced the event, acknowledging the \$1000 grant from the [Deaf Mental Health trust fund \(Ben Souter\)](#) that helped fund it. Many DBV members knew Ben and we think he would be proud to see our community coming together to look after deafblind mental health in his name.

Kate Chivers, a psychologist that works with deaf and deafblind children at [Aurora School](#) presented clear and simple information about what mental health means for deafblind people. This led to some “a-ha” moments – after Kate described depression, one member said “oh! I’ve felt that way. I didn’t know that’s what ‘depression’ means.”

Participants shared how they stay calm when stressed or upset. Arts and crafts were common activities. Many mentioned the importance of connection with peers at Deafblind Victoria, and several talked about support from Able Australia. Technology also plays an important role. However, for some, even doing simple things like going for a walk outside to relax is difficult without regular access to commguides.

Jasper Cleland shared his personal story of mental illness as a deafblind person. This was a powerful part of the event, and we especially want to thank Jasper for his bravery and determination to open up a discussion about mental health in the deafblind community. Participants talked about the frightening feeling of not knowing what is “out there”, who is looking at me, and not being able to verify what is real. Loneliness was a common theme, and impact of Covid lockdowns and a chronic shortage of commguides and interpreters was also discussed.

One participant joined the dots from her childhood to now: growing up missing instruction and knowledge from parents led to not knowing what healthy eating meant; poor physical health then led to poor mental health. Others talked about the mental health challenges of becoming deafblind; grief, frustration, fear, and the pressure of learning the skills needed to get about the community and communicate with others. There were also stories of resilience; participants talked about how they got through tough times, and what supports are most effective.

After the discussion, a qigong activity for relaxation was led by Justin Gadze, and a sensory box was available for participants to explore.

The two key objectives of the event were:

- 1) to help members better identify mental ill health and gain strategies for staying well, and
- 2) to gather information about barriers to mental health for Deafblind Victorians that DBV can use to target gaps and to advocate. We are thrilled with how both these objectives were met. Thorough planning and a strong peer support network helped keep things on track. Suggestions that arose from the discussion, such as building a database of mental health practitioners and accessible services, gave DBV leads to work on as a self-advocacy group.

Pictures from the day from the DBV website follow











Reference:

<https://deafblindvictoria.com/2022/05/18/deafblind-mental-health/> accessed 27 July 2022