

Introducing Justin

Hi, my name's Justin and I'm 36 years old, with over ten years of clinical experience in the mental health field, but more importantly to me, a lifetime of lived experience with mental illness issues in what I believe to be a system fraught with inconsistencies. I consider myself one of the lucky ones, in that I did fall through the cracks early, after being diagnosed early with Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), ADHD, Generalised Anxiety Disorder and Panic Disorder.

All of the professionals I saw wanted me to be admitted to psych wards and put on high doses of medication, but I am thankful for my parents to see that there were more holistic ways to treat my issues. By age 15 I had discovered a huge passion for both music and basketball, which started my journey of healing.

Through finding the right mixture of things for myself, I gradually learned to become independent, resilient, much more confident and playful, and I started to have hope for myself and others like me. I sought out friends who were 'complex' or 'like me' and although there were a lot of dark times, I became relentless about paving a path forward for myself where I could create my own bubble of contentment for myself, in such a complicated world.

By the age of 22, I was living in Brooklyn, New York, with my band - I had played basketball at state level, and was playing daily in New York. It was around this age I also decided to pursue my studies in psychology, which I completed through to postgraduate level at Monash University.

Although my psychology degree has been highly useful, I am constantly reminded that there are still many gaps in the system, and I find myself wanting to do for me what so many others did for me along my journey, that is still continuing.

I have found that I can sit in a place of gratitude, even with all I have been through, and it's one of my life's mission statements to help others find some sort of peace, happiness and even joy, which has led me to work more towards roles in advocacy and support.

Here are a few more things about me!

Favourite colour

It's a tough one, but I have to go with forest green. A lot of people don't know this, but green often symbolises rebirth and regeneration, and I find it quite calming. Beyond that, I do love nature and gravitate highly towards the serenity that being outdoors can give me.

Favourite recreational/social activity

It's a tie! Music and basketball are definitely my two favorite recreational activities. Music, because I can always match my mood with a playlist I've made on Spotify, whether I'm feeling down or up or anything in between - I also love sitting down at the Piano or picking up a guitar and playing.

Basketball is also something I value greatly, as growing up it taught me a lot about discipline and working within a team, but was also very therapeutic for me as it allowed me to turn a lot of 'negative' energy I had into positives by being on the court, especially racking up steals on defence and turning them into assists or three point shots!



Favourite food

Japanese! I'm pretty sure I could exist purely on a diet of Salmon Nigiri, Ramen, Okonomiyaki and Tempura 😊

Why Peer Support?

Throughout my time working in highly clinical settings I've found one thing to be a bit lacking amongst services: connection. Peer support, from what I have found, offers the privilege of being with someone and facing challenges together, often with similar shared experiences that in my opinion leads to less feelings of isolation and improved coping mechanisms, but most importantly connection. I always view the client as the expert, and whatever I can offer that person to support them on their journey is a privilege.

Any goals with APFT Inc?

I am coming into APTF with the mindset of 'whatever is needed of me' - in saying that I would like to not just do what's needed, but what is often just wanted. I find my biggest skill in therapy is active listening and sitting with someone in the moment, so whatever that might be in the short, medium or long term, I'm here to advocate. After years and years of experience in both the public and private sectors, I view APTF as a real breath of fresh air to the mental health space, and I'm excited to help it grow and evolve. I would say another goal of mine is to support young people in what I was lucky enough to do for myself, with the help of others: use my mental health 'issues' almost as superpowers to help me gain perspective and forge my own path.

How is APTF different from other organisations?

Simply put, an understanding that the systems in place for young people's mental health can be counter-intuitive, and even sometimes harmful for young people. What separates APTF from other organisations, in my opinion, is that it is holistic in nature, understands the clinical perspective, and also values empowerment and a highly strengths-based approach wherein by young people are RESPECTED and VALUED - APTF, to me, has the power to evolve into something truly special where young people can not only feel safe, but heal and even prosper.

How do you think a younger peer would benefit from your support?

Whilst I have years of clinical experience, I think a younger peer would benefit mostly from me having gone through significant mental health issues, and understanding that everybody's experience is highly complex and actually letting them know there are people out there who truly want to help. I am someone who deeply cares for people, and I believe in the incredible resilience of young people. In saying that, the main benefit I believe a young person will get from working with me is connection, and from there I truly believe it's up to us working as a team to take it one day at a time towards empowering young people to forge their own paths.

