



Michelle Ulm was supported by Sunbury Community Health Centre in her battle to beat addiction and is speaking out to help others. Picture: KYLIE ELSE

Second chance at life

COURSE OFFERS A FRESH START FOR THOSE BATTLING ADDICTION

Barry Kennedy

A LIFE skills and resilience course came at just the right time for 27-year-old Sunbury single mother Michelle Ulm.

Ms Ulm hit "rock bottom" last Christmas when she found herself in a psych ward as the worsening symptoms of her addiction to methamphetamines took hold.

"Ice was my problem and I was at war with myself," she said.

"I was falling out with my family and couldn't look after my daughter and the drugs were my way of shutting it all out."

A client of Sunbury Community Health counselling team, Ms Ulm joined a pilot program – The Art of Change – in March with three other women who had drug and alcohol addictions.

Following weekly sessions that use a therapeutic recovery model and creative art to build esteem, the course proved a huge help for Ms Ulm.

"One of the exercises was to write a letter to yourself from the 2021 version of me where I was in my own house, was fully qualified and was feeling positive about my life," she said.

"The letter is on a vision board I put together and I look at it every day."

Other exercises during the course included making 1000 origami cranes, which in ancient

Japanese culture makes a wish come true; and kintsugi, another Japanese art form where participants reconstructed a ripped-up photo.

Ms Ulm said the combination of symbolism and collaborative work to construct a more meaningful life had helped her put behind both her ice addiction, and also smoking.

The destructive habits have been replaced with almost daily gym workouts, an acceptance to study and an imminent work placement.

"I feel as if I am getting a second chance at life – I wanted to be a good mother and get back to my old self, before it went bad," she said.

"I'm noticing so many good things in my life – I'm eating better and communicating better.

"I also hope others do this course; if one person does it and gets some benefit, then I think I've helped."

Sunbury Community Health is running another six-week The Art of Change program. The free program will be held from 1-3pm on Tuesdays, running from October 4 until November 15 at the Salvation Army Community Hall, 27-37 Anderson Rd. For details contact Gaby on 9744 9221 or email gabyn@sunbury.org.au; or contact Ayse on 9744 9596 or at ayses@sunburychc.org.au.