

**BELOW:** Janine and her beloved dog Max



# The Black Dog Project

*Story by Donna Geyer*

Recently Baptistcare was privileged to interview Janine Browne from The Black Dog project, which includes art, stories and poetry to connect with people who are experiencing personal, social or mental struggles.

Janine produces handmade books and cards to share characters and stories developed via her own lived experience of mental illness and adversity.

While the stories in her books relate to people of all ages they have been used successfully with children and young people who suffer from mental illness and / or trauma and abuse. She says that one of the hardest things for young people is to 'talk' or put words to feelings about what has happened in their lives.

Counsellors who have used the materials have noted that even if a child or young person couldn't find their own words they could select an image from one of Janine's books and say: 'That's how I feel.' The Black Dog Project also purposefully builds elements of suicide prevention into its resources by creating a sense of community and through the use of art and storytelling.

**Janine says that Black Dog's main point of difference is that it's personal, she says it is not a self-help, follow the steps process, it is more about sharing your own journey. Because some of the stories are from traumatic experiences, Janine likes to soften that with the art work.**

Janine says as a child she always felt different and suffered from insecurity so her work also focuses on how a person can deal with something

that may have been traumatic and then come out the other end feeling okay about themselves.

When asked about how friends and love ones can support someone who is suffering from a mental illness she says, 'Mental health can be complex and affects so many people in our community but what I've experienced and what I've observed has helped other people, are very simple things, it's the basic human needs stuff, like having someone to talk to, kindness, and trying to understand difference. It's those people that don't judge, and that are willing to listen and to be kind, it is the connection that is made through those acts that give the greatest sense of hope and possibility.'

Janine says the project has grown to establish a community of supporting artists, writers and creatives who contribute freely; health professionals, support groups and organisations who use the resources and inject ideas; friends and followers who provide input, let others know about the project and pass the art and stories on.

## **DANCE WITH WORDS**

*It is the simple act of storytelling*

*That illuminates the darkness.*

*An image, a string of words*

*That accesses places beyond consciousness.*

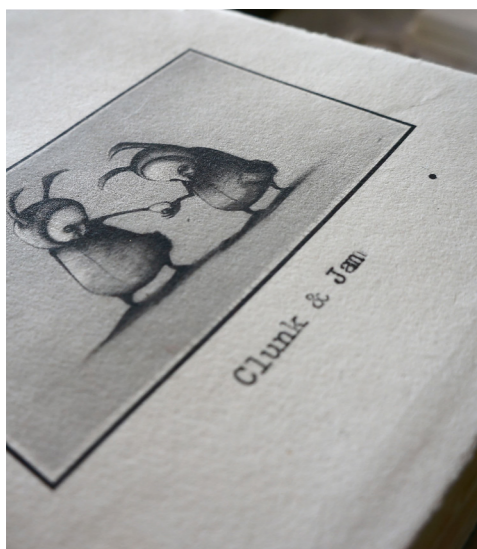
*It is truth spoken from a damaged soul*

*That warms the heart.*

*The expression of another's pain*

*That has the power to heal.*

**Janine Browne**



To find out more about The Black Dog Project visit Janine's website [theblackdogproject.com](http://theblackdogproject.com)