

Who will write our history?



Meet Mitchell Giles

I met with Mitchell Giles, the Chief Executive Officer of ['Lives Lived Well'](#), a major Non-Government Organisation that provides support for people in Queensland and New South Wales who have problems with alcohol or drugs or problems with mental health. Our purpose in meeting was to discuss the DANA history of Drug and Alcohol (D&A) Nursing project.

The history of D&A nursing in Queensland is very much intertwined with Mitchell's own career as a D&A nurse; not that he started out that way. He completed a Bachelor of Business before changing direction and becoming a registered nurse. His introduction to D&A nursing came early in his career when he worked for a time in the Hospital Alcohol and Drug Service at the Royal Brisbane Hospital. Interestingly Mitchell had always been curious about the Australian drinking culture and for his Masters degree completed his thesis on this topic.



In 1990, with the strong encouragement of Father Gerry Nichol and Sister Francine Stuber, the Sisters of the Holy Spirit opened a purpose designed facility dedicated solely to the treatment of people with problems related to the use of alcohol and prescription drugs. Known as Damascus, it was and is an acute care detoxification and rehabilitation unit.

It was in Damascus that Mitchell's career flourished. He joined in 1991 as a part-time registered nurse and in 1992 became the Nurse Manager of the unit. Under his management a multi-disciplinary team and a CBT based therapeutic rehabilitation program were introduced. Recognising the necessity for sound follow-up Mitchell oversaw the implementation of a day program to reduce the risk of relapse. Many of the nursing staff who came to work in Damascus were under-prepared for the challenges of the role, so Mitchell ensured that were provided with sound on-the-job training.

Mitchell stayed in this role for 12 years. I can speak with some authority when I write that during his time as Manager, Mitchell and his team created a very special environment; caring, non-judgmental with a focus on restoring each person's sense of dignity, as I became the manager of the unit soon after Mitchell left. In D&A circles in Brisbane this tall, quietly spoken man is highly respected and admired as a visionary manager.