# Sober in the country

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### Shanna discovered firsthand how inadequate support for alcohol harm is in rural areas. So she started a conversation online and found a massive amount of people ready to join in.

This February I will be gathering a few friends and celebrating a day I thought I’d never, ever, see. I’ll be marking the passing of my fourth year as a 100% (happily) alcohol-free Aussie, living sober in the country.

As is too often the case, it took me nearly losing my life to save it. And it happened so fast and so slowly at the same time.

It seemed that one day I was an extremely typical everyday outback Aussie girl; embarking on life full of hope and a bright future. I was somebody with everything in the world going for me.

I was a social girl who loved a cold beer with friends, because that was our primary way to socialise in a rural setting. As I got older, I turned to a cold beer after a stressful day or a hard day in the paddock. It’s what we all did.

And the next moment I was a thirty-year-old career woman unable to unwind unless I had several glasses of wine at five o’clock.

By my late 30’s, a battle with infertility and my inability to address and move past some seriously traumatic events in my past created a steady increase in my love affair with alcohol to hide pain and loneliness and ultimately it all created the perfect storm.

Ever so gradually I went from being a big social drinker and into the horrible world of chronic alcoholism.

And do you know what? I never once received advice from a GP that I had serious issues with alcohol. I was told again and again by people that I was fine, and to just cut back, to ‘’have some anti-depressants’’.

I didn’t drink daily, or during the day, and I worked and was successful. Therefore, I honest-to-God thought that made me immune from risk, and that I was just a regular Aussie woman who had earned the right to have her wine ‘’thanks very much!’’

In fact, I was one of those people who shared memes on social media like ‘I’m not an alcoholic, alcoholics go to meetings – I go to parties’.

It was all fun and games until it wasn’t. And suddenly – the time had flown by in the blink of an eye and I was looking at an early death, either by accident or by my own hand. I knew that either was imminent.

Hitting rock bottom and almost losing it all was the greatest thing that ever happened to me.

I am one of the lucky ones who went on to make a full recovery from this hideous, complex, and misunderstood disease. It’s a bit of a miracle, actually, because as I would find out the hard way, our health infrastructure in rural and remote settings is woefully inadequate at best.

The only time I could access genuinely useful support was when I travelled to major centres (always a full day of travel) and at immense cost.

And that, right there, is the reason my life looks like it does in 2019. That is why today I am a full-time volunteer on a relentless mission to help my rural and remote mates; people just like me, who appear to the rest of society as ‘normal’ or ‘functioning’ and are therefore dismissed as needing support or help. When in actual fact, they’re drowning.

The truth is that with every kilometre travelled away from major cities, alcohol-related harm and death increases exponentially. And until you’ve seen or lived remotely, let alone in this ongoing drought, you cannot fathom the challenges.

My plan is to change that.

When I began to share my journey online I did so with zero expectations or plans in place, and I did it because I felt that surely one other person might benefit from what I had worked so hard to find – access to relatable information and support in a rural setting.

Today, that conversation has evolved and gone national. It has become a rural discussion that I call [Sober in the Country](https://www.soberinthecountry.com.au/). The response to my online discussions quickly went so far and so wide that I created a space for it all and I now literally struggle daily to keep up with messages from other outback Aussies all over the nation. This is not because I am in any way unique or extraordinary – but because my story is not unique. It’s ordinary. It’s everywhere.

So massive has the response been that I’ve had the privilege of reaching out to and impacting many, many lives through my raw and honest public speaking which has included television, radio, and print press.

So many of those I connect with who now share their own stories and help each other online through a private support group I run share the common story that they, too, thought addiction to alcohol meant being a homeless person who drinks during the day from a scotch bottle. Seriously – that’s how misinformed many of us are around the truth of alcoholism and education around it. And yet, through nothing more complex than connection, open conversation, and a few brave souls stepping forward, we are creating a ‘me too’ movement that’s enabling so many people to step forward and seek some help.

My goal is to create a discussion in rural Australia where we see the truth of our worship of casual alcoholism as the health crisis it is – and stop viewing it as a national badge of honour and pride.

### Metadata

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