

The Men's Table

By Anna Rizzo-Tassone



A 2018 Australian Psychological Society study on loneliness revealed that one in four Australians feel lonely. And a report by Relationships Australia the same year revealed that men are more likely to experience loneliness than women.

Loneliness has been linked to premature death (Holt-Lunstad et al. 2015), poor physical and mental health (Australian Psychological Society 2018; Relationships Australia 2018) and general dissatisfaction with life (Schumaker et al. 1993).

The Men's Table is a charitable organisation looking to combat loneliness and provide a safe place for men to share and be heard in a confidential and non-judgemental environment. Celebrating the launch of their 50th Table in Australia, we spoke to Table organiser Michael Lofaro (*pictured left*) about his involvement with the community group and his fondness for it.

Tell us a little bit about The Men's Table...

The Men's Table is a grassroots community dedicated to fostering social connection among men. It's a simple model based on regular interaction between men in an environment that encourages meaningful conversation and mutual support. We believe it's healthy to show emotion and when men have the opportunity to do this, they build relationships which can strengthen the resilience of the whole community. Belonging to a Table contributes to a man's social, mental and emotional wellbeing.

How did you discover The Men's Table for yourself?

David Pointon, one of the co-founders of The Men's Table, and I had known each other for many years through business connections. I had spent some time living and working overseas and upon my return to Sydney, I reached out to reconnect with David. He shared with me over coffee his renewed life goals and activities, one of which was The Men's Table. I initially became involved in a volunteer capacity, then moved to joining a Table based in Flemington, and to now being a part-time member of the Table's Kitchen team.

What interested you in joining as a Table organiser?

The experience of actually being part of a Table, the support, camaraderie and the positive outcomes that I have been gifted by participating. It motivated me to want to help other men to come to a Table. For me the Table is a new way to connect with men on a much deeper level. A place to share stories about the highs and lows of life. It's about men supporting men and in turn being supported.

Are there any rules around the Table?

Tables operate via a set of guidelines we call the Fundamentals. Tables meet on a monthly basis, at a fixed time and location for a meal and a drink. Tables usually meet mid-week and it is an evening event which we encourage should only run for about two hours. These guidelines have been developed from years of actual Table activity, from the real-life experiences of a Table. Listening, sharing, no "fixing", no alpha male activity, and confidentiality are just some of the Fundamentals we use to ensure a long standing and viable Table experience.

How important is socialising for men's mental health?

Our experience is that isolation and the lack of socialisation are commonplace among men. The reasons for this isolation and lack of socialisation are diverse and individual. We have commissioned two research documents (*Model of Care* and *From Couch to Community*) which are available for download on our website, which expose some very clear statistics regarding the importance of socialising for men and also the way in which being part of a Table has helped men in overcoming such issues.

How can anyone get involved and is there a fee?

Membership is open to men aged 18 years and over. We currently have men aged from 19 through to 93 sitting at Tables in every state and territory except South Australia and the Northern Territory.

There are no membership fees. Our only ask is that men that join a Table be present and attend at least nine meetings a year. The only out-of-pocket cost is their meal and a drink.

Are you running any events in and around the 2137 postcode?

We currently have Tables in Canada Bay, Burwood, Flemington and Ryde and are looking to build more Tables in the area. The path to a Table is via what we call an Entree Event. We run such events both virtually (on a fortnightly basis) and in person. We are currently organising an in-person Entree for Canada Bay on 3rd August. Please go to themenstable.org for more information.

What is the vision for the future of The Men's Table?

Our vision is "Healthy Men, Healthy Masculinities, Healthy Communities". We want to provide a safe place for any man in Australia to connect and belong. We want to see our communities benefiting from a growing number of men who are learning and practising healthy ways of being a man.



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