

Increasing Self-Compassion and Body Neutrality in University Students:

The Journey of the “Freedom From Your Cage” Program

Presented by:

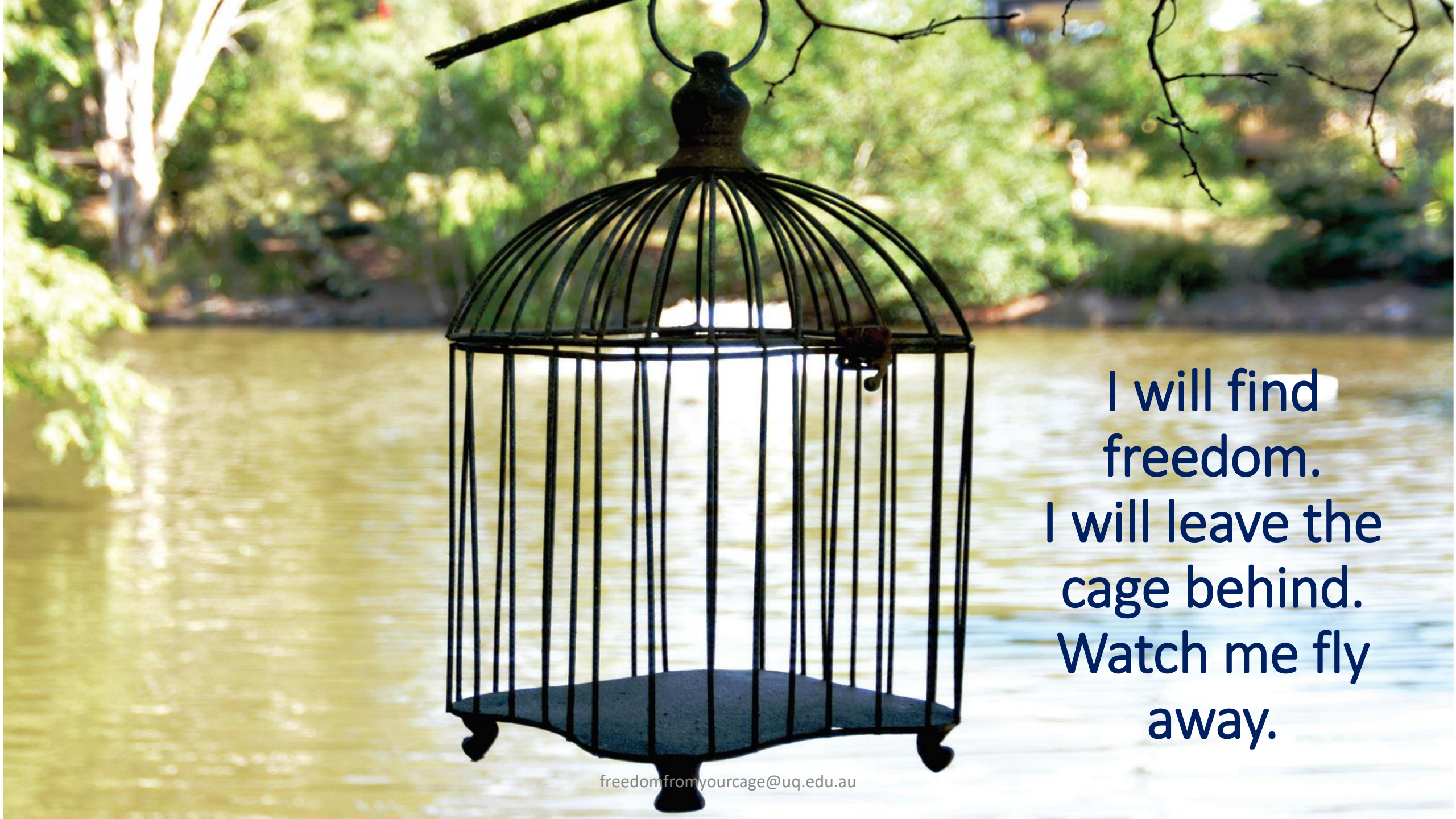
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I will find
freedom.
I will leave the
cage behind.
Watch me fly
away.

Why undertake the journey?

Why FFYC started?

1. Suffering in silence
2. Loss of potential
3. Lack of referral options
4. Missed middle or un-unified missed middle

Planning the journey

Research

- What already existed?
- What would match our students and genuinely reflect our approach to supporting students?
- Why therapeutic rather than workshop or manualised?
- Approach encourages students to own, direct and invest in change to self perception.

From start to now...

2015

2 sessions

1. A discussion about body image
(influences, self reflection art based activity)
2. Assumptions, the inner critic and the supportive voice

From start to now...

Now

4 sessions

1. A discussion about body image (influences, self reflection activity, cultural impacts)

2. Assumptions, the inner critic and supportive voice (including self soothing)

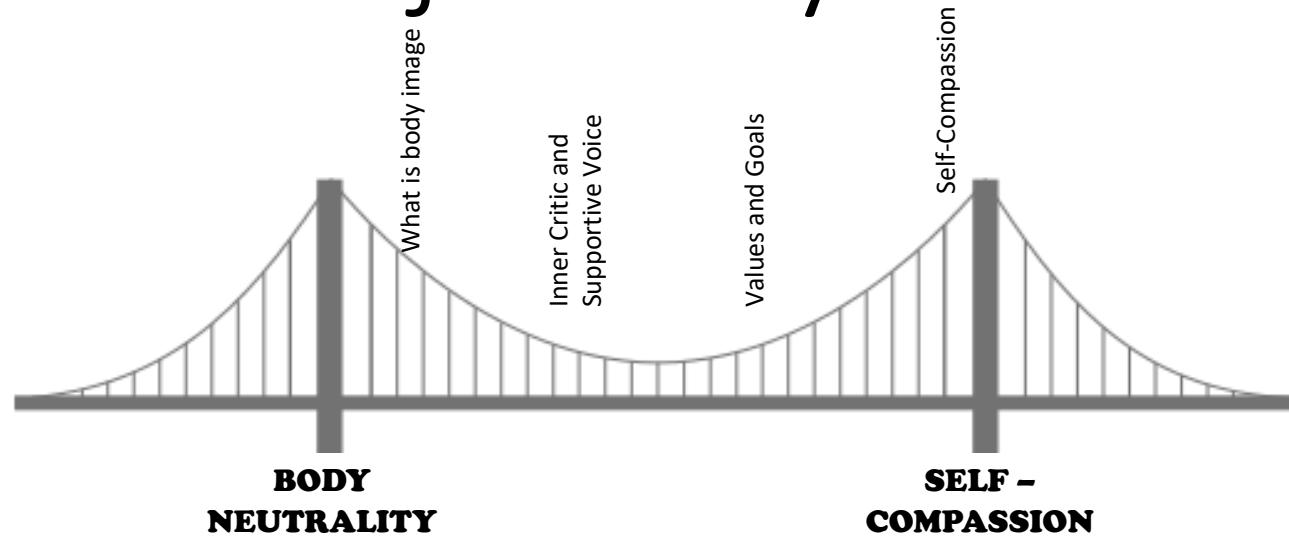
3. Values and goals (practical values activity and goal setting worksheet).
Introduction to body neutrality.

4. Self-compassion (3 components (Neff) and mindful eating activity)

Follow up sessions – 4 week after program completion and at the end of the year for all participants in that year

- Why did we collect these (self-compassion and body neutrality) ???

Self-compassion and body neutrality: pillars of the journey



- Self-compassion linked to reduced fear of failure, increased emotion focused coping strategies, and less avoidance ⁽¹⁾
- Also greater reductions in body dissatisfaction, body shame and contingent self worth based on appearance ⁽²⁾
- Body neutrality is a new and emerging area
 - Focus on function rather than form
 - Acknowledging what your body does, not how it appears

Current research findings

- Feedback collected after every session to guide future sessions.
- Focus Group findings
- **Students**
 - All can benefit from body neutrality, all could benefit
 - Self-compassion is important to add respect for body, it is an ongoing reprogramming
 - *“I think it’s a very important concept or idea not only for body image but for all of our wellbeing. That’s a really good tool, a big benefit from the program at the end that you can get that tool or concept or idea and you are able to apply even, roll the concept away from there. So that’s something I found very positive”*

Current research findings

- **Staff**

- Self-compassion and body neutrality shift distress
- More understanding needed of body neutrality

- *“Students that I have referred ... most of them didn’t have disordered eating but had a lot of negative inner critic dialogue about their body image that as impacting them in starting relationships or contributing to anxiety and social situations. Again, not to an extreme end of that I didn’t think it would work well in a group but that it was a barrier for them in forming new friendships”.*

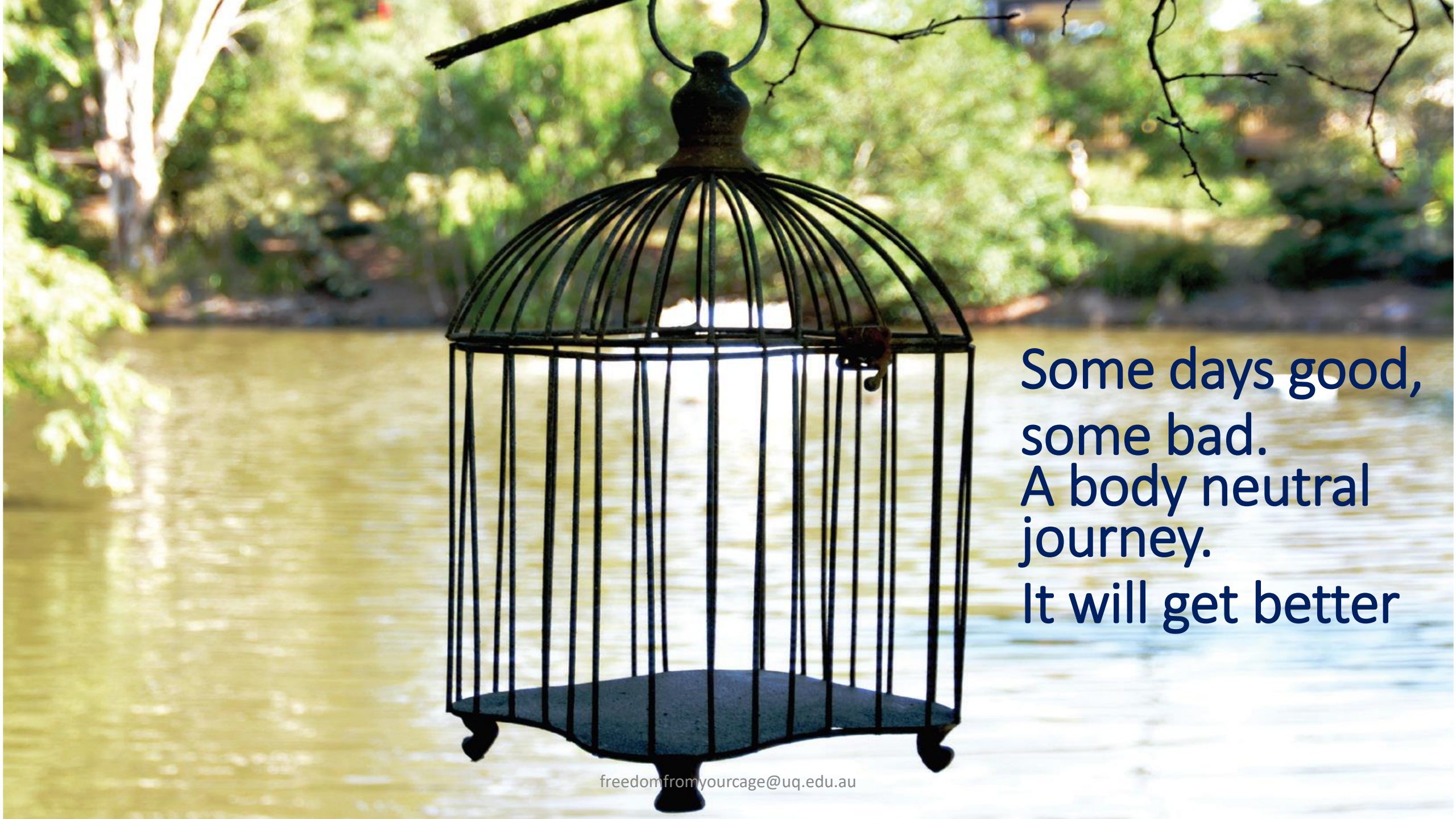
Feedback and future

- Inner critic is a powerful topic
- More self-compassion based strategies and activities
 - Mindful eating receives strong positive feedback
 - Connectedness between group members both during and post program completion
- Elaborate body neutrality and creating a space where culture change can happen
- Supporting the Freedom From Your Cage clan

"Think of the hardest subject you've ever had in uni. I mean one that makes sense and you think you've got it all down but then comes exam time and you're blank, or worst, you start blaming yourself for not knowing and then you blank some more. That for me was body image, I understood all of it from an intellectual standpoint and I believed in feminism and acceptance of all bodies, faiths and political views that don't harm others. So why did I keep on blanking when it came down to accepting myself ?

Well freedom from your cage means it's ok to blank... it's ok to feel a little bit like you don't belong, but here's the quicker: once you find that little self compassion you also have to face the facts: your body, whatever it looks like, whatever it's missing and anything "extra" still is an awesome and highly functional "machine" (yes, sorry I am an engineer so forgive my blunt comparisons). Throughout the FFYC workshops I found an incredibly accepting, zero judgement space that also invited me to get off my bum and do something about the pain. I cried during half the sessions and laugh really hard in most too. I met people that had had it way harder than me and were still pretty optimistic. I learnt that what matters it's your own pain and it's pointless to compare to others , better to accompany each other. I learnt that body image is not a pass or fail subject, but a daily care routine".

(Female student, PhD, aged 20 to 30 years)



Some days good,
some bad.
A body neutral
journey.
It will get better

Questions or comments.....



Share the journey with us.....

Email: freedomfromyourcage@uq.edu.au

Website: <https://my.uq.edu.au/information-and-services/student-support/workshops>

Grab a flyer

freedomfromyourcage@uq.edu.au



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1. 2. Neff, K., & Dill-Shackleford, K.E. (2014). Self-compassion and body dissatisfaction in women: A randomized controlled trial of a brief meditation intervention. *Mindfulness, 6 (3)*, 444-454.

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