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The Mercury

Anxiety floats away as Les takes a dive from on high

ALICE CLARIDGE

JUMPING out of an aircraft requires a great leap of faith for anyone.

For Les Harding, who suffers from a mental illness, it was an even greater challenge.

Four years ago, Mr Harding suffered such severe anxiety it was difficult for him even to step outside his home.

Yesterday, proving he is now on the road to recovery, Mr Harding skydived from 3000 metres (10,000 feet) — a challenge he set himself a year earlier.

Mr Harding, 50, of Rokeby, said he hoped his achievement might inspire other people who suffer from mental illness to set their own goals.

"I have had some hard times, but I'm in a good place now," Mr Harding said.

"Skydiving is something I've wanted to do my whole life.

"It feels good to have worked towards this, and now achieved it."

Mr Harding is a client of the Richmond Fellowship, an agency which provides rehabilitation and support services to encourage mental health and emotional well-being.

Richmond Fellowship chief executive Patrick Carlisle said Mr Harding's courageous leap of faith proved to himself and others that fear should not be a barrier to



THE JUMP: Parachutes open and down they come.

a successful and happy life for people experiencing mental illness.

"One in four people experience mental illness at some time in their life and yet are able to move forward and lead meaningful lives," Mr Carlisle said.

"Les is a great example. What he has achieved today is fantastic, he has come a long way.

"Jumping out of a plane is something many people have a fear of, but for Les there were even more barriers to overcome than for most.

"For people with mental illness, steps such as doing the shopping, cleaning or getting dressed can be a challenge. Each hurdle that is overcome, gives hope for the next."



NO WORRIES: First time skydiver Les Harding, left, with instructor Richard Timperon after their skydive yesterday. Pictures: LEIGH WINBURN

Mental health awareness jump:

A Richmond Fellowship client and a staff member did a parachute jump in Hobart yesterday to raise awareness of mental health. The pair did the jump over the cenotaph at Lower Domain, Hobart. Richmond Fellowship provides rehabilitation and support services to encourage mental health and emotional wellbeing. Chief executive officer Patrick Carlisle said the jump signified a leap of faith, showing that fear should not be a barrier to a happy life for people with mental illness.
