



**ARAFEMI**

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# ARAFEMI NEWS

*Promoting and improving the wellbeing of people affected by mental illness*

ARAFEMI NEWS Volume 14, Issue 5 Autumn 2008

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## 48 HOURS IN THE LIFE OF ARAFEMI

**A** recent 48 hours at ARAFEMI led me to reflect on just how busy and involved the organisation is in providing support and involving people and their carers in developing positive life solutions.

### **Monday – all day**

Fourteen people have arrived at the ARAFEMI office in Hawthorn, they are attending a Carers Coping skills one day session. Carers often feel shocked and in total despair when they hear that a mental illness has been diagnosed with a partner or one of their children. Hilary is running the all day session and she covers understanding mental illness, the mental health system, seeking professional help, and looking after 'self'. By the end of the day, there's a loud buzz coming from the training room, people are talking to each other, one of the major goals of the day has been achieved! Carers often feel isolated and all alone, and this day has provided some much need mutual support.

In the meantime, in another part of the building, the Carer Helpline is busy, answering calls, listening to people, providing information and support and valuable information which will allow people to make contact with professional services and support.

### **Monday evening – let's check the budget**

Hardly had the Coping Skills Course finished, than the Business Development meeting of the ARAFEMI Board meets in the same room. These Board members meet with the Executive Director and Finance Officer to look at how ARAFEMI is travelling. They examine the budget and operational costs. We may need to watch this item, "look at the phone bill, its costing much more than we thought".. or perhaps its 'why don't we plan this in the future'. It's

a hot bed of fertile thinking, crunching numbers and making sure that the organisation uses its resources most effectively.

### **Tuesday morning – Managers talking it through**

By 11am the next day, the four managers who run the ARAFEMI services are meeting together over a cup of coffee in the meeting room. They are busy talking about making sure the after hours on call roster for the Linwood PARC program is working well. It can do with some refinement, and one manager wants to take a break, and this requires others sharing the load. The values which drive us come to the surface, its about living our belief and hope in the recovery of people from mental illness that keeps us all going. Staff morale is high, and it is noted that over the last three years, ARAFEMI's staff numbers have doubled. There are now over 40 people on the payroll. Get those time-sheets right.

### **Tuesday afternoon - staff training and development session**

By 2pm, about 25 staff have gathered in the training room to hear the guest speaker in the staff development series. Today it's Brendan O'Hanlon from Bouverie Family Services. Brendan used to be on the ARAFEMI Board and knows the organisation well. Today he is starting a series of sessions which will sharpen up the staff focus on working with families in a sensitive manner. He's good, the afternoon is stimulating, staff are enthusiastic, and go away to their respective roles much clearer about how to involve families in various aspects of caring within mental health.

Its been a busy 48 hours at ARAFEMI! Take a breath, it's only Tuesday, get ready for tomorrow.  
- Warren Jenkins ED

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## **ARAFEMI Carer Helpline**



**for families &  
friends of  
people with a  
mental  
illness**

**03 9810 9314  
9am– 5pm  
Monday to Friday**

## COPES BOX HILL

### Carers Offering Peers Early Support

Trying to support someone with a mental illness can be a very lonely, frustrating and difficult experience for families and carers. It can feel quite overwhelming at times, trying to understand the complexities of mental illness and then working out what to do about it. Families often talk about feeling like they are walking on egg shells and live with the fear and uncertainty of not knowing what's around the corner.

ARAFEMI in partnership with Eastern Health Adult Mental Health Program are currently setting up the the COPES Box Hill Program to provide additional support to carers and families whose relative is in receipt of mental health treatment or support from Eastern Health Adult Mental Health Program or ARAFEMI. The COPES workers are someone you can go to for support, information and referrals. Sometimes it can be helpful to talk to someone in person, who can listen and be there for you, as well as explore different pathways to recovery. This service will be particularly helpful to those who find it difficult to express themselves over the phone and prefer to talk face to face with someone about what is going on.

The new COPES Box Hill workers have experience as carers of people with a mental illness and provide valuable and compassionate support to assist families who are supporting someone with mental illness. It is planned that COPES workers will be based across three mental health services including; Upton House (Box Hill Hospital) and the Adult Mental Health Program at Koonung Clinic.

The COPES Program is a free and confidential service, which also be available after hours to suit carers needs.

We are very excited to be setting up this new program for families and carers and to build on the success of the existing COPES program in the outer east. We look forward to bringing you full details on how to access the service in the next edition of the ARAFEMI News.

## ADVOCACY IN MOTION.

You may have heard a fair amount about carer allowances in the media in the past few days - with growing pressure to the Federal Government to rethink its plans to scrap the new carer bonus. The power of consumers and carers to unite to get good outcomes from government can be shown through this campaign. So how can we continue to ensure that this issue and other issues in mental health are not dropped?

In speaking to Simon Tatz from the Mental Health Council of Australia (MHCA), he explored the need for joint efforts to effect change. His experience in working at a National level was that individual carers don't have a strong voice, but collectively are heard. The more we form alliances and coalitions for advocacy. the better we can achieve good outcomes for carers and for mental health.

We at ARAFEMI believe that supporting carers is essential. Please keep your voices loud.

## Mental Health Carers need support

Scrapping the \$1600 annual bonuses paid to Australia's carers will hurt not only carers, but many mental health consumers, the Mental Health Council of Australia (MHCA) said today.

There are reports that the Rudd Government is going to axe the \$1600 Carer Bonus and replace it with a \$500 higher utilities allowance.

The loss of the \$1100 that has been part of the carers allowance for the last 4 years will create greater financial stress on carers and consumers.

Carers need this small payment to help with medication, food, transport and accessing the services many people take for granted. The utilities allowance cannot substitute for what the carer bonus can buy.

The suggestion that the Carer Bonus is pork-barrelling fails to acknowledge the role of this vital financial supplement in assisting thousands of struggling carers and their loved ones.

Mental health carers are vital to the health and well being of many people with a mental illness. They are often the backbone of care plans and ongoing support, as well as being responsible for accessing appropriate services. The importance of their role cannot be overstated.

The MHCA is hoping that Minister Jenny Macklin will reconsider this proposed cut once she has consulted with mental health and other carers, and has a first-hand understanding of the increased hardship and suffering removal of this bonus will cause.

The MHCA urges the Rudd Government to take account of how this proposed cut will impact on vulnerable Australians.

## ARAFEMI FAMILY EDUCATION PROGRAM

*“Mental illness was completely new to me and I had to learn as much as I could whilst dealing with my sick son. Education and support was provided at a time of despair and bewilderment” Carer Consultation, 2007*

ARAFEMI is a statewide, non-profit organization, which aims to promote and improve the well being of people affected by mental illness, and to better inform the community about the needs of carers of people with a mental illness.

ARAFEMI's Family Education program aims to empower family, friends & carers of people with mental illness to:

- Improve carer coping, knowledge & management skills
- Enhance carers wellbeing, resilience & relationships
- Enhance relationships between carers and mental health services
- Improve consumer mental health through supporting families and carers
- Share & validate the lived experience of carers
- Provide specific education & support to assist in the role of caring

All of our training follows the Carer Lifecourse Framework, which maps supports across a continuum of caring and recovery. This model allows us to plan supports for carers from early identification (something is wrong) through to ongoing management and coping.

The ARAFEMI Family Education program is open to family members, friends and carers of people with a mental illness and any other interested people.

ARAFEMI provides regular courses and workshops throughout the year at our ARAFEMI head office in Hawthorn. We also deliver education to community and carer groups' throughout Victoria. **To find out more about booking a course for your group or service or to register for our Family Education Program please telephone our CARERS Helpline on (03) 9810 9314.**

WORKSHOPS	DATE	LOCATION
<b>Carers Coping Skills</b>	Monday 25 February 9.30am-3.30pm	Hawthorn
<b>Compassion Fatigue Wayne Lynch, Centre for Grief Education</b>	Saturday 19 April 10am-1.00pm	Hawthorn
<b>Recovery – the carers journey</b>	Saturday 17 May 2008 9.30am-3.30am	Hawthorn
<b>Siblings Forum</b>	Thursday 19 June 7.30pm-9.30pm	Venue to be confirmed
<b>Carers Coping Skills</b>	Saturday 9 August 9.30am-3.30pm	Hawthorn
<b>Recovery – the carers journey</b>	Thursday 18 September TBA	Hawthorn
<b>Carers week workshop: Grief &amp; loss Garrett O'Dowd</b>	Saturday 18 October 10am-1pm	Hawthorn
<b>Carers Coping skills</b>	Wednesday 19 November TBA	Hawthorn

**Education and resources**  
**Professional Development**



**ARAFEMI aims to be a leader in support and recovery for consumers, carers and their families**

ARAFEMI has developed a number of short courses and professional development workshops for service providers. Training focuses on the lived experience of carers of people with mental illness and how services can respond to supporting carers and families using a Carer Life Course Framework Approach.

Our workshops are designed to assist workers and organisations to understand the lived experience of carers and explore barriers to carer sensitive practice by bringing together stories and research about carers. Participants are assisted to utilise a service framework approach based on carer / family need to identify service gaps and look for opportunities to build in carer support within their own organisation and practice in a practical and sustainable way.

Our programs are a great starting place for Program Managers and staff who want to develop service and staff capacity to respond to carers and families. Training is also suitable for staff to explore the needs of carers and how to better respond to carers during assessment, service delivery and exit planning.

\*Professional training can be supported by our carer specific training in: media and public speaking, advocacy and support group convening.

Programs can be tailored to meet your specific needs and we can offer on-going consultation to support implementation of carer – peer support models and / or promote organisational change.

Workshops are scheduled throughout the year in our fantastic ARAFEMI training rooms or our skilled carer trainers can come to you. Workshops can be delivered at rural or metropolitan locations on request. All of our training is delivered at cost.

For more information contact our Education Officer 9810 9300 or download our education brochure and registration form from our website [www.arafemi.org.au](http://www.arafemi.org.au)

**2008 Professional Development Calendar**

**WSFSP1 The lived experience of carers – a Carer Life Course Framework approach**

Develop an understanding of a continuum model for caring and recovery to develop a service map of interventions and supports that match carer need.

*1-5 pm April 23rd 2008 or or August 13th Cost \$45.00 includes afternoon tea*

**WSFSP2 Walking the line with carers and consumers – Privacy and Confidentiality**

Explore carers experience of information sharing, develop greater understanding of legislation and acts and explore ways in which services can better support understanding of privacy and confidentiality and support information sharing for recovery.

*1-5 pm Thursday Nov 27th Cost: \$38.00 includes afternoon tea*

**WSFSP3 Supporting carer participation**

As a lead mental health carer agency, ARAFEMI has a history of supporting services to develop mechanisms for greater carer representation and peer support. This workshop aims to explore current models, build on service mapping and explore opportunities and needs for greater carer involvement. *1-5 pm July 17th 2008 or August 23rd Cost \$45.00 includes afternoon tea*

**ALL COURSES ARE HELD AT THE ARAFEMI HEAD OFFICE 270 AUBURN ROAD HAWTHORN 3122**

<b>NAME:</b>	
<b>ORGANISATION:</b>	
<b>ADDRESS:</b>	
<b>P/CODE:</b>	
<b>CONTACT PHONE:</b>	
<b>EMAIL:</b>	
<b>TOTAL COST:</b>	
<b>PAYMENT METHOD</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> Cheque (bank/personal) <input type="checkbox"/> Money Order <input type="checkbox"/> Credit Card <input type="checkbox"/> Master Card <input type="checkbox"/> Visa Card Number _____ / _____ / _____ / _____ Expiry Date _____ / _____ Name on Card _____ Signature of authorising card holder _____

## Of Noise and Silence: Finding Sanctuary in a Frenetic World

By James Kelso ARAFEMI Consumer Consultant

What a busy world it is we live in these days. Work is busy, city is busy, home is busy – anywhere we go, we seem to find ‘busyness’.

And yet, are we any happier because of this ‘busyness’? No. If anything, we are less happy, more frenetic, more stressed, more time-poor and more nervous and anxious.

We don’t seem to realise it, but we, as a western-living humanity, have created this dilemma for ourselves. And yet our solution to it seems to display a remarkable amount of false logic.

We think our ‘snail mail’, personal visits, letter writing and the ‘human touch’ take too long, so we devise ways to speed the process up, usually through the use of technology. Now we have emails, the internet, telephone calls, fax machines, ‘facebook’, online chat-rooms, even online ‘dating’. Whilst this technology is great for a while, has anyone ever, in the long term, become ‘less stressed’ because of technology? No. Technology allows us to do *more, quicker, faster, in greater numbers and volumes* of our intended communication or messages.

So our problem is that we may be able to communicate more quickly, but we ‘make up for it’ by producing more content to be communicated, and usually do this in a more impersonal, distant tone, for which any number of consequential technological gimmicks cannot properly compensate. And so. We are left with, yes, a problem of ‘societal’ mental health.

The book that inspired me to write this piece was called ‘Finding Sanctuary: Monastic Steps for Everyday Life’. I am not trying to ‘push a religious trolley’ here, but I think that everyone can gain from the insights offered, whether religious or not.

It suggests self-control, simplicity, calmness, forethought and balance in an approach to life. Quite simply, it recommends an approach to life that is *thought about* as much as it is *impulsively acted upon*.

That is another problem in modern society, that of a global phenomenon of ‘impulsivity’, ‘reward’ and ‘consumerism’. All of these characteristics are encouraged by the media and corporate structure, and really, supported by the economic and governmental framework in which we exist also. ‘Give in to yourself’, ‘Resistance is useless’, ‘Because - you’re worth it’. These are all slogans of our age. And it is remarkable how many of us live by them.

It may be seemingly impossible to remove oneself from the consumer society, because unless we become self-sufficient, and hence really isolate ourselves from most of our fellow human beings, this is not achievable. It is notable, however,

that for a large part, this is what members of the monastic religious community do, and deliberately so. I think that given our hectic paced lives, the current public interest in the monastic life is not surprising, as people seek spiritual peace just as much or more than ‘never content’ financial gain.

All people do not even benefit from the consumer society. Some are obviously disadvantaged. The poor, for example, must try enormously hard just to ‘make ends meet’, let alone ‘get ahead’ in life. To say that the unemployed, the retired or those working less must therefore lead a slow-paced life is an uninformed myth. And yet the antidote to this presented to us from all quarters is not to change our style of life, but merely to increase its intensity even more, to ‘catch up’.

There are simple things that we can all do, whether driven to the monastic life or not. Of course, the ‘monastic life’ is only one option offered for all us ‘busy people’, and the book referenced in this article does not try and make everyone a convert anyway. What it does say, along the TV programmes which accompany it (which some of us may be aware), is that everyone can learn from its lessons and teachings, without needing to follow the monastic life ‘chapter and verse’.<sup>1</sup>

Special parts of the home can be set up for contemplation times. Meditation, or deep relaxation, can be of help. Mindfulness and simple awareness practice can be of benefit. We can use works of art, poetry, flame or even the simple ticking of a clock in silence to draw our attention inwards, focus, and then outwards again. Natural features, or gardens can be of great benefit. Watch *beauty* subconsciously transform us. We can suddenly become *aware* of our existence and our surroundings, instead of just madly rushing through life - working, talking, socialising, administrating, computer using, sleeping - only to rush back to it, day after day, month after month.

We must stop for a moment. We need to look at ourselves, and our lives, and really *ask* ourselves whether we are going in the direction we want to be going. Will our efforts deliver us the bounty we so desire? And if it is so good, why hasn’t it been delivered to us already? When are we going to say ‘we have made it?’ Have we a time-frame? How can we *know* that ‘tomorrow will come’?

One solution, I think, is to set up a routine of contemplation, meditation and awareness in our lives, instead of constantly chasing ever-moving chimerical dreams.

As the Buddha said, when asked, ‘Are you a God or a Man?’, he replied ... ‘I am awake’.

**Reference:** Jamison, Abbot Christopher, *Finding Sanctuary: Monastic Steps for Everyday Life*, (Phoenix: London) 2006. Available at ABC shops

### Suggested Reading

Feldman, Christina, *Meditation*, (Thorsons: London) 2001  
Lebell, Sharon, *The Art of Living – Epictetus – The Classical Manual on Virtue, Happiness and Effectiveness*, (HarperSanFrancisco) 1995  
Baggott, Andy, *Living the Zen Arts*, (Octopus: London) 2005  
Kornfield, Jack, *Buddha’s Little Instruction Book* (Rider: London) 1999

<sup>1</sup> No pun intended

## INTRODUCING OUR NEW RESPITE PROGRAM

ARAFEMI has a proud reputation of working with families and carers to support the ongoing journey of caring. Our new Eastern respite program allows us to showcase our unique service qualities by combining our expertise in supporting families and carers with our specialist mental health skills to deliver high quality tailored respite packages.

So how have we used our expertise? In consultation with carers and consumers we identified that our program had to meet the following needs:

- Had to involve families, carers and the consumer in planning.
- Had to be available and flexible to individual needs
- Had to have specialist mental health workers
- Had to be available after hours and weekends
- Had to ensure that services were based on the principles of hope and recovery
- Had to be based in the community and also provide an accommodation option.

With these needs in mind we have created a flexible respite options program that employs only skilled mental health workers to deliver recreation, education, home based outreach and accommodation based respite.

Our respite services will operate on a 24hour / 7 day a week basis - a first in the East! This is important in allowing access to emergency and planned respite and ensuring that families and carers get the break they need—when they need it. **You decide how much support and how it is delivered.**

### **ON THE 28TH MARCH 2008 WE WILL BE LAUNCHING THE FOLLOWING SERVICES.**

#### **More support for carers and families:**

Taking time out is never easy but our experience is that spending time with other carers and getting specific and understanding supports is of great value. Our range of carer specific respite includes:

- Planned or emergency respite accommodation for carers
- A range of carer education and support packages
- Carer respite days—take time out with other carers in a range of fun activities.

Families and carers may choose to get additional help through our home-based support or outreach services to ensure that their respite time is stress free.

#### **Welcome to Banyan House**

'Banyan House' - Our respite house has a beautiful fig tree and prickly pear in the garden. Following on from the fig theme (and even the prickly pear is sometimes called Indian Fig), there is a variety of fig tree called Banyan. In Hindu mythology, it is a divine wish-granting tree, and also represents expansion due to its unique branching. We hope our house allows carers and consumers to have their respite wishes fulfilled as a life step towards greater growth and expansion.



Our new ARAFEMI Respite House provides a unique home like environment with a flexible range of supports. We offer:

- A choice of 24 hour or outreach support
- Planned and emergency Respite
- Carer Respite

#### **Outreach Respite Support**

Our specialist mental health workers can deliver a range of planned or emergency respite supports. All of our services offer:

- High quality support for people with a mental illness - including help with day to day living, recreation and leisure activities
- Planned and emergency home-based outreach support with a one to one mental health support worker
- Support to establish a respite relationship and continuity of care

So whether its someone to drop by each day and lend a helping hand while you take a break or you would like more formal respite activities—our workers can help you.

#### **Day Recreation and Camps**

ARAFEMI has been successfully delivering a range of recreation activities to people with psychiatric disabilities for over 10 years. These activities are led by an experienced recreation consultant and supported by our skilled mental health outreach workers.

Recreation is an important part of our recovery approach. Activities allow consumers and workers to collaboratively put into practice individual respite plans and increase opportunity for building confidence and being out in the community. Activities range from ½ day to day activities and 3–4 day camps.

**For a copy of our latest ARAFEMI Respite Calendar or to enquire about respite please call (9810 9300).**

## What's New

### SANE SIGNPOSTS TO MENTAL ILLNESS

SANE Australia takes a fresh approach to helping people affected by mental illness, with the launch of an innovative national advertising campaign, 'Signs'.

The three-year campaign, which began earlier this month, spans radio, television, print and the Internet – to help people understand the early signs of mental illness and highlight the importance of taking action so those affected can get the help they need.

The national campaign features everyday street signs and billboards replaced with titles such as 'depression', 'anxiety' and 'mood swings' to represent how mental illness is a part of everyday life for many people – and the importance of identifying possible signs.

SANE Australia Executive Director Barbara Hocking says people can visit SANE's website or call the SANE freecall Helpline to get more information about the signs of mental illness as well as advice from trained advisors about getting treatment and support.

'Friends and family are often the first people to notice changes in behaviour or thinking that can be early signs of mental illness. SANE encourages people to act on their concerns as soon as possible and seek clear information and advice,' Ms Hocking said.

'We know that the earlier people receive help the better the outcomes and the fewer disruptions there will be to study, work and family. About 20 per cent of Australians will experience a mental illness at some stage of their lives and most will develop it between the ages of 15 and 24, so it's vital to respond quickly to early signs.'

Family carer Jo Buchanan has seen many changes in the mental health sector and says SANE Australia's campaign gives much needed support.

'When my sister first showed signs of schizophrenia, I was frightened and confused. I had no idea what was happening as I had to deal with it alone. When it happened again with my nephew, I was able to recognise the symptoms, which enabled me to seek help from the right people immediately,' Jo said.

'Campaigns like this are very important; they encourage you to follow up concerns and help you to realise there is hope and assistance out there, for both you and your family.'

The campaign was developed for SANE Australia by advertising agency Commotion, with the commercial directed by David Jagoda, renowned for his work on high-profile campaigns for Nokia, Ikea and MTV among others.

F a c t s   a b o u t   m e n t a l   i l l n e s s

- Mental illness is real and treatable
- Anxiety disorders and depression are the most common mental illnesses, affecting 18% of Australians
- About 3% of people will be affected by bipolar disorder or schizophrenia at some stage in their lives
- Early signs of mental illness include changes in the way someone feels, thinks or behaves that are out of character for that person for example, insomnia, mood swings, withdrawal from people or situations, strange thoughts and constant worry
- SANE Australia has a range of resources to help recognize the signs of mental illness, including the 'When sadness won't go away' and 'Something is not quite right' pamphlets
- SANE Guides offer useful information and advice on a range of issues, such as depression, anxiety and schizophrenia.

[www.sane.org](http://www.sane.org)

## *Family Relationships Service for Carers*

Is a statewide service based at Eastern Access  
Community Health 46 Warrandyte Road  
Ringwood, 3134

**Email :** [frsc@each.com.au](mailto:frsc@each.com.au)

**Phone:** 1300 303 346

## **St.Vincents Information for Acute In-Patients**

Caring for someone with a mental illness can be confusing and distressing. Take the opportunity meet with staff and similar others to gain a better understanding of what it's all about.

**Bookings essential** Amber 9882 9299 or  
0417 592 154 St. Vincent's Mental Health 46  
Nicholson Street Fitzroy

State Trustees in partnership with Arts Access Victoria is calling for entries to **'connected08'**.



**'connected08'** is an art prize open to Victorian artists with a disability or with an experience of mental illness.

Artists from community projects, supported residential accommodation, workplace employment and training initiatives, as well as independent artists and studios are encouraged to submit their work to be considered for the exhibition.

**22 July - 3 August 2008**

**Black Box, The Victorian Arts Centre**

**Email:** [connected08@artsaccess.com.au](mailto:connected08@artsaccess.com.au)

## DISCUSSION @ARAFEMI

### DISCUSSION ON SUPPORT GROUPS

We took the following two questions to a panel of carers, consumers and professionals to explore different views on support groups and what they can provide as part of recovery. We also invite you to read the responses and send us your thoughts, as part of an ongoing dialogue around this important issue.

1. **Are support groups an '80's thing?**
2. **Where to from here..**

#### Panel Member 1: Jen is a support group attendee

ARAFEMI'S Bipolar Support Group [ 3rd Wed of-the-month] is a mutual support group. Specific goals create an atmosphere of safety and acceptance for all; sharing and listening in confidentiality. In essence, despite an abundance of information available through the internet, texts, helplines etc., and possibly greater access to the medical profession via GP's, psychiatrists, psychologists, other health professionals AND alternative therapies, connections made within the dynamics of the group cannot be duplicated even within supportive family/friends or professional networks.

It truly is "that" tangible feeling that someone really "understands" you and essentially, IMPORTANTLY, you are not completely alone. That's the SECRET why support groups are equally relevant today, despite our fast-paced, information overload society, and must be nurtured into the future. Members definitely having 'ownership' in the group group/direction and finding the balance between guest speakers on occasion and open discussion on preferred generated topics has helped to keep our focus in ever changing times. The 'transient' nature of the group with past members attending for a block of time to draw strength and information and moving on has changed as members return on-goingly as more meaningful connections are being made. There will always be a need for like-minded 'souls' to draw strength from each other, -it's the "human condition".

#### Panel Member 2: Frances is a worker

I think that when groups wax and wane - a big response is to feel that groups don't work or that quicker and more immediate interventions will be better. These may, certainly in audience size, give the impression of greater success, give greater validation to the worker and be easier to evaluate in terms of outcomes.

Please email any feedback or any ideas for further panel topics to [frances.sanders@arafemi.org.au](mailto:frances.sanders@arafemi.org.au)

However, it is important to note that carer and consumer research shows that both the demand for support groups and the experience of support groups remains positive. The research also indicates that carers and consumers have different needs in attending groups (ie. support Vs knowledge). Many people identify that support groups offer an essential means of validation and support at a time of great isolation. Therefore size or attendance rates may not be a good measure of group value.

It may be useful to look across fields and learn from other support groups which operate in the community. How many new mothers groups survive beyond the initial period where there is a vast need for support, companionship and knowledge? This does not mean that the time spent in the group was worthless—To throw the baby out with the bathwater would undermine how much value those few attendees may get from walking the walk with others.

Groups may not be for everyone, but without them we would lose a highly human component of our wide and varied mental health system.

#### Panel Member 3: Trish, Convenor Bridging the Gaps-Southern

In its distilled form, mutual support and self help is a meeting together of those who have like experiences but are informed by their own unique life journeys. It expresses understanding of the emotional rollercoaster of mental illness in the family. It is a forum for honesty as well as understanding. Its hallmark is courage; being open for others despite owning grief. It is a group of carers who have the opportunity to become increasingly resourceful in a supportive environment. It is a safe place where feelings are shared, where confidentiality is an imperative. It is a positive environment where capacities build and problem solving develops.

Mutual support and self help groups have the hallmark of respect, fairness and shared goals. Interestingly, in mutual support and self help, carers not only attend to gain but are then prepared to give of themselves as their journeys unfold in order that others may benefit. This creates balance in the group where mental health education is ongoing, where self care is acknowledged as essential and positive caring relationships are formed.

Letters to the Editor



## Letter to the Editor

Years ago I concluded my father had little idea how I had suffered during my many mental illness episodes. I felt he showed me little compassion and emotional support.

I wrote him a letter saying so.

When we next met he opened the conversation asking, "In what way have you suffered that I haven't?"

I was flabbergasted. Slowly, anger brewed inside me and I just about exploded yelling, "How about 11 admissions to psychiatric wards?" That helped him understand. And our relationship strengthened from then on.

I believe ARAFEMI could be more proactive in increasing the understanding between the carer of a mental illness sufferer and the person they care for.

Two ideas occur to me. One suggestion involves a support group situation where say eight carers and the person they care for, attend to exchange experiences and ideas. In this setting the consumer would need to be a little outgoing.

My second suggestion is that ARAFEMI regularly runs a social function where carers and consumers mix. It might be structured to encourage people to move around the room and share their comparative experiences of mental illness widely and make new friends.

Learning how other people live broadens one's perspective.

- Doug Western

## Community Award for Writings on Mental Health

*"my experiences since when explaining details of my life to people in rational, calm and understandable ways suggests most people do not automatically stigmatise the mentally ill."*

In November 2007, regular ARAFEMI news contributor, Doug Western won the Knox Pride Communication Award.

Doug is pictured here at the award ceremony with Knox City Council Mayor, Cr Jim Penna,

When interviewed for the ARAFEMI News, Doug said, "My award was based on communication ability displayed during environmental and other social improvement projects.

"Leading the Knox Environment Society and writing and publishing the book *Knox Nature Trail* helped win the award. Significantly, my audio visual presentation, *Straight from My Swamp* and contributions to ARAFEMI News did not harm my application. I say this because both give extensive details about my mental illness experiences. Thus the judging panel did not stigmatise me.

Doug has recently upgraded his web site [www.taxistories.com.au](http://www.taxistories.com.au) to reflect his public speaking program for 2008. Check it out. Your community group might like to book him. Or just read one of his funny taxi stories.

Doug's latest project is very adventurous. He is making a short film about his life to enter the 2007/2008 Hope Awards. We at ARAFEMI, wish him well.

## HELP WANTED



ARAFEMI provides support services for people living in the community, and we have several houses that need the odd job done. We need a volunteer handy person to give us a hand with light housing repairs and or simple gardening in Boroondara and Whitehorse. Help would be needed 1-2 times a month at the most. All volunteers will be provided with support and will undergo a police check and references.

If you can help please phone Hugo Steinbergs Program Manager - Home Based & Intensive Outreach ARAFEMI 270 Auburn Rd Hawthorn 3122 Ph. 9810 9300 Mobile: 0419 286 788

**Contributions to ARAFEMI NEWS** The opinions expressed in ARAFEMI NEWS are those of the contributors and not necessarily those of the whole membership.



## RESEARCH AND NEWS



### Volunteers Wanted!



The Mental Health Research Institute of Victoria and La Trobe University are seeking **volunteers aged 16-40 years** who have a current diagnosis of **Schizophrenia / Schizoaffective Disorder** to participate in a study looking at important factors which may contribute to the formation of illness-related beliefs in mental illness.

Participation will be over two sessions. Session one will involve a short interview and brief questionnaires. Session two is optional and will involve computer-based activities.

Contact Rachel Mountjoy on (03) 8344 1873 or 0414 205 339 or [rlmountjoy@students.latrobe.edu.au](mailto:rlmountjoy@students.latrobe.edu.au) for more information.

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# Grief and Loss

Presented by Garrett O'Dowd, Counselling Psychologist from Mercy Western Grief Services

## A Forum for Mental Health Carers and Families

CARER PARTICIPATION ADULT MENTAL HEALTH PROGRAM

This is a forum open to all Carers and family members of people with a mental illness and all mental health workers

**DATE: Wed 9th April 2008 TIME: 6.30 – 9.00pm** 6.30 – 7pm Supper 7 – 9pm Presentation **VENUE: Waratah Room, Whitehorse Centre, 379-397 Whitehorse Road, Nunawading**

**Supper will be provided**

**Registration by RSVP only to Jessica Taylor Fri 4th April on 9843 5800**

**email [jessica.taylor@easternhealth.org.au](mailto:jessica.taylor@easternhealth.org.au)**

**SUPPORTED BY EASTERN HEALTH AND UNTING CARE COMMUNITY OPTIONS**

## **CARERS NEEDED - research on the Mental Health Review Board**

Are you a carer and interested in talking about your experiences of hearings at the Mental Health Review Board? You can contribute to current research to improve peoples' experiences of the board. For further details or if you would like to participate, please contact Alikki on email [A.vernon@latrobe.edu.au](mailto:A.vernon@latrobe.edu.au) or phone on 0434 585 416. The research is being conducted through the University of Sydney. A report will be completed by the end of 2008 to be received by the MHRVB.

## ARAFEMI CARER INVOLVEMENT PROJECT

ARAFEMI is currently conducting a project to increase opportunities for peer support and involvement for carers.

We welcome Kylie Cassar as our Project Worker, to help us explore different models for offering peer support. Kylie, has been busily working since December on a comprehensive review of peer support literature, also mapping current peer support programs in Victoria. This will help us to gather expertise and evidence on how peer or mentoring programs can be developed. We look forward to sharing this review with the broader field and encouraging good practice around the development of carer peer support programs.

In the second phase of the project, Kylie will be working with services across the Northern region to develop a peer support program that operates across clinical, non-clinical, community and PDRSS services. This is an exciting partnership with the Northern Mental Health Alliance group and shares as its members, the Northern Area Mental Health Service, Department of Human Services, NEAMI, MIND, Mental Illness Fellowship (MIF), Wishin and ARAFEMI. The project reference group will also draw on the expertise of the Northern Carer Respite Centre and ADEC. This is an exciting opportunity for services to work together to better carer peer supports and we look forward to sharing outcomes with you as we design and pilot the project throughout 2008.

For further enquiries about the project please contact Kylie on 9810 9300.

## New website for ARAFEMI

ARAFEMI is gearing up for a launch of its new website in April. The website will have a number of new features as well as simplifying the way people can access help through clearer information pathways to our range of carer and mental health services.

The new website will also feature an on-line shop, research page, volunteer and employment pages and an on-line news, carers chat room and message board.

Thank you to all of those who gave feedback which made the new website possible. We think it looks great, we hope you do too.

## Compassion Fatigue

**Guest Speaker : Wayne Lynch**  
**Centre for Grief Education**

10am-1.00pm  
Saturday 19 April

Venue: ARAFEMI  
270 Auburn Road, Hawthorn 3121

Bookings: 9810 9300

## 'Parenting' as a grandparent

Speaker and Discussion

7-9pm Tuesday 8<sup>th</sup> April 2008

- How do I talk to the children about their parent's mental illness?
- How do I balance my adult child's need for independence versus their children's need for safety and care?
- Where do I go for help if the grandchildren have special developmental needs?
- What about when the children are adolescents and there is the generation gap?
- How do I help and trust my son or daughter to be good parents?
- How can I help foster the bond between my son/daughter and their children?
- What about when the children play me off with their parent?

Drummond Street Relationship Centre

195 Drummond St, Carlton

(between Pelham and Grattan Sts)

**No cost**

Treats will be provided, so please let us know if you are coming by calling Georgie or Kristan on **Ph: 96636733**

## ARAFEMI SUPPORT GROUP MEETINGS

If you have not previously attended a meeting, please telephone to confirm details before attending

### SUPPORT GROUP FOR FAMILIES & CARERS OF PEOPLE WITH A BORDERLINE PERSONALITY DISORDER

At Terra Firma, 423 Station Street, Box Hill  
(Melways 47 C12)

Phone ARAFEMI Carer Helpline on (03) 9810 9314  
for more information

or if you are attending the group for the first time  
**FIRST WEDNESDAY EVENING** of each month

From 7.00pm to 9.00pm  
**2 April 7 May 4 June**

### BRIDGING THE GAPS—SOUTHERN

Education & Information sessions for Parents  
& Family Carers of Young People

At Family Life,

197 Bluff Road, Sandringham (Melway ref: 76,K12)

Phone: (03) 9810 9314

**FIRST THURSDAY EVENING** of each month  
from 7.45—9.30pm

**3 April 8 May 5 June**

### WANTED:



### Telephone Helpline Workers

Helpline Workers participate in the direct provision of the Information, Support and Referral Service (Telephone, Email, Face-to-face and Message board) to Carers and families across Victoria. The Helpline operates from Monday to Friday between 9.00am & 5.00pm. A commitment of a weekly four-hour shift for a minimum period of 12 months is required. Volunteers participate in the Volunteer Induction Training, observations and on – the job-supervised calls. Ongoing support, external group supervision and debriefing are provided. Please contact our Helpline immediately for our next intake: 9810 9314

### ARE YOU A CARER IN THE NORTH? WOULD YOU LIKE TO HELP OTHER CARERS?

We need carers to help run support groups throughout the North and in Whittlesea. Full training and support is offered. If you are interested please contact Elise on 9810 9300.

### BENDIGO RELATIVES AND FRIENDS Support Group

8 Olinda Street, Bendigo

Phone (03) 5446 1944 for information

**First Friday Afternoon of each month**  
from 1pm to 3pm

**4 April 2 May 6 June**

### ARAFEMI RELATIVES & FRIENDS Support Group

An open group for families and friends

At ARAFEMI Ground Floor, 270 Auburn Rd, Hawthorn

Phone: (03) 9810 9314

**FOURTH THURSDAY EVENING** of each month  
From 7.30pm to 9.30pm

**Newcomers** are asked to arrive at 6.30pm  
to meet with facilitators

**27 March 24 April 29 May 26 June**

### BRIDGING THE GAPS— EASTERN

Education & Information sessions for Parents  
& Family Carers of Young People

**Please note new meeting venue for 2008**

At ARAFEMI, Ground Floor, 270 Auburn Road  
Hawthorn (Melway 45 F12)

Phone: (03) 9810 9314

**SECOND THURSDAY EVENING** of each month  
from 7.45—9.30pm

**13 March 10 April 8 May 12 June**

### ARAFEMI BIPOLAR SUPPORT GROUP

for people experiencing bipolar disorder

At ARAFEMI Ground Floor, 270 Auburn Rd, Hawthorn

Phone: (03) 9810 9314

for more information

or if you are attending the group for the first time  
**THIRD WEDNESDAY EVENING** of each month

From 7.30pm to 9.30pm

**19 March 16 April 21 May 18 June**

### Subscription to ARAFEMI NEWS

is included in the annual membership fee: \$20.00 for waged persons, \$10.00 for unwaged persons and \$30.00 for organizations.

If you would like more information about membership of ARAFEMI, please contact our office.

### ARAFEMI Victoria

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