



Carer Advocacy at ARAFEMI

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Since 2009 ARAFEMI has provided an individual state-wide independent carer advocacy program. It was developed after direct consultation with mental health carers. They identified a need to provide a stronger and more responsive advocacy program for carers.

A key finding of the consultation was "...even carers who are trained, experienced and skilled in advocacy felt there were times when they could advocate and times when it was just too hard ..." (Sanders, 2007).

The role of Carer Advocate is an important one within the mental health framework as they can often be an important communications agent for both carers and consumers alike. The Carer Advocate offers support for carers seeking resolutions to any issues that are of concern to them, using their skills and expertise to represent carers' interests and assisting them to voice their perspective more effectively.



Photographed by: D. Sharon Pruitt

At ARAFEMI, Michelle Swann has been the carer advocate since its inception. Michelle finds supporting carers to cut through the quagmire of the mental health system both challenging and rewarding.

One of the most important interventions of the program so far has been Michelle's

attendance at family meetings, where having a witness in the room often improves communication between carers and the mental health service.

A carer noted that Michelle's warmth and understanding 'further opened up useful dialogue'.

Michelle looks at what is required from a meeting, and she empowers carers to speak for themselves, taking on an advocacy and/or mediatory role where

needed. Carers frequently comment that family meetings where Michelle is present, are the best they have attended.

The Carer Advocate in a Snapshot

The ARAFEMI Carer Advocate provides a service neutral casework advocacy model that has supported over 126 Victorian carers with over 900 contacts and 438 direct hours of advocacy.



Executive Director's Report

We have had an extremely busy start to the year at ARAFEMI and it is hard to believe that winter is upon us (what happened to summer?). Of significant note in this period was our farewell to Robyn Keleher who retired after 24 years of wonderful service to ARAFEMI.

Robyn first joined ARAFEMI in 1987 as a project worker. Since that time, Robyn has held a variety of roles and has been a vital part of our ARAFEMI team providing a caring and constant force for consumers and their family carers. Her dedication, knowledge and passion for making a difference is something that strikes all of us in our daily work. In many ways, Robyn has helped shape ARAFEMI's values and she has modelled them every day of her working life. Robyn will be sorely missed. The ARAFEMI family wishes her all the very best in her retirement and hope she enjoys her progress to spending more time looking at beaches.



Robyn Keleher

We have also been actively engaged in evaluating the pilot of the Carer Advocate Program mentioned in the cover story. As the project has become established we have had an upsurge in referrals, both from carers and services who are seeking assistance to resolve more complex issues. In the next 6 months we will be directly approaching funding bodies, government and our members for vital funding and assistance to ensure this service is maintained for carers. We welcome your direct contact if you can support us in any way.

Wishing warm skies and wellness

Frances Sanders
Executive Director

The Carer Advocate model has been developed along a human rights/social justice framework, which recognises that whilst carer issues are the focus of the program, the consumer can be the most vulnerable person in the equation and all advocacy needs to be according to their best interests. If a request is made by a carer that is insensitive to the consumer's needs or situation, then the request will be modified or refused. Michelle prefers to work when both carer and consumers are on the same page and the consumer can be easily consulted.

Another important facet of the Carer Advocate model is its strengths-based approach, which acknowledges people's strengths, both in themselves and around them, and acknowledges the carers' own expertise. Carers often feel isolated, unsupported and alone in what they are going through.



**ARAFEMI Carer Advocate,
Michelle Swann**

Along with supportive counselling, Michelle encourages carers to cultivate many supportive relationships by advising mental health workers where additional carer support may be required. She also refers carers to other ARAFEMI services; including the Carer Support Helpline Counselling; Respite; Carer Education and ARAFEMI Support Groups; as well as reaching out to their existing social networks.

As Carer Advocate, Michelle has highlighted systemic issues for carers, such as lack of supported accommodation options for consumers and some services' inability to effectively support carers.

Since its inception, carers have been overwhelmingly receptive to the support offered by the Carer Advocate. '...before speaking with Michelle I was questioning myself...after Michelle I was empowered to continue with a very painful journey at that time'.



ARAFEMI In The Round

Outreach Services

We are saddened by the retirement of Outreach worker, Robyn Keleher after 24 years with ARAFEMI. This is an enormous loss to the organisation as it is rare nowadays to have someone so dedicated to both her clients and working in Mental Health. As mentioned in Frances' column, Robyn started working as a housing support worker during the time of deinstitutionalisation, and so has seen many changes in staff and services. She will be missed by all and we wish her well.

In Robyn's place we have recruited Justine Halfpenny, who has recently graduated having completed a double major in Bachelor of Occupational Therapy/Psychological Science.

Hugo Steinbergs

Program Manager – Outreach Services

Northern Office

The Northern office has been busy as usual. We recently attended an Alliance event with the North East region and other psychiatric disability rehabilitation and support (PDRS) services. This was aimed at both new and existing staff to demonstrate that outcomes are improved when clinical and community services work collaboratively. There were three case studies presented which remind us how important it is to always work alongside clinicians and carers and to use the community supports available.

Fiona Jensen

Team Leader – Northern Office

Family Services

We welcome a new member to our respite team with the appointment of Sarah Bayley in the role of Senior Respite Worker. After a great start to 2011 with several sold out respite activities, we hope to offer even more exciting respite opportunities for the remainder of the year. Within this edition of ARAFEMI News you will also find the July-December 2011 Family Services Calendar. Be sure to replace your old calendar.

Helen Kane

Family Services Manager

New July-December 2011 Family Services Calendar Now Available

ARAFEMI Family Services Carers Education Calendar 2011 (July 1 – December 31 only)				
Workshops				
Date	Time	Topic	Details	
August Tues 16	7pm-10pm	Carers Coping Skills	This workshop aims to assist carers to explore issues relating to supporting someone with a mental health issue. Carers will develop self-care skills and feel more confident when communicating in difficult situations. The course also provides assistance with planning, treatment and recovery partners.	
August Tues 23	7pm-10pm	Future Planning	Planning for the future when caring for someone with mental health issues has individual challenges, as compared to caring for someone with a physical illness. The seminar will explore legal issues, wills, and various options to ensure your family member will be supported in the future.	
September Tues 6	10am-5pm	Engaging and supporting carers in the advocacy process (WORKERS ONLY)	Where does the carer fit within the mental health system? Navigating the mental health system can be challenging for carers. How can workers engage carers to feel more empowered for themselves, in order to protect their rights and to advocate the interests of the person they care for and their own interests.	
September Tues 20	7pm-10pm	Healthy Boundaries & Communication	One of the more difficult areas for carers of people with mental health conditions may be that of setting and maintaining limits and clearly defining personal boundaries. This workshop provides an opportunity to enhance these kinds of communication skills.	
October Sat 15	10am-1pm	Advocacy for Carers On the path to self-advocacy	Learn how to champion the best interests of you, loved one and yourself! This workshop assists carers to navigate the mental health system and effectively communicate his or her own interests, desires, needs and rights.	
October Tues 25	7pm-10pm	Recovery and Hope	This workshop aims to assist families & carers of people with mental health issues to understand and support recovery. It allows personal experience and building skills to help carers maintain hope, explore strengths and feel more effective as a supporter of recovery.	
November Sat 19	10am-1pm	Healthy Boundaries & Communication	One of the more difficult areas for carers of people with mental health conditions may be that of setting and maintaining limits and clearly defining personal boundaries. This workshop provides an opportunity to enhance these kinds of communication skills.	
December Sat 3	10am-1pm	Recovery and Hope	This workshop aims to assist families & carers of people with mental health issues to understand and support recovery. It allows personal experience and building skills to help carers maintain hope, explore strengths and feel more effective as a supporter of recovery.	

Note: All seminars and workshops held at ARAFEMI cost \$5. Tea & coffee is provided. All seminars and events are held at ARAFEMI 270 Auburn Road Hawthorn. For bookings or more information regarding any workshop call the Carer Help Line on 1300 550 265, Arafemi on 9610 9300 or email volunteers@arafemi.org.au

Support Groups				
Day	Time	Activity	Details	
1st WEDNESDAY each month: Jul 6, Aug 3, Sep 7, Oct 5, Nov 2, Dec 7	7.30pm-9.30pm	Borderline personality disorder family carers group	Open support and information group for carers of people with a Borderline Personality Disorder.	
2nd THURSDAY each month: Jul 14, Aug 18, Sept 6, Oct 13, Nov 10, Dec 8	7.30pm-9.30pm	Bridging the Gaps - Eastern	Education, information and support for parents and family carers.	
3rd WEDNESDAY each month: Jul 20, Aug 17, Sept 21, Oct 19, Nov 16, Dec 21	7.30pm-9.30pm	Bipolar Consumer Support Group	Open support group for people experiencing bipolar disorder.	
1st THURSDAY every 2 months: Aug 4, Oct 6, Dec 1	7.30pm-9.30pm	Bipolar Carer Support Group	A bi-monthly group supporting carers of people with bipolar disorder.	
2nd WEDNESDAY each month: Jul 7, Sept 1, Nov 3	7.30pm-9.30pm	Bipolar Combined Carer and Consumer Support Group	A bi-monthly group supporting carers of people with bipolar disorder and people experiencing bipolar disorder.	
1st THURSDAY each month: Jul 13, Aug 16, Sept 14, Oct 13, Nov 9, Dec 14	7.00pm-9.00pm	Caring 4 Carers Group - High Street	Open support and information group for carers of someone with a mental illness.	
4th WEDNESDAY each month: Jul 27, Aug 24, Sept 20, Oct 26, Nov 23, Dec 20	12.30pm-2.30pm	Caring 4 Carers Group - Wood Street	Open support and information group for carers of someone with a mental illness.	
3rd WEDNESDAY each month: Jul 20, Aug 16, Sept 21, Oct 19, Nov 16, Dec 21	7.00pm-9.00pm	Northern Families 4 Carers of People with a Borderline Personality Disorder	Open support and information group for carers of people with a Borderline Personality Disorder.	
1st WEDNESDAY each month: Jul 6, Aug 3, Sept 7, Oct 5, Nov 2, Dec 7	7.00pm-9.00pm	Partners Group - Roanana	Open support and information for partners of someone with a mental illness.	

Note: There is no cost to attend a support group. To book a support group or for further information call the Carer Helpline 1300 550 265 or email volunteers@arafemi.org.au

ARAFEMI
270 Auburn Road Hawthorn, VIC 3122
PO Box 82 Hawthorn 3122
Carer Helpline 1300 550 265
T: (03) 9610 9300 F: (03) 9610 6891
www.arafemi.org.au

Inside this edition of ARAFEMI News you will find the new Family Services calendar. It includes dates for the Support Groups and all the dates for the Seminars and Workshops to be held for the second half of the year.

Be sure to keep it in a prominent place and stay informed!

ARAFEMI is Recruiting Volunteer Telephone Helpline Workers

Helpline workers provide telephone support, information and referrals to friends and family members of people with a mental illness. The helpline operates from Mon-Fri between 9-5pm.

If you are interested in volunteering, please contact the Helpline on **1300 550 265**.

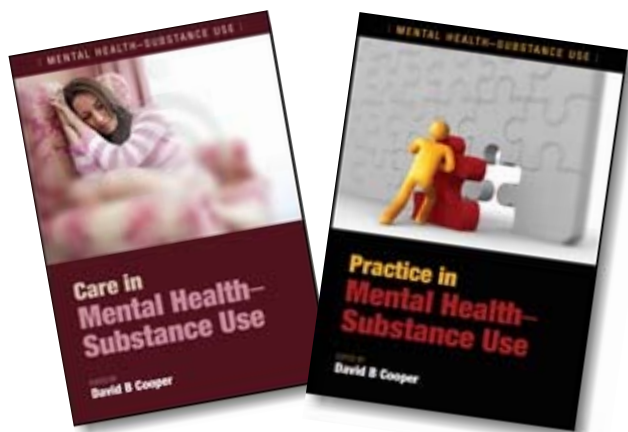
For more information and the full position description please visit:

<http://www.arafemi.org.au/get-involved/employment-at-arafemi.html>



In Brief

New books to be released in the *Mental Health – Substance Use* series



Book five and six in the Mental Health - Substance Use series were released in April. Created by Radcliffe Publishing, these books focus on the complex interrelation of mental health and substance abuse.

Book five, '*Care in Mental Health – Substance Use*', is primarily about caring for individuals and families who turn to professionals at a time when their lives are unmanageable alone, but is also concerned with the care that these professions extend to their own members.

Book six, '*Practices in Mental Health – Substance Use*', is the final book in the series and provides the basis of best practice for offering effective interventions to affected individuals and their families, exploring the effects of various substances, both controlled and proscribed, and the impact of substance use in schizophrenia.

For more info visit <http://www.radcliffe-oxford.com> and look up Mental Health.

Better access for whom?

Conducted by the Centre for Health Policy, Programs and Economics, the long awaited evaluation into the 'Mental Health Better Access Initiative', has shown that the scheme has increased access to mental health care for a number of Australians. However the Mental Health Council of Australia (MHCA) has claimed that the evaluation also reveals that many Australians are still missing out on care and services.

Key issues highlighted by MHCA include:

- That the young, men and those living in remote and rural communities have far less access to services than the broader population

- Uptake levels were 10% lower for individuals living in disadvantaged areas.
- That the evaluation was unable to gain data and thus provide information on people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds or Indigenous Australians.

For more information about the 'Better Access Initiative' go to the www.health.gov.au

Flexible Care Packages for mental health rolled out

The Minister for Mental Health and Ageing, Mark Butler, announced that implementation has begun on the Government's Flexible Care Packages for people with severe mental illnesses. Funding of \$58.5 million was allocated in the 2010-11 Budget for the Flexible Care Packages. They will assist clinical and case coordination services to better support people with severe mental illness in the community delivered through Medicare Locals.

Flexible Care Packages will allow Medicare Locals to purchase the services a person with a severe mental illness needs to keep them well in the community and out of hospital.

Extra \$5 billion needed for mental health

The Australian Medical Association has appealed to the federal government to provide an extra \$5 billion in funding to expand health and social services. Issues such as prevention, destigmatisation and community understanding have been listed as some of the key areas that need improvement and would benefit from extra funding.

For more info go to <http://ama.com.au>

Website launched for young carers in WA



Youth Minister Robyn McSweeney joined with Carers WA to launch a new website for young carers in WA. With over 40,000 carers in Western

Australia under the age of 26, this website offers them support by providing information and advice on looking after yourself, coping with school, the caring role and supports young carer can access.

To visit the website go to:

<http://www.youngcarerswa.asn.au>



Member Contributions

Journey with The Black Dog: A Reader's Response

By Graeme Wilson

It had long been my understanding that 'the black dog' was an expression coined by Winston Churchill as a metaphor to describe his recurring bouts of depression, but apparently I was wrong and it has a much older provenance. Nevertheless, as the instigator of such bombing raids as caused the total destruction of Dresden, it does not surprise me that he was constantly pursued by that unwanted hound!



I was interested to read that there are several different types of depression, but I presume that there must be some underlying commonality. In my own case, unbridled personal ambition was my downfall, and when it all fell in a heap as psychosis reared its ugly head, life seemed to have lost all its significance.

I would describe it as existential despair. What was the point of living? It was 'ME, ME, ME' all the time. The turn around came gradually, the first scarcely recognisable marker being my reluctant recognition that life as I had originally envisaged it was no longer achievable. This was followed by a heightened awareness, capable of almost infinite expansion, of those around me who were also 'doing it tough'—and often without complaint!

My life took a big step forward when one day I met Georgia Shields, our founding president, who invited me to attend a meeting with ARAFEMI of the [formerly named] Manic Depressive Mutual Support Group.

What a surprise to discover that I was not alone with my problems. Other people had remarkably similar symptoms, and even though our life stories differed, the mutual sharing was beneficial to all involved. That was over twenty years ago.

The black dog eventually lost interest in me, and moved out of my house. Instead, we now have a real, live black and white cat, 'Woody'. He is a Collingwood supporter, is very old, and sleeps all the time. So he is not much trouble.

Mother Earth

By Warwick Fisher



You wake up and there is Mother Earth
Gone is the darkness
Light streams into the trees
You can hear it as the wind blows
Sight and vision are a gift
Reaching out into this land, knowing that you
are alive
Awaken to this glory awaken to this splendour
Reach up and reach out
So let the sun shine
The wind be our friend
Water caresses our bodies
And the earth is our Mother
For it is in planting the seed
That we are all God's children.

ARAFEMI Membership

Become an ARAFEMI Member and you and your family can access the ARAFEMI library. Also receive the quarterly ARAFEMI Newsletter.

Cost: Wage earning	\$20.00
Non wage earning	\$10.00
Organisation	\$30.00

For more information call **(03) 9810 9300**



Member Contributions

Addiction Withdrawal: One Day at a Time

By Mark Toogood

You stand at the portal of a new existence hoping to achieve completely new behaviours and thought patterns, and the lure of the old is held at bay only by new found resolution. What I say will not be the ultimate panacea and should be taken only as an anecdote amongst the wealth of information available. However, if you are to fight addiction, it is paramount to control yourself. You cannot afford to be half-hearted; your total being should be involved. Once you have begun progressing towards a new life, only then can the amount of effort, but never vigilance, diminish.

Take pleasure and pride that you have taken the first step in realising change has to occur. You might be asking 'Will I ever be free?', and, 'What resources are available apart from resolve?'. Fortunately there are many and with careful research on your part, access to a wide variety of support is available.

You may be longing for total freedom but not seeing it as achievable. Take heart that you are in the most difficult part of withdrawal. Remember that the road to be travelled is measured by footfalls made only by yourself. Your willpower alone will not be enough to beat addiction, it has to be supplemented, and this is where effort on your part begins.

You may have already contacted support groups that use various steps to work towards freedom, for example the twelve steps or earnest prayer. I advocate the necessity of research to compliment the steps you have already taken. The steps are:

1. Research
2. Re-organise your behaviours accordingly; and
3. Replicate the first two steps.

"Now the reason the enlightened prince and the wise general conquer the enemy whenever they move and their achievements surpass those of ordinary men, is foreknowledge." (Sun Tzu, *The Art of War*).

Although written centuries ago, the wisdom of Tzu holds true; to conquer a foe, it is necessary to be intimately knowledgeable of its workings.

Acquire ammunition from a wide variety of sources, including listening to anecdotes from peers about what does and doesn't work, speaking with professionals, reading articles, or by attending support groups run by benevolent organisations. The final resource depends on your faith status, but personally I can vouch for its total efficacy.

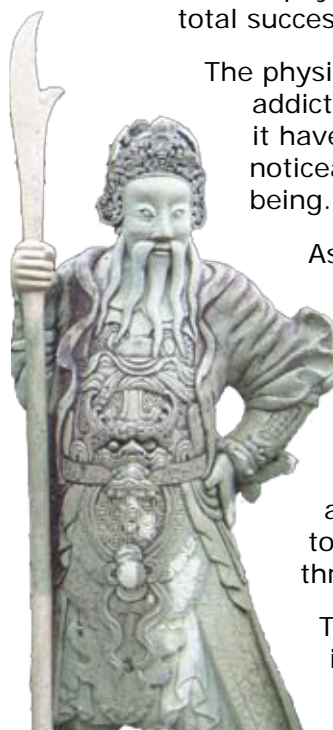
Using the concept of warfare, I have fought various physical and psychological addictions with total success.

The physicality of the martial stance against addiction means that your blows against it have a direct effect. This can produce noticeable results in your physical well-being.

As you are aware, at its deepest hold the addiction was, and may still be so heavy you feel it as a physical load. As the burden decreases, you feel the sensations lift and even memory and senses return to normal. I first noticed this in September 1985 when even the atmosphere surrounding me returned to the sensations I had last experienced three months previously.

Total freedom and reclamation of life is achievable. Never lose heart, and remember that endurance under privation produces strength and success follows.

I wish you well.



Have Something to Contribute?

ARAFEMI always welcomes member contributions for the Newsletter. If you would like to make a contribution please send it to Chandi via email, chandi.piefke@arafemi.org.au or by mail, PO BOX 83, Hawthorn VIC 3122.

We thank everyone that has contributed material for this edition.



From the Library



This is an extract from "Right a wrong. Where, when and how to complain in Victoria" by Victoria Legal Aid

Guide to making a complaint

If you feel you have been wronged and you want to make a complaint, it is important to work out exactly what you are unhappy about and how you would like the problem fixed.

Health

Whether you are a private or public patient there are a range of actions you can take if your health service provider has not cared for you satisfactorily, has not been respectful of your dignity or privacy, or has been negligent or unprofessional.

These health service providers include specialists, doctors, dentists, hospitals, public and private, physiotherapists, occupational therapists, social workers in a health setting, nurses and ambulances.

Always approach your health service provider first to discuss your concern. If you are still unhappy, there are different complaint agencies to contact depending on which service provider, or branch of the medical professional, is involved.

The Health Services Commissioner (HSC) can help. The HSC accepts complaints about a wide range of health, welfare and medical services. These include doctors and other medical practitioners, hospitals, public and private, occupational therapists, dentists, physiotherapists, optometrists, alternative therapists, nurses, chiropractors and anybody providing you with a health service.

Health Services Commissioner
30th floor, 570 Bourke St, Melbourne 3000
t: 8601 5200 or 1800 136 066
e: hsc@dhs.vic.gov.au
w: www.health.vic.gov.au/hsc

"Right a wrong. Where, when and how to complain in Victoria" is available from the ARAFEMI Library. Your ARAFEMI membership entitles you to borrow books from the ARAFEMI Library.

Staff Contribution

Momentary Happiness

Sometimes when I'm sitting
Alone in my house
By the window
Sunlight streaming in
And gentle music
Crooning in the background
I experience
Momentary happiness
An ephemeral state of bliss
Like grasping
A dandelion in the air
You can see it
Floating by
But catching it
Is harder
But if you do
You have done well
Because when you do
You have grasped
Happiness

It fills the air
In the rare moments
When it's there
The stillness is quiet
To let it speak
It's gone, now
Of course
But it was there
Before
When I wrote this poem
When the music was different
And the atmosphere
Held control
Moments like that
Make life worth living
When the stillness
Is not oppressive
Or boring
Or stultifying
But pleasant
And peaceful
And it holds a grip of the air
And fills it with content

- James Kelso

Disclaimer

ARAFEMI is a Statewide support agency for carers of people with a mental illness and also provides a broad range of consumer services. The ideas and views of personal contributions to the ARAFEMI newsletter are not necessarily those of ARAFEMI, its auspicing agencies, editorial committee, or management. Notices published in this newsletter regarding research does not imply the research is endorsed by ARAFEMI. All articles and artwork in the ARAFEMI newsletter remain the copyright of the artist / author.



ARAFEMI Events

Support Groups

Borderline Personality Disorder family & carers group

What: Open support and information group for carers of people with a Borderline Personality Disorder
 When: FIRST WEDNESDAY of each month 7pm-9pm (June 1, July 6, Aug 3)

Bridging the Gaps – Eastern

What: Education, information and support for parents and family carers
 When: SECOND THURSDAY of each month 7.30pm-9.30pm (June 9, July 14, Aug 11)

ARAFEMI Bipolar Consumer Support Group

What: Open support group for people experiencing bipolar disorder
 When: THIRD WEDNESDAY of each month 7.30pm-9.30pm (May 18, June 15, July 20, Aug 17)

ARAFEMI Bipolar Carer Support Group

What: A bi-monthly group supporting carers of people with bipolar disorder
 When: FIRST THURSDAY bimonthly 7.30pm-9.30pm (June 2, Aug 4)

ARAFEMI Bipolar Combined Carer & Consumer Support Group

What: A bi-monthly group supporting carers of people with bipolar disorder and people experiencing bipolar disorder
 When: FIRST THURSDAY bimonthly 7.30pm-9.30pm (July 7)

ARAFEMI Caring 4 Carers Group - High Street and Wood Street

What: Open support and information group for carers of someone with a mental illness. These groups are run by ARAFEMI in partnership with NAMHS.
 When: High Street - SECOND WEDNESDAY of each month 7pm-9pm (June 8, July 13, Aug 10)
 Where: Preston Neighborhood House, 218 High St, Preston
 When: Wood Street - FOURTH FRIDAY of each month 7pm-9pm (June 22, July 27, Aug 24)
 Where: 131 Wood Street, Preston

Northern Families & Carers of People with a Borderline Personality Disorder ***NEW**

What: Open support and information group for carers of people with a Borderline Personality Disorder
 When: THIRD WEDNESDAY of each month 7pm-9pm (May 18, June 15, July 20, Aug 17)
 Where: ARAFEMI, Lvl 2, 76-80 Turnham Ave, Rosanna

Partners Group - Rosanna ***NEW**

What: Open support and information for partners of someone with a mental illness
 When: FIRST WEDNESDAY of each month 7pm-9pm (May 4, June 1, July 6)
 Where: ARAFEMI, Lvl 2, 76-80 Turnham Ave, Rosanna

Education Seminars & Workshops

On the Path to Self-advocacy (for carers)

What: This workshop assists carers to navigate the mental health system and effectively communicate his or her own interest, desires, needs and rights.
 When: Tuesday May 24 (7pm-10pm)

Carers Coping Skills

What: This workshop assists carers to explore issues in supporting someone with mental health issues. Carers will develop self-care skills and feel more confident communicating in difficult situations.
 When: Tuesday June 7 (10am-1pm)

Love. Laugh. Learn.

What: Fifth rural conference for families and carers. To book contact St Lukes Bendigo directly on 03 5448 100.
 When: Saturday June 18 (9am-4pm)

General Information

Cost for Support Groups: Free

Cost for Seminars/Workshops: \$5.00

Venue: Venue for support groups and education & seminar workshops unless otherwise stated: ARAFEMI's head office, 270 Auburn Rd Hawthorn

Parking details: For parking information go to <http://www.arafemi.org.au/contact-us.html>

Booking Form: To download a booking form go to <http://www.arafemi.org.au/family-support/carer-education.html>

For further information please contact the Carer Helpline 1300 550 265

ARAFEMI Victoria

Ground Floor 270 Auburn Road
 Hawthorn 3122

PO Box 83 Hawthorn 3122

Reg Inc No A0000883B ABN 21 094 487 229

Telephone 03 9810 9300

Fax 03 9810 9399

www.arafemi.org.au

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