



16th Annual THEMHS Conference

30 August – 1 September 2006



by Robin Cruickshank

Through the support of MHACA I attended the 16th Annual THEMHS conference in Townsville. Well, I did return, even though it was great to be away ...

The conference was good, I learnt a lot. To start with, we had the Consumer Day which focused on how consumers need to become more proactive, to stand up, to not be afraid to make some noise. I understood this but there are always two sides to everything. Sometimes consumers aren't able to do this. This was noted and some lively discussion ensued. What I found most beneficial about the day was the main speaker, Ron Coleman. He told us his story on how he tackled mental illness head on and his path to recovery.

I brought back a couple of DVD's which show his story (see MHACA).

The conference went for four days so I saw and learnt a lot. There is far

too much to write about so I shall summarise.

workshops

The second day I went to two sessions. The first one was called "I am not sick I don't need help"—on how to help someone with mental illness accept treatment. This was about how people with some forms of mental illness do not believe they have a mental illness.

The next one I attended was about 'Living Wills'—advance directives or crisis management plans, they are called many things. These are documents drawn up by consumers which give directions to mental health services about what they think is helpful and what isn't during periods when they are unwell. This session explored the legal administrative and creative issues surrounding such documents.

The day ended with a cocktail party by the pool which was much needed after a long day!

speakers

Day three saw the day kick off with the keynote speaker, Jon Jureidini, giving an address on Australia's bad state of children's rights and the rights of children in immigration detention centres.

Then I had a great opportunity to hear Sarah Chunys OAM speak. Sarah is an Alice Springs girl and I have known her for 5-6 years and she is a fantastic role model for all. She has met life head on and I am proud to call her a friend. Her story and how she has succeeded in life is an inspiration.

Day three ended with a dinner on



The Mental Health Services Conference of Australia & New Zealand

the back lawns of Jupiters Casino where part of the conference was held.

Last day. Well, I made it to the fourth and final day and boy was I tired. But I battled on, and it was worth it. The last session I attended was by Merinda Epstein called 'The Emperor's New Clothes'—what Merinda called a gendered perspective from a borderline pioneer. It focused on how she has sought to articulate and champion the rights and human dignity of women labeled 'borderline personality disorder.' She pondered the complex task of 'bearing witness' to trauma and abuse and asked, 'Can a system predicated on a medical model of human suffering ever articulate the needs of survivors?'

That was it, I had no energy left! I was looking forward to chilling out for a while, so I spent an hour or two mixing with others at the conference, those who lasted the distance.

The closing ceremony was great ... we saw some great Cook Island dancers, then the TheMS banner was passed on to next years hosts from Melbourne.

I urge you all to strive to attend a THEMHS conference, the experience is well worth it. It's a challenge to last four days, but the people you meet are fantastic.

Thank you to MHACA for the opportunity to attend. ✂

Robin

Sarah Chunys presenting at THEMHS conference

