

18<sup>th</sup> Annual

TheMHS Conference



Be The Change You Want  
-Workforce Ingenuity

Auckland, New Zealand

2-5 September 2008



Gwynyth, Danielle,  
Claudia & Glenise arriving in Auckland

## Kiaora!! (This means G'Day in Maori lingo)

AT THE beginning of September, four 'desert dwellers' set off for the Land of the Long White Cloud (New Zealand), and the City of Sails (Auckland) which is home to about 1.4 million people. The purpose was to attend a conference ...

The Mental Health Services (TheMS) Conference began in 1990 and is an annual event that moves around the major cities of Australia and New Zealand each year. People from all over the world are invited, and the primary purpose is to organise educational forums that bring together ALL people interested in the provision of Mental Health Services. This includes consumers, indigenous peoples, refugee/new immigrant groups, families, carers, clinicians, service managers, support workers, researchers, health promoters, primary health care workers, academics, and community agencies public and private. This year people came from as far as places like England and Hawaii to:

- ◆ exchange ideas about the best ways to ensure high quality service
- ◆ promote positive attitudes, leadership and advocacy
- ◆ promote involvement and inclusion of ALL stakeholders
- ◆ provide a forum for professional development
- ◆ present current innovations, strategies and research
- ◆ stimulate debate which will "challenge the boundaries"
- ◆ award, recognise and encourage best practice

## Be the Change You Want

The theme this year was "Be The Change You Want—Workforce Ingenuity." Ghandi once said that people could start (or continue) a process of change by "Being the change you want to see."

At the opening of the conference we were presented with flower leis and then were welcomed (or called in) to the building by two Maori women in traditional language. We listened to passionate keynote speakers and attended workshops on a range of different topics. Each workshop lasted approximately an hour and a half and comprised of 20-minute presentations.

The opening, closing and awards ceremonies were full of Maori tradition, beautiful singing and a bit of humour. There was such a positive "buzz" in the air.

As a symbol of coming together and growing a carving was made by a local New Zealand artist, and the message stick which was sent by the traditional people of Townsville at the 2006 conference was presented to inspire continued healing.

Our accommodation of two self-contained apartments, was right in the centre of the city and only about 5 minutes walk from the conference—which was great—and we had a fab view of the Sky Tower from our windows. We were also right next to the Police Station, so we made sure we behaved ourselves!

The food was great (never eaten so much steak in my life!), the people were friendly, the scenery was amazing and it is a trip that we will always look back on with great fondness. Next year the conference will be held in Perth, Western Australia and we highly recommend it to anyone who has an interest in mental health.

We would like to say a HUGE THANKYOU to MHACA for giving us the opportunity to attend such an inspirational event. We learnt a lot, met some amazing people (some we won't forget in a while), opened our eyes to new possibilities and came away feeling that MHACA is headed in the right direction... but there are still things that we could do better... ✕

Danielle Noble, Gwynyth Cassiopeia-Roennfeldt  
and Glenise Alexander





Be The Change You Want  
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The 2008 TheMHS  
Book of Abstracts  
is available



Left: Gwynyth & Glenise touching down on their overseas adventure

## Presentation by Glenise Alexander at the 2008 TheMHS Conference

Hi everyone,

I am a Consumer Advocate and I have been living in Alice Springs for about 18 months, and had moved there to better my life, away from the problems I had. I have struggled with a cycle of depression, isolation, fear and anxiety. At times I felt suicidal and unable to cope.

Generally, I don't tell people about that part of my life because they treat you differently. It is like they are scared of what you're going to do and that has made me feel less of a person. This feeling can stop you by making you paranoid and fearful and you become stuck with the stigma. You are judged on what the stigma is and not 'who you are or what you can be'.

MHACA has helped me in many ways with my recovery:

- ◆ From support when I was hospitalised to ongoing support when I got better
- ◆ Keeping in regular contact with home visits and phone calls
- ◆ Transport to appointments and counselling; and
- ◆ Help with day to day living issues

I want to share what has helped in my ongoing recovery:



Glenise with a 'Welcome Plaque' at the conference

- ◆ Not being isolated
- ◆ Feeling better & believing in myself
- ◆ Having purpose and meaning
- ◆ Having control over my life and being independent
- ◆ Having opportunities to do new things
- ◆ And being trusted to make mistakes and learn from them

With my own determination and my support network I have become the person that I am today. I have learnt to accept the things I can not change and not worry and be anxious of the small things ... that are just that.

These days I have returned to the workforce after a long period and I enjoy my job. I am feeling more confident, and my self-esteem has had a much needed boost ... as well as my pocket!!

I am enjoying life—a person, just like all of you here, and love being treated as a person and not a mental illness.

MHACA is a very unique and worthwhile organisation and it helps so many people in Central Australia, and I am proud to be a part of it.

*Thank you, Glenise*

Keynote speech ...

## Personalising Mental Health Services -

by Claudia Manu-Preston

One of the pivotal keynote presentations we attended was "Personalising Mental Health Services: The Only Future for Policy and Practice" by Antony Sheehan. A very good presentation, Antony focused on what he meant by 'personalising mental health services' and how this would benefit the people we support.

The question posed was, 'What is the future of mental health policy and practice?'—a question that people from around the world are asking. After respective phases of reform—including de-institutionalisation, defining community care, developing psychological models and progressing social inclusion—what next?

The key point Antony presented was that personalisation is a strategy aimed at closing the 'power gap' between consumers and providers of services. The key principles he highlighted were:

- ◆ treat people as people—provide caring support instead of using systems and paperwork to disassociate from clients
- ◆ people should be supported to choose the services they would like to use.

Further discussion focused on personalisation as a key part of the recovery paradigm and on the evidence of the benefits.

**For a copy of the conference paper please refer to [www.themhs.org/resources/conference-proceedings](http://www.themhs.org/resources/conference-proceedings)**



The MHACA team being welcomed at the conference

TheMHS Feature

## A TheMHS Adventure

by Gwvynyth Cassiopeia-Roennfeldt

*WOW! What an experience! The 2008 TheMHS Conference in New Zealand was a 4-day conference that included a presentation on MHACA done by Claudia, Glenise and myself. What a different and thrilling prospect I thought as I applied. "Be the change you want; Workplace Ingenuity" was the theme of the conference, and enabling recovery—and the processes, services and challenges that achieve this—are what I was listening for.*

When I applied I said that I expected to learn and network with other service providers and to develop as a consumer consultant. I can now say that those four days were a crash course on mental health advocacy and practice, and I developed quite a lot of confidence about the future prospectives of the field. Not only is peer support and consumer consultancy the new wave of the last decade and emerging future, hospitals are more and more seeking assistance and evaluation, practices to help improve the services.

I attended a Consumer Forum on Tuesday and managed to sit in on 18 sessions from Wednesday to Friday. The Forum was called Destination Known: the Journey of Strength and was about the Peer Worker Workforce. "Journey-boards in Mental Health" was one presentation which I think was invaluable. The team from Southern Mental Health presented their visual communication tool which they had implemented in their hospital. It was a board which their Mental Health Team collect data regarding discharge and note barriers which become obvious. They collate who the consumer had dealings with—and how often—on their road to recovery.

My part of the MHACA presentation titled, 'Workforce Ingenuity in Central Australia,' talked about how coming to MHACA has helped me to not feel so alone and to feel more confident that it is safe to be open because I am not judged about mental illness.

Our peer support is achieved through consumer forums and consumer action group meetings. Twice a month we come together to have discussions on ideas and issues related to the MHACA service. The GROW Program is a program in which all in attendance are of peer status and are guided to explore and overcome mental health issues. Consumer peer support is a very important role advocated at all levels of the MHACA service.

I was fortunate enough to be in Auckland—the city where my Godmother lived—and used the opportunity to extend my stay. I am so pleased with the time I spent in New Zealand—the business of the conference and the pleasure of holidaying overseas, two things which I have not done before.

### Thank you

I want to say the hugest thank you to Jo for keeping my confidence up on the subject, and to Claudia and Danielle for being so available and for keeping the pressure off me (phew, what a relief that was!).

Only one way to find out what I mean crew—try it for yourself ... a highly recommended experience!

Gwvynyth



Guests watching a performance at the Closing Ceremony



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## 10 Commandments for Reducing Stress

1. Thou shalt not be perfect, nor even try to be
2. Thou shalt not try to be all things to all people
3. Thou shalt leave things undone that ought to be done
4. Thou shalt not spread thyself too thin
5. Thou shalt learn to say No
6. Thou shalt schedule time for thyself
7. Thou shalt switch off and do nothing regularly
8. Thou shalt be boring, untidy, inelegant and unattractive at times
9. Thou shalt not even feel guilty
10. Especially, thou shalt not be thine own worst enemy, but be thine own best friend.

Anon