



## **E-NEWSLETTER, ISSUE #4 - NOVEMBER 2009**

### **Welcome**

The end of 2009 is almost upon us, and again it has been a very interesting year. I have now been with the MHCT for two years, and in that time I have noticed many changes within the organisation, as well as more broadly in the community mental health sector. Much of this is reported in our 2009 Annual Report.

Probably the biggest change has been the advent of the Office for the Community Sector, and changes to our funding agreements. With the first component of reporting due in January 2010, I think we are all still getting into swing of the new system. As the peak body, I would encourage our member organisations to contact us should they require any assistance.

As we wind up for the year, I would like to take this opportunity to thank the sector for their ongoing support of the MHCT over the past year, and wish everyone a safe and happy festive season. I am looking forward to 2010, and in continuing to work collaboratively with the sector.

Best wishes

Michelle

### **MHCT Update**

#### ***Families at the Cutting Edge of Research Symposium***

On Monday 5 October the MHCT convened a symposium looking at current research regarding families of people living with a mental illness. This was an activity of the *Building Capacity in Community Mental Health Family Support & Respite Project* funded by FaHCSIA.

The symposium was a magnificent success with almost 100 delegates registered to attend the day, held at the Tram Sheds in Launceston. Anne Bevan, Project Coordinator, organised an impressive line up of speakers:

Barbara Hocking, SANE  
Frances Sanders, ARAFEMI  
Ann Tullgren, consumer perspective  
perspective

Elizabeth Crowther, MIF  
Cat Schofield, SMHS  
Helen Wills, carer

Together, these speakers provided a hugely engaging and informative agenda and no doubt sparked a lot of discussion around the state of how we might be able to work together more effectively to improve services for carers and families of people living with a mental illness. More information about the day, including presentations, can be viewed [here](#).

#### ***Mental Health Week***

Mental Health Week was a flurry of activity in the mental health sector around Tasmania. Michelle and Adele took the opportunity to do a bit of a road trip around the state, and were delighted to be able to attend the opening of the week at the Design Centre in Launceston. Aspire organised the opening, which coincided with the launch of an art exhibition of inspiring creative pieces completed by Tasmanian mental health consumers.

The MHCT, in conjunction with TasCOSS also launched a policy platform under the umbrella of Our Island Our Voices. We are calling for increased support for people with a mental illness in accessing employment opportunities. More information about the release can be found [here](#).

On Wednesday, Michelle and Adele made a flying visit to Latrobe to join in a fun filled day organised by YAFF for year seven students of Latrobe High School. Michelle and Adele were excited to discover some hidden talents in egg and spoon racing (before being disqualified for being too tall... so unfair), but will never be persuaded to engage in a donut eating competition. Never.

On Friday the Botanical Gardens again played host to a mental health and wellbeing expo, involving many mental health sector organisations. Besides being awarded for the best stall, the MHCT was excited to launch its new resource, ***Climbing Fences***, stories written by and for young Tasmanians caring for a parent or family member with a mental illness.

The *Climbing Fences* book is now available for \$5.50, by emailing [Ann](#).

## Upcoming Events

Please continue to [contact us](#) with details of what is happening in the sector so we can update our [Events Calendar](#). All your information about the event can be uploaded into the calendar, including any advertising information.

### **1 December 2009: MH In-Touch**

2.30pm-4.30pm, Tuesday 1 December 2009 – Cadbury's Room Hobart Campus Polytechnic

Don't miss the opportunity to get together with consumers, employment networks, mental health service providers as well as the education and training sector for an afternoon of networking, information sharing and maybe even debate! This event is open to anyone who is interested in assisting mental health consumers gain employment and/or participate in education and training. This is a **FREE** afternoon, including drinks and nibbles! Where else do you have to be? The topic for the session will be disclosure.

RSVPs are required by 27 November 2009 to Debbie Hindle ([Debbie.Hindle@utas.edu.au](mailto:Debbie.Hindle@utas.edu.au); 6226 1796).

### **Coming Soon...**

The Tasmanian Transcultural Mental Health Network (TTMHN) will soon be approaching TTMHN members to complete an anonymous survey about the progress of the TTMHN and to gauge your expectations for the coming year. Keep an eye out in your inbox for the invitation to participate!

The TTMHN is hosted by the Phoenix Centre, and the main aim is to provide a coordinated network in which a wide variety of stakeholders can work in a collaborative manner to progress common concerns across the transcultural mental health sector in Tasmania.

For more information, please contact the Project Officer, Renée Valentino on (03) 6234 9138 or via email: [rvalentino@mrchobart.org.au](mailto:rvalentino@mrchobart.org.au). You can find Renée at 49 Molle St in Hobart.

## Sector in Focus

### ***Are you a professional?***

An article by Adele Spencer, Policy Research and Development Officer for the MHCT

I was sitting in the car with two of my colleagues the other day, and we were trying to solve the problems of the world, which included the community sector workforce. One of the issues that came up was that many people in the sector do not perceive themselves as a working professional. It makes me ask, why?

The community sector performs an important role in the delivery of crucial services for people who may otherwise fall through the gaps. This is acknowledged by all levels of government in the repeated funding that community sector organisations receive (OK, so we know it's not enough... but let's face it, services continue to be funded). It's further acknowledged by the people accessing your services. Is this not recognition enough?

Why do we in the community sector continue to feel as inadequate as the pay we receive? It appears to me that it is time to unite and bring about change, in the formation of a common identity and singular pride in the work that is achieved every year on a shoestring budget within the community sector. At the end of every year we should celebrate our achievements and delight in the fact that the community sector has again worked in a highly professional manner to bring these achievements to fruition.

At the MHCT's recent AGM, consultant Maree Fudge presented her report *Growing Forward*. Maree inspired those in attendance, and put the onus on the whole sector to work together to start bringing about change now. The MHCT has already been approached by some inspired colleagues in the sector to be involved in any resulting projects to commence in the not too distant future.

Maree confirmed a lot of beliefs we have about the community mental health sector workforce. She also debunked a lot of myths. Of primary importance to this discussion is the now evidenced fact that we are a very qualified sector. Over 60% of employees in surveyed organisations in the community mental health sector workforce have a diploma or tertiary education. Wow! That's an incredible statistic. Conversely, only 3% were reported to not have received any qualifications. Surely this is a reminder for employers to encourage their staff to seek out some professional development in the form of accredited training.

So again. Let me ask you, should you need convincing, why are we not perceiving ourselves as professional workers? Whether you are a support worker or finance manager, a counsellor or an administrative assistant, *you are a professional*, and you are doing the community sector proud.

## Member in Focus



*Rural Alive and Well  
Vyw Alomes*

Although many people see the RAW vehicles travelling across the Southern Midlands, Central Highlands and Glamorgan Spring Bay areas, with their distinctive signs of "Talk to A mate" a lot of people still don't know what RAW does.

Rural Alive and Well (RAW) is a suicide prevention and community wellbeing program and the core role of RAW Outreach Workers is to simply call in and chat with people who may just need a little support or simply "someone to talk to". The drought may be officially over but the rebuilding and stress will last many more years yet.

The RAW program has been taken to heart by many people. Since July 2008 we have assisted over 200 people with a wide range of issues and highlighted for us that we could not be everything to everyone, however by working closely with other services and the Rural Services Network we are able to overcome the difficulties of the past.

Traditionally rural people have been unable to access support in their own areas and this has led to many mental health problems, high stress levels and taken a huge toll on individuals and families. RAW Outreach Workers can, through our valuable partnerships, sit at the kitchen table or over the back of the ute and put people in touch with what ever help is needed, then and there.

Raw is proud of being part of the community as well by organising or supporting community events such as, school mentoring programs, ute musters, fishing groups, bush buddy programs etc. The

results have been a reduction in suicide rates of over 90% in the Southern Midlands and Central Highlands in the past 12 months compared to the previous 5 years.

So when you next see a RAW vehicle on the road, give us a wave and remember to “Talk To A Mate” when things are tough. Sharing a problem really does make a difference.

Rural Alive & Well is available 24 hours on 6259 3014.

**Do you have something to contribute?**

If you'd like to be featured here, please [submit to us](#) an article of no more than 500 words (and maybe a picture or two!).

*If you do not wish to be on the mailing list for this e-news, please [contact us](#) and we will remove you from our list.*

***Michelle Swallow***  
***Executive Officer***

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*The peak body representing the community mental health sector in Tasmania at a state and national level*



I support Our Island Our Voices: A campaign for a fairer Tasmania. Visit [www.ourisland.tascoss.org.au](http://www.ourisland.tascoss.org.au)