Multicultural Mental Health Australia

Mental health and wellbeing for a diverse community

- Culturally relevant translated mental health information
- Information on mental health services
- Workshops, courses & conferences
- Synergy magazine & e-bulletins

Locked Bag 7118
Parramatta BC
NSW 2150 Australia

Tel: + 61 2 9840 3333
Fax: + 61 2 9840 3388

Website: www.mmha.org.au
Email: admin@mmha.org.au
Welcome to the culture edition. By “culture” I mean two things: first, the diversity of groups in our society and, second, the arts. We look at these two in relation to mental health.

Several stories communicate the varied experiences of Australians. These include a paralympian gold medallist tackling the Kokoda Trail to raise the profile of men’s mental health, a Muslim psychologist who works in the justice system, and an Indigenous carer from the state’s North West. Other stories explore ways in which the arts enrich our mental wellbeing. We cover stories from the areas of visual arts, music and performance. We also provide a wrap up of recent events, such as Mental Health Week and the launch of the statewide suicide prevention strategy.

The annual TheMHS Conference was held in Perth this year. I’d like to thank the co-convenors the WA Mental Health Association and the South Metropolitan Area Health Service, Mental Health for their hard work in making the international conference a success. For the first time, it was held with the WA Transcultural Mental Health Conference and the inaugural Refugee Health Conference, organised by Ishar and the WA Transcultural Mental Health Services. The estimated combined number of attendees was around 1300. Well done!

Dr Peter Flett
Director General, WA Health

Cover: “Seeds of Life” by Margaret Raven, Indigenous Cultural Rights Consultant www.placelessness.org
Kurt Fearnley has just come back from a 2.5 hour crawl up and down a Newcastle cliff face. “I’m becoming efficient at crawling,” he says.

Kurt has been training daily by crawling steep hills, cliffs and stairs. Special wrist braces, and pads for his hands, knees and shins are helping to protect him. He is preparing himself for the biggest challenge of his life.

“I can do 62 flight of stairs in half hour and 115 in an hour,” he says. “Every single metre is a drag. You literally are lifting your body with your hands and dragging yourself along. Every single step is like doing a bench press.”

Kurt doesn’t usually crawl. In fact, he is the world’s leading wheelchair marathoner, aiming for a third consecutive gold medal in the marathon at the 2012 Paralympics.

The 28-year-old was born without the lower section of his spine in the town of Carcoar in NSW.

“You need the support there to carry you when you need it. Kokoda is a good example of what that was made for.”

Family and close friends have always been important to him, and he will be accompanied by several of them in Kokoda. “With them I believe I can do anything. I can ask them for a hand. They give me physical and emotional support,” he declares.

Kurt’s determination to overcome literal and symbolic obstacles has propelled him from an early age.

“There are always barriers. But it’s the way you approach it. The more you get around the things in front of you, the easier it is the next time. I know everything is do-able. The more you do things, the more you believe it can be done. One of the main ways to become confident is by setting goals and continuing with it until all of a sudden you’re doing what you want to do.”

The paralympian’s ability to overcome barriers has given him the self-belief that he can conquer the Kokoda Trail. The aim of the journey is to raise awareness of men’s mental health for Movember and beyondblue.

Australia’s relationship with the Kokoda Trail, one of mateship and perseverance, is a message he believes other men will relate to.

“Blokes can talk to each other for help, and if someone in a wheelchair can do it then anyone else can. If you have that group around you to lift and support you like I will on the Kokoda Track, if you can ask for help, then so much more is possible,” he explains.

“Family and mateship are more or less the same a lot of the time. You need the support there to carry you when you need it. Kokoda is a good example of what that was made for.

“I think everyone has someone around them who suffers from depression, who feels it’s a weakness and can’t talk about it. Like cancer, ignoring it won’t get rid of it. We need to talk about it to overcome it. Blokes need to ask for help when need be. Even having someone contact me out of the blue is a good start. I direct them to beyondblue or Lifeline.

“If some fella can make a phone call to save his life then that’d be fantastic.”

For Kurt, strength comes from acknowledging vulnerability.

Visit: www.kurtfearnley.com
www.beyondblue.com
www.movember.com
The Abbot Who Laughs

Venerable Ajahn Brahmavamso Mahathera, known to most as Ajahn Brahm, is the Spiritual Director of the Buddhist Society of Western Australia and Abbot of Bodhinyana Monastery in Serpentine. He is also an author, a sought-after public speaker and an exceptional wit. He shares some of his wisdom and humour.

What first interested you in Buddhism?
I was 16 and realised religion was important. I decided to focus on all the major religions and found that Buddhism interested me. I like to call it market research.

You are well known for your sense of humour. Do you think the Buddha might have been a funny person?
Yes. There’s a few times where he’s told some cracking stories. Humour is part of wisdom and compassion. Tell a story in a way to make people laugh. A monk once told me that when you have people opening their mouths and laughing, that’s the time you can pop in the pill of wisdom.

Is a sense of humour important for wellbeing?
Absolutely. It’s good for your lungs. You can’t be negative and laugh at the same time. It’s a circuit breaker for chronic negativity which underlies some people’s neuroses.

“You can’t be negative and laugh at the same time.”

You have written a book on mindfulness and bliss. What do you mean by these terms? And how might they be attained?
Mindfulness is an awareness of certain parts of your mental processes that you might not be aware of—wisdom and understanding. From wisdom and understanding there is freedom from problems caused by the narrow perspective we’ve been conditioned to by personal painful experiences, society and family. Seeing beyond that leads to a sense of happiness, and there’s nothing more blissful than being at peace.

Sometimes you feel you’re in a prison, and mindfulness shows you the door is unlocked and you can walk out.

How do you find quietude and equanimity in this day and age?
They’re all around you. You just need to notice. They’re there in the space between words, in moments between activities, in the space between one leaf and another on a tree. Once we recognise quietude there’s so much space and freedom.

You’ve dedicated your time and wisdom to those in the prison system. What was that experience like?
It’s one of those places where I found my audience was the most honest. Once they’re in gaol they won’t take any bull----. You can’t speak outside your own experience; otherwise they will let you know it.

One of the accolades I’ve always cherished was when one of the prison officers called me and asked me to come back. I said I was now busy with my duties as an Abbot. I suggested he ask someone else, but he said, “We want you. I’ve been here for many years and every prisoner who saw you never came back.”

I never saw a crime but the person. When you see the whole person then they can recognise themselves. They can respect themselves. They can see their worth, which means they won’t have to do the crime again.

For more information about Ajahn Brahm, call (08) 9525 2420 or visit www.ajahnbrahm.org
Alli Fillery is a carer and a Bardi Aboriginal woman from the North West of WA. She tells us what life and love have taught her.

I am married to a man who was diagnosed with drug resistant paranoid schizophrenia over 16 years ago.

He is a wonderful husband and brilliant father, who happens to have an illness that can make everyday tasks difficult, but we love him for the man he is.

I am also a very proud mother of a talented 16-year-old son who has won awards for educating families who live with mental illness.

I have been working in the social welfare field for 18 years now. My skills are with supporting youth involved in mental health, drug and alcohol issues and the justice system. I care about these young people who are in a pretty dark place in their lives. My wish is to offer hope to them and their families.

Over the years I have sat on many mental health boards and conducted interagency workshops to support families in rural and remote WA. My advocacy is not about me individually. I understand that if there are no services for my family, then there are a hundred families out there in a similar situation.

I have never stopped dreaming big dreams.

Although I currently live in Perth, I continue to maintain close links with my community and land in rural WA, as I am well aware of how difficult it is to access mental health services in these areas. Part of my job is to engage remote communities in community consultations in developing sustainable solutions to current issues. I have delivered a lot of cross-cultural training so that mainstream workers can be culturally appropriate in keeping our people safe.

But I want my story to be about hope; that you can cope with having a family member with a mental illness; that you can have fulfilling relationships. I wouldn’t change the last 20 years of my life, as it has strengthened my husband and me, both individually and as a couple. With our son, we are a family that can face life on our terms and come out as better people.

We may be on a different path to what our original dreams were, but this has allowed us to make the best of what’s happened, to appreciate our lives and to stop and look at the pretty flowers at the path’s edge. When things don’t work out the first time, we laugh and go in for the second round.

“I want my story to be about hope; that you can cope with having a family member with a mental illness.”

I’ve learnt that no illness can rob such a gentle man of his pure heart that still loves the girl he fell in love with at 13. I’ve learnt three other things:

Awareness = Perception
Acceptance = Perspective
Action = Perseverance

This lesson has made my journey easier. It has been hard work, but any marriage is. The more you invest in it, the more rewards you receive.

Many have said that we are two halves of the same shell. He tells everyone that I complete him, but he is wrong; he completes me.

I will never give up the hope that one day we will find the right medication or even a cure. We may have to wait another 20 years, but I’m in this for long haul. I can’t give up now; we have grown together. I signed up for the good, the bad and the ugly of what life can throw at me and I have won. Love will conquer any illness.
Going Head2Head

Sumo wrestling suits and other surprising devices are helping people in the Mid West to learn about mental health, drug and alcohol issues. We find out more.

The Midwest Community Drug Service (MWCDS) has for 10 years been providing services to the second largest regional health district in WA, an area roughly the size of Germany.

The service targets a wide range of drug and alcohol related issues in the community. MWCDS provides counselling, pharmacotherapies such as opioid replacement, and home and hospital detoxification programs.

The population in the Midwest is widely dispersed, which presents challenges in delivering services. MWCDS has adapted by being innovative and willing to travel to remote regions. While the main office is in Geraldton, MWCDS also has satellite offices in Carnarvon and Meekatharra.

The service was honoured at the inaugural WA Alcohol and other Drug Sector Awards last year. It received the Arthur Toon Award, which acknowledges organisations that are both innovative and nurturing of workers in the sector.

MWCDS has developed some novel and creative community education programs.

One such program is Head2Head (no relation to this magazine), which targets young people. It was developed using resources and information from the Strong Spirit, Strong Mind program, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Mental Health First Aid course, and the Indigenous Men Managing Anger and Substance Use program.

“Sumo wrestling suits provide a means of exploring anger in a controlled environment.”

The Head2Head program uses fun activities to engage and educate its participants.

Sumo wrestling suits provide a means of exploring anger in a controlled environment. Beer goggles, which distort vision, enable participants to experience the effects that alcohol can have on judgement, emotions and behaviour. Laser tagging promotes teamwork and is a fun way to relieve stress and complete the program.

Alex McIntosh who facilitates the program says the activities form a big drawcard.

“The young crew who are involved enjoy the program. They want to participate because of the activities. The way the information is presented also gives them a first hand example of what alcohol and drugs do to the system,” he says.

MWCDS recently launched a DVD called Slow Down, which highlights the impact of intravenous substance use on the wellbeing of families and communities. The DVD features interviews and points of view from children, past substance users and Aboriginal Elders.

Slow Down was developed locally with the Mullewa community and addresses the issues of peer pressure, copycat substance use and violence resulting from use. While the DVD focuses on one small community, it reflects the impact that substance use has on many rural communities.

Production of the DVD was funded through a grant from the WA Network of Alcohol and other Drug Agencies.

For more information about the Midwest Community Drug Service and Slow Down, contact Mitchell Dobbie on (08) 9956 2424 or at Mitchell.Dobbie@health.wa.gov.au

Image by Jessica McLeod, www.jessicamonster.com
Gifts That Keep Giving

Winston Churchill said “we make a living by what we get, but we make a life by what we give.” Many local musicians and artists embody this perfectly, donating their time and talents to enhance mental wellbeing in the community.

Award-winning band Mister and Sunbird recently performed at a fundraiser for people with a mental illness. Their infectious mixture of swing, jazz, bluegrass and ska had the crowd smiling and dancing. Vocalist and multi-instrumentalist Scott Kociuruba shared his insights as a carer.

“My mother suffers from a mental illness and it can be very difficult to know how to help,” reflects Scott. “Her tone of voice or lack of communication will let me know when it’s time to either allow space or give support.”

“The difference between a ‘mentally ill’ person and anybody else is merely a diagnosis. We all have the ability to be mentally ill, just as all our bodies can become ill. Mister and Sunbird’s songs explore love and how we navigate our way through, which for me is the meaning of life. If we can give and receive love we have the best possible chance of mental stability.”

Hip hop artist K.I.B. writes songs to inspire others and has donated an online song-mix to the Association for Services to Torture and Trauma Survivors.

“My album From a Weak Foundation talks about my experiences in Ethiopia and moving to Perth,” says K.I.B. “It shares the personal struggles I faced and how I’m still here because I choose to follow my dream and work hard. I aim to motivate or inspire others; that anything they want to achieve is possible if they put their mind to it.”

Perth’s hottest bands continue to support Music Feedback: What if we talked about music the same way we talk about mental illness? The youth mental health project, a partnership with the WA Music Industry Association, includes a compilation CD/DVD and documentary by Black Cyclone Productions. Schools, youth and community groups have successfully engaged thousands of young people with the Music Feedback message. The popular website has thousands of views every month. It features songs, posters and interviews with musicians, including pop/rock singer Nat Ripepi.

“Sharing stories is so important in healing mental illness,” Nat affirms. “My songs state that no matter how difficult things seem, you can’t let it get you down. They’re about finding the strength and courage to keep going.”

“I have bouts of depression myself and the best way to deal with it is to talk to someone. I encourage friends going through tough times to talk to a counsellor or doctor. An open ear and a few positive words can go a long way.”

Artists and musicians also collaborated on the recent Mind Your Art Exhibition at the Kurb Gallery. The artworks were developed in workshops with artist Robert Jenkins, a regular contributor to Head2Head. Young people learnt new techniques to express themselves and have fun. The exhibition opening featured performances by K.I.B., Jesse Woodward, Complete, Jamie Kennedy-Fillery and Green Foxgloves. Mind Your Art was proudly supported by the Mental Health Division, Youth Affairs Council of WA, Propel Youth Arts and Healthway to promote the Drug Aware message.

For more information, contact Pui San Whittaker on (08) 9222 4099 or at Puisan.Whittaker@health.wa.gov.au or visit www.musicfeedback.com.au

Robert Jenkins designed the 2009 WAM Song of the Year artwork, which illustrates ideas emerging from the songwriter’s open mind and heart. Robert is selling prints of this drawing to support Even Keel Bipolar Support Association. Prints are $25 and can be purchased from Even Keel at evenkeel@aapt.net.au or on (08) 9388 9869.

WAM Song of the Year artwork by Robert Jenkins, www.myspace/robertjenkinsart
Instrument for Change

Simon Faulkner of DRUMBEAT tells us why hand drumming is a perfect medium for personal change and social connection.

At the Holyoake Institute, we were looking for a way to engage young people, raise their self confidence and teach them life skills that would enable them to reintegrate with their community.

Some of these young people were socially isolated and at risk of harm from drug and alcohol use. Traditional interventions didn’t seem to be working.

For these and many other participants, we found the drum to be an extremely useful medium for healthy engagement, safe communication and change.

Drumming allows participants of any background to express themselves emotionally without fear of judgement or misinterpretation. It is a fun and non-competitive physical activity that eases tension and improves mood.

Music has been linked to increased academic performance, yet many students have very little opportunity to play music.

DRUMBEAT (Discovering Relationships Using Music—Beliefs, Emotions, Attitudes and Thoughts) is a program that brings music back into the lives of young people and opens up an avenue for expression and fun.

In fact, DRUMBEAT is endorsed by the Curriculum Council of West Australia as a course of study for the West Australian Certificate of Education.

Evaluations have shown that young people who completed the program became more able and willing to engage in mainstream group activities. They had more confidence and less anxiety, increased levels of emotional control, improved relationships with teachers and peers, and a greater sense of belonging. Participants maintained these changes 12 months after completing the program.

Recent studies at Swan Mental Health Service and the Department of Psychiatry at Sir Charles Gairdner Hospital have indicated that DRUMBEAT’s social outcomes are transferable to people diagnosed with a range of mental health conditions.

It has been particularly successful as an early intervention program for young people with high risk of future mental health problems.

As a relationships program, however, DRUMBEAT is applicable to a broad range of people.

The program is primarily an experiential learning process, in which music-making forms nearly 70 percent of the content.

Like many cognitive-based programs, DRUMBEAT also allows for discussion with participants about their lives, healthy choices and the risks of drug use. These conversations are drawn from analogies taken from the group drumming experience.

With the safety of the drum as a communication tool, young people feel confident to participate.

“The music is a direct reflection of their social skills.”

The learning from these conversations is demonstrated in the advances participants make in learning to play music together. The music is a direct reflection of their social skills.

The first six of the 10 DRUMBEAT sessions have a theme: The Rhythm of Life, Relationships, Harmony, Identity, Emotions and Feelings, and Teamwork. The last four weeks work towards the performance. The performance provides both recognition of personal contribution and a positive link to others.

When players form a drum circle they reflect a community, whether it is the family, school or workplace. The drum circle provides a safe space to explore human relationships and practice the skills that promote healthy interaction and connection.

Because of this, the drum can certainly be an instrument for positive change.

For information about the DRUMBEAT program and upcoming training dates, contact Simon Faulkner at sfaulkner@holyoake.org.au or visit www.holyoake.org.au
Working With Strengths

Shannon McNeair from the Multisystemic Therapy (MST) discusses her team’s good outcomes with Aboriginal families.

Given that the MST program has been running in the Rockingham area for only four years, success has been relatively swift.

In 2008, the program received a Mental Health Good Outcomes Award (the Dr Mark Rooney Award for Improved Outcomes in Child and Adolescent Mental Health), as well as the Healthy Communities Award.

MST clinicians assist families with children and adolescents who have serious or chronic antisocial behaviour. They aim to help young people remain at home and be more positively involved in school, work and recreation.

“MST is goal-focused and action-orientated.”

MST is often involved after other services and avenues have been exhausted. The program has several benefits, including its community-based approach, which means the service comes to the homes, schools and community.

This approach proved a drawcard for Shannon McNeair, an MST clinician and Aboriginal Torres Strait Islander Specialist.

“I liked that it was a community-based service; you take your treatment out to the families,” she says.

Shannon believes that the program benefits from its emphasis on the collaborative process.

“We work collaboratively with parents at all times. We meet regularly with school psychologists who are critical allies in our treatment program.”

The program achieves enduring positive change in a young person’s behaviour by working intensively with multiple “systems.” This includes the family system where clinicians help parents to better monitor and manage their child’s behaviour. Parents are encouraged to have regular contact with the school system about their child’s attendance and progress.

MST has had great success in assisting Aboriginal families—so much so that the number of families in contact with the program has been steadily increasing.

Shannon believes that one of the reasons for the positive outcome has been the focus on working with strengths and setting goals.

“We go to families and assess their strengths and needs. We find out what’s going well and use that as the leverage for therapeutic change.”

“MST is goal-focused and action-orientated. It’s not just about ‘naughtiness,’ but about children’s goals and how to help them reach their goals.”

Lasting positive change in the young person’s behaviour is a result of change in the household level, school and community systems.

“The key stakeholder is the parent, and we make sure the communication style and way of working fits with the parent. We assure them that MST is about changing behavioural problems. The majority of parents are open to change and improvement.

“A strength-based approach empowers the parents to move on and address things that need addressing.”

The Mental Health Good Outcomes Awards are held annually during Mental Health Week. For more information, contact the Mental Health Division on (08) 9222 4099 or at MentalHealthReception.RoyalSt@health.wa.gov.au or visit www.health.wa.gov.au/mentalhealth
Can you describe your role?
I work as a psychologist with the Youth Justice Psychological Services and Programs Team. The role varies depending on my setting, but in general terms, it involves assessing the psychological needs of young people who come into contact with the justice system, and providing follow-up counselling if suitable.

Are there aspects of your own cultural background or beliefs that inform your work?
Absolutely. I think we are all informed by our own background to some extent. And whilst it's important not to place our own values on our clients, who we are will inevitably influence our reading of a situation.

“I think we are all informed by our own background to some extent.”

Are there groups at greater risk of being involved in the justice system? How do you address their needs?
Young people from minority cultural backgrounds are at particular risk of becoming involved in the justice system. The statistics relating to the proportion of young Indigenous people in custody are staggering and I think unacceptable from a systems perspective. Young people with an intellectual disability are at significantly higher risk of entering the justice system.

Certainly more work needs to be done in the area of prevention and in strengthening communities. Effort from all areas of society and government is essential to address the systemic problems that often lead to engagement with the justice system.

What is the most satisfying part of your job?
I really enjoy working with young people. The identifiable successes are often quite small from the outside looking in. However, given the life experiences of these young people, sometimes the smallest progress is the beginning of a major shift. I’ve also enjoyed the opportunity to travel to other parts of WA. This has certainly been rewarding and eye-opening for me.
Everybody’s Business

The theme of this year’s World Suicide Prevention Day was “Suicide Prevention in Different Cultures.” It was marked in WA by the launch of a $13 million suicide prevention strategy and by the Suicide Prevention Australia LIFE Awards.

The Western Australian Suicide Prevention Strategy 2009–2013 was launched on 10 September by the Minister for Mental Health, Dr Graham Jacobs. He spoke of the importance of the strategy.

“More Australians suicide each year than are killed on our roads,” he noted.

“This strategy sends a strong message that suicide is everyone’s business and outlines a way forward for individuals, groups and organisations to work collaboratively to reduce the loss of life from suicide.”

The Minister said the strategy placed an emphasis on young people, particularly young men, as well as people living in rural and regional areas and Indigenous communities.

Under the strategy, the Ministerial Council for Suicide Prevention will oversee suicide prevention initiatives and identify communities requiring more support. A non-government organisation will be appointed to implement the strategy, increase public awareness and oversee research, evaluation, education and training in suicide prevention.

Estelle Dragun, mother of former Perth newsreader Charmaine Dragun, also spoke at the launch. She expressed the hope that the strategy would reduce the number of suicides.

“If this new government initiative can prevent another mother from experiencing the pain my family and I have suffered since my beautiful daughter took her own life, then we should all stand up and applaud,” she said. “The sooner the community, government agencies, health professionals and all other concerned parties get started, the better.”

“Estelle Dragun, mother of former Perth newsreader Charmaine Dragun, also spoke at the launch.”

Estelle asserted that removing stigma around mental illness would help people receive the help and understanding they need.

“We must realise that depression is not an illness that can be dealt with on your own. Let us work together to get rid of stigma, embarrassment and the perception that mental illness is a sign of weakness,” she said. “For so long we have worried about physical wellbeing that our mental health and wellbeing has been neglected or just brushed aside.”

A day after the launch, Suicide Prevention Australia (SPA) held their annual LIFE Awards in Perth. The awards recognise the outstanding contribution of organisations and individuals to suicide prevention in Australia.

The WA winner of the Healthy Communities category was the Understanding and Building Resilience in the South West project, coordinated by the Injury Control Council of Western Australia. The resilience project was initiated in 2003 as a response to a series of suicide clusters in the area.

At the awards, SPA also launched a new position statement that addresses the relationship between mental illness and suicide. Mental Illness and Suicide recommends a comprehensive system of care that meets the holistic and long-term needs of mental health consumers.

SPA Chair, Dr Michael Dudley, said that, while mental illness is a major risk factor for suicide, “80 per cent of mental illnesses are untreated at the time of death. Around only 35 per cent of people aged 16 to 85 years with a need for mental health care receive any. What is needed are long-term remedies; not just band-aid solutions.”


For more about SPA, visit www.suicidepreventionaust.org
Speaking Their Minds

A comprehensive consultation process to inform the State Mental Health Policy and Mental Health Strategic Plan 2010–2020 for WA has now been completed.

The policy and plan will help reform the state’s mental health services.

More than 500 adult consumers responded to the WA Health Mental Health Telephone Survey 2009. The majority of respondents agreed with statements across four areas of care: general satisfaction, access, quality and appropriateness, and outcomes. This indicated a generally positive experience with mental health services.

In addition to the telephone survey, almost 400 individuals and organisations completed a Survey of Consumers and Carers and provided submissions.

Similar to the telephone survey, the majority of consumers reported a positive experience with mental health services. Carers were less likely to report positive outcomes for the person in their care.

Over 30 percent of respondents thought that a key strength of the mental health services was their approachable, caring and dedicated staff.

Suggestions for improving the delivery of services were also submitted and included the following:

- Greater consumer and carer participation and representation in the delivery of services, additional independent advocacy for consumers and carers, as well as greater support and understanding for consumers, carers and families.
- Improved continuity of care within the mental health system, along with additional assertive treatment and follow up care in the community.
- Enhanced shared care coordination, liaison and integration across service providers (for example, drug and alcohol and disability services) and other government agencies such as Centrelink.

- Added focus on the individual’s recovery process. One respondent called for a fundamental shift in the values, principles and resources of mental health services to deliver recovery-focused and person-centred services.
- A holistic focus including greater attention to physical, dental and psychosocial care.

“Over 30 percent of respondents thought that a key strength of the mental health services was their approachable, caring and dedicated staff.”

Respondents were also asked to outline what they considered to be the main priority areas for the mental health sector.

The highest priority area applied to mental health workforce capacity and training. The need for attraction, retention and appropriate training was highlighted.

Other high priority areas related generally to more services or greater options with respect to:

- Infant, child and youth mental health services. Early intervention programs in schools, and increased specialised services for high risk groups such as Indigenous youth, young people in rural and remote regions, and those in contact with the justice system.
- The level of funding and support for rural, regional, and forensic mental health services.
- Suicide prevention strategy programs, options for culturally and linguistically appropriate services, and supported accommodation and hostels.

The State Mental Health Policy and Mental Health Strategic Plan 2010–2020 for WA is due for release in early 2010.

For more information, visit www.health.wa.gov.au/mentalhealth, email mentalhealthsurvey@au.pwc.com or call (08) 9238 3126.
Celebrating Mental Health

Johnny Young helped young talent to shine during Mental Health Week.

Song of the Year

Music personality Johnny Young was MC at the annual WAM Song of the Year competition, held during Mental Health Week in October. This year's theme for Mental Health Week was, “Our mental health and wellbeing is about all of us.”

The Department of Health's Mental Health Division sponsored the state’s premiere songwriting competition in order to raise greater awareness of mental health in the community. The competition is an initiative of the WA Music Industry Association (WAM).

The presentation night was held at the Fly By Night Musicians’ Club in Fremantle.

Minister for Mental Health, Dr Graham Jacobs, presented the prize for the inaugural Mentally Healthy category to Black Board Minds for their song “I’m Not Scared.”

Lead singer and guitarist, Andrew Miller, is an occupational therapist at Graylands Hospital, where he coordinates music groups with patients.

“The main chorus of our song is, “I’m not scared of losing my mind I hear it happens to good people all the time,” says Andrew.

“Mental illness is indiscriminate and happens to the best of people, including your family, neighbour, friend, teacher, favourite artist and doctor. There is no real place for shame or blame.

“As a band, we strongly value what music has done for us and its healing potential. Proceeds of our album will help purchase instruments for patients in psychiatric care facilities.”

Local band Umpire was awarded the grand prize for their song, “Streamers.” The award carries a prize of $5000 cash courtesy of the Mental Health Division, a publishing deal with Shock Music Publishing, a recording and mastering package courtesy of Poons Head Studios and James Hewgill Music, and a run of 500 CDs supplied by Diskbank.

Musical entertainment was provided by nominees, including Felicity Groom and Voltaire Twins, who also participated in the youth mental health project, Music Feedback.

MC Johnny Young, best known for hosting the iconic 70s and 80s show Young Talent Time, kept the audience engaged throughout the evening. He even led them down memory lane with a sing-along version of “All My Loving.”

For a full list of winners, visit www.wam.asn.au

Mental Health Good Outcomes Awards

Excellence in mental health programs and service delivery was recognised at the annual Mental Health Good Outcomes Awards.

Presented by the Mental Health Division and a range of sponsors, the awards acknowledge outstanding contributions enhancing good mental health outcomes in WA.

The awards also play an important role in raising public awareness of mental health problems and reducing the stigma surrounding mental illness.

Dr Jacobs announced the winners across the 11 award categories.

Rachel Pittaway from Perth Home Care Services won the Freehills Mental Health Employee Award. Rachel helped establish the Personal Helpers and Mentors program and Young Carers Program in the Wheatbelt region.

“I personally felt honoured to have received this award and was grateful to be able to share this moment with my husband and children,” she says.

“I would like to thank Perth Home Care Services, Wheatbelt Mental Health and the team at the Wheatbelt Personal Helpers and Mentors for their dedication and support.

“The awards assist with the positive concept of Mental Health Week, validating its importance and raising awareness. We have some wonderful, dedicated organisations, groups and individuals working towards better outcomes and a brighter future. I am proud to be a part of the journey.”

For a full list of winners, visit: www.health.wa.gov.au/mentalhealth
Dr Elizabeth Moore and Dr Graham Jacobs with the team behind the Living Libraries DVD

Living Libraries DVD
Dr Jacobs launched the Living Libraries: Promoting mental health and wellbeing DVD at an afternoon tea hosted by the City of Melville and Deputy Mayor, Patricia Phelan.

Living Libraries illustrates ways of organising living libraries by sharing the life experiences of people with a mental illness, carers and mental health professionals. The DVD was produced by the Mental Health Division and film production company Black Cyclone.

One-on-one conversations between “living books” and their “readers” are featured in the DVD. Books include mental health consumer advocate Jacqui Wharton, Senior Noongar advocate Jim Morrison, carers Verna Champion and Maranda Ali, and Freedom Centre Coordinator Dani Wright.

“The living library is a good program because it enables people to face their own prejudices.”

John Toomey, a librarian at Gosnells Knowledge Centre, explains in the DVD the value of holding living libraries in the community.

“We tend to view our community library as a community hub where a vast cross-section of the community will come at any one time. So the opportunity to host a living library and have an impact on the community was such a great idea,” he says.

“For our books it was an opportunity to express themselves to a community that they don’t always see, that doesn’t always see them as people but as a mental health problem.”

“The living library is a good program because it enables people to face their own prejudices,” adds Marcia Coelho, Neighbourhood Support Coordinator at the City of Melville.

The free DVD can be ordered from the Mental Health Division on (08) 9222 4099 or at MentalHealthReception.RoyalSt@health.wa.gov.au

Open Minds Open Doors
Fremantle Hospital’s Alma Street Centre celebrated Mental Health Week with the annual Open Minds Open Doors Art Exhibition.

The popular exhibition is open both to artists who have experienced a mental illness and to people working in the mental health services. It includes a first prize of $1000.

The exhibition is a collaboration with Disability in the Arts, Disadvantage in the Arts WA (DADAA).

According to exhibition coordinator, Anne Oliver, the emotional rewards of creativity are many.

“The varied works and themes submitted by the artists convey a profound message about personal recovery and insight. It is a fantastic opportunity for celebration of self-expression. Artwork can be such a rewarding way of improving self-confidence and empowerment through a focus on creating and then having the courage to exhibit,” she says.

For more information, phone Anne Oliver on (08) 9494 2972.

Collaborative Events
This year saw an increased number of organisations collaborating to plan celebrations.

A series of workshops to reduce workplace stress among community service workers was put on by the WA Association for Mental Health (WAAMH), WA Network of Alcohol and other Drug Agencies, and Western Australian Council of Social Service.

The afternoon program included the basics of Mental Health First Aid, tips to take the stress out of managing emails, information about Employee Assistance Programs, advice for exercising and eating right, and mocktails.

Health by Design launched the Kick Fit CBD Soccer Challenge on National Stress Less Day. Around 100 people took part in the successful event. Winners were the Infurnus, from the Office of Energy. Monies raised were donated to WAAMH.

The annual Blue Sky Mental Health Awareness Day was held at Minnawarra Park in Armadale. The popular event, aimed at promoting the awareness of prevention, early intervention and recovery, is a fun day for the family and includes live performances from WA bands. Blue Sky Day was started by the Armadale Consumer Advice Group following the suicide of two brothers.

The Way Ahead

Family Pathways offers therapeutic, educational and practical support services that can make a difference to the lives of children and their families.

Some families need a circuit breaker. Consider the following scenario. You have a group of children with extreme emotional, social and behavioural difficulties. They have attended several schools and seen numerous health and mental health professionals throughout their lives. Many of these children have poor self-esteem and have experienced psychological trauma. Several of them have developed learning and communication difficulties that hinder their education. For instance, if they are given work at school that they cannot complete, they might feel ashamed and act out to avoid the work, get into trouble and be sent home. At home, a tired and distressed parent punishes them for their actions or, out of despair and misunderstanding, erupts, further undermining their child’s self-esteem.

“Family Pathways aims to break a devastating cycle like this,” says its Manager Tony Fotios.

The statewide clinical service provides outreach in homes and community settings to children up to the age of 12 and their families. It is based at Stubbs Terrace in Shenton Park, as part of Princess Margaret Hospital. A multidisciplinary intensive approach is provided by staff in mental health nursing, social work, clinical psychology, child psychiatry, occupational therapy, speech pathology and teaching.

The service works in partnership with the Department of Education and Training’s Hospital School Services to run a school for up to 10 primary school-age children at a time.

Understanding and addressing the multiple issues affecting the children at Family Pathways is an ongoing process. “They include feelings of insecurity with significant others, temperamental difficulties, developmental delays or learning disabilities, chronic illness or a medical condition, loss and separation, parental mental health issues, and trauma,” says Tony.

He notes that the children and families who attend Family Pathways experience an average of nine out of 27 possible risk factors. He also believes that, without appropriate services, the children are at danger of developing severe and lifelong emotional, social and mental health problems that can in turn adversely affect the next generation.

“A multimodal intervention, tailored to the specific needs of each child, has the potential to counter these problems. It can result in improvements in the child’s developmental trajectory and better overall outcomes for them and their families,” he says.

“For every dollar spent on early intervention, significantly more is saved down the line.”

Other considerable gains are made. For every dollar spent on early intervention, significantly more is saved down the line on criminal justice, mental health, health and other community services—not to mention, reduced individual and societal suffering.

“To help make sense of the factors impacting on our clients, clinicians at Family Pathways talk to the parents, teachers and other health and mental health professionals. They also assess and observe the child in a range of settings.”

Family Pathways won the GESB Government Organisation Award at the 2009 Mental Health Good Outcomes Awards.

For more information about Family Pathways, contact (08) 9382 0730 or visit www.pmh.health.wa.gov.au/services
Barriers to Cross

A recent study has uncovered high rates of poor mental health among transsexual and transgender Western Australians.

The study by Curtin University’s WA Centre for Health Promotion Research found that 50 percent of participants had previously been diagnosed with depression, and that one third had an episode in the year preceding the study. Anxiety disorders were also common, with one third diagnosed at some point, and one fifth within the previous year.

By contrast, data from the Department of Health’s Health and Wellbeing Surveillance System suggest that only around 6 percent of the general population were diagnosed with depression or an anxiety disorder in the same 12-month period.

Participants reported a number of stressors, including estrangement from family and friends, inability to change key identifying documents and difficulty obtaining medical treatment.

“Although transsexualism is a bona fide medical condition, it is often misunderstood by doctors and society generally.”

Lead investigator Zoë Hyde said that access to health services was particularly important for these populations. “Although transsexualism is a bona fide medical condition, it is often misunderstood by doctors and society generally,” she says.

“There’s increasing evidence that something disrupts the process in which the brain develops along male or female lines in utero. Researchers have recently found changes in several genes which seem to be associated with this.

“Despite this, many participants had a lot of trouble finding a doctor who was willing to help or had the knowledge to provide the right care. The few clinicians specialising in this area work in private practice, which left a lot of people with large medical bills.”

Zoë believes that mental health problems are likely to be compounded when transsexual and transgender people were unable to access health services that met their needs.

“Treatment isn’t particularly complex or difficult to provide and there are specialist clinics operating interstate, but not in WA. We have identified a need for similar services here.”

For more information, contact Zoë Hyde at zhyde@meddent.uwa.edu.au

Cracking the Code

WA is now part of two important international genetic research projects.

The first is the Wellcome Trust Case Control Consortium project, which is the largest-ever study of the genetics behind common diseases such as diabetes, rheumatoid arthritis, coronary heart disease and schizophrenia.

Professor Robin Murray of Kings College London will be managing the schizophrenia research arm of the project. He has selected the Western Australian Family Study of Schizophrenia (WAFSS) project to participate, along with other centres in London, Germany and Spain. The WAFSS is the core project at WA’s Centre for Clinical Research in Neuropsychiatry.

WA is now involved in the Australian Schizophrenia Research Bank (ASRB). This is also part of an international collaboration in schizophrenia research. The ASRB project will be nested in WAFSS.

Data will be available to Australian and international teams to support researchers working in the clinical, cognitive, genetic, and brain-imaging fields.

WAFSS and ASRB are seeking research participants, especially people with no immediate family history of mental illness. To volunteer, call 1800 648 223 (Freecall within WA).
Tried and Tested

In each edition, we feature what people have “tried and tested” to promote their mental wellbeing.

Illustrations by Anita Ristovski, a_ristovski@hotmail.com

Change and (E)motion

By An Vo

If change is a constant, then why is moving one of the most stressful things one can do? I’ve changed schools eight times, houses 13 times, cities four times, and countries three times. And yet it can still be a bewildering, disorientating, frightening experience.

Four years ago I moved from Perth to New York City. I encountered many changes. I was now one in a city of 8.3 million, far away from family and friends, and where everything was unfamiliar.

Not being one to throw myself head first into anything, I chose to ease into my new life. I made a small circle of friends; slowly explored my new surroundings neighbourhood by neighbourhood; kept in regular touch with family and friends back in Australia by phone, email, and social networking sites; and surrounded myself with fellow Australians as much as possible.

Somewhere between missing meat pies, cricket, and the Aussie laid back approach to life, I became an adopted New Yorker. It crept up on me slowly. Summer lazing in Central Park surrounded by skyscrapers. Watching funky hipsters in Union Square. Happening upon an impromptu concert in Washington Square at midnight. Looking for the Empire State Building and the Chrysler Building to get my bearings. Knowing that Manhattan streets run east-west and avenues run north-south. Giving subway directions to out-of-town Americans visiting the Big Apple. And a thousand other vignettes and details that mark four years of living somewhere.

I guess from my experience, change is a journey of a thousand steps; one that takes you to places where you’ve never been, helps you grow in ways you’d never unexpected, but whose path back home is always clearly marked.

An Vo won the Premier’s Multicultural Ambassador Youth Award in 2003 for his work with Vietnamese students and an online counselling service. He moved to New York City in 2005 and is now a management consultant in Washington D.C. He still considers himself an Australian, and travels to New York to pick up meat pies.

Bellydancing Beauty

By Fatima Jelly-Belly

I took up bellydancing in 2006 when I became otherwise totally incapacitated by depression and anorexia. My psychiatrist encouraged me to do so, alongside the usual therapeutic regime of medication and cognitive behavioural therapy.

I was surprised and delighted to discover that you don’t necessarily have to have a big belly to bellydance. All body shapes, ages and types can do it—even males!

Bellydancing helps me to focus on what my body can do, not on what it looks like. Rather than staring in the mirror and hating my gradually increasing size, I can dance in front of the mirror and marvel at my abdomen as I learn to isolate the different muscles.

My fitness level has increased through dancing. I feel a tremendous sense of creative achievement and satisfaction. My social confidence has blossomed because I’ve met a bunch of beautiful female friends. I never had friends before.

I am motivated to work hard at my dance. At the same time it has provided me the opportunity to accept the fact that, despite my perfectionistic tendencies, I will never be “perfect” at it. God blessed me with two bunions, flat feet, scoliosis and intractable
Writing at the Crossroads

By Jasmina Brankovich

It was over half a lifetime ago. On a new year’s eve, while soothed by the soft snowfall outside, I bit into a piece of cherry pie and wrote a short story using one of those extinct mechanical typewriters sold in antique shops. The story was replete with nostalgia over the cherry pies my grandmother made and which, unbeknownst to me, I tasted for the last time.

My foray into writing was as much an act of defiance as a form of mental release from the circumstances in which I lived. War was raging around me; the country I once knew as Yugoslavia was falling apart. Young men were returning from the frontline either deeply damaged or in coffins. I was at the crossroads: there was the option of returning to Perth, which, earlier at the age of 14, I found suffocating and uncultured. Then there was the option of doing something seemingly useful, such as nursing, which filled me with an air of invincibility that can belong only to an 18-year-old. I imagined myself to be Miles Franklin, whose ode to (female) rebellion, My Brilliant Career, sustained my fervent imagination. (It is little known that Franklin was a nurse to Serbian troops during the First World War.)

My Australian citizenship provided easy exit out of extremism gripping the country. But I did not want to leave my then boyfriend. A soppy love story played itself out in my mind and on the typewriter. I found writing was the best expression for emotions that others could not either understand or accept. Although fear for my own life was never seriously strong, my fervent opposition to the dominant nationalist politics made me a social outcast. To leave Serbia was the only valid choice I could make to remain true to my values. Against my mother’s best-intentioned wishes, I decided to marry my boyfriend and open up a path to another life.

I have no regrets and find life “in-between” cultures exciting. The privilege this perspective affords is precious and nurturing at most times.

The marriage lasted 10 years, but the insights I gained are enduring. Today, it is my writing—journal-writing, creative writing, writing about rock music—that keeps these insights alive and supports me mentally and spiritually.

Jasmina Brankovich works at the Mental Health Division and holds a PhD in Australian history.

Fatima Jelly-Belly (not her real name) is a writer and allied health professional. She lives in Perth with her cat.
I migrated to Australia in the early 1990s and found it extremely difficult to get a job in my area of specialisation, computer science.

I did eventually secure an administrative role in the public service.

In the subsequent years, the culmination of an accident, a marriage breakdown and a compensation claim against my employer sent me on a downward spiral, the likes of which I had never experienced before.

It was a dark place to be in. There was no light or sense of hope at all—my confidence and self-esteem took a major battering. It was at this point that I felt socially isolated.

Unfortunately, there was no family or community support. I put this down to a lack of understanding that I was suffering from a physical disability and depression.

It was a dear friend who introduced me to The Upper Room, an organisation which works through issues in one’s life with spirituality in mind. It helped me immensely: to meet others in a safe place where I realised I was not alone in my experiences. The people there were real angels. I would say that this was when my life began to turn around and there was a light at the end of the tunnel.

I started being involved with the Ethnic Disability Advocacy Centre (EDAC) on a part-time basis. EDAC helps people from an ethnic background by providing them with individual and systemic advocacy.

“I also know now that it is vital for my wellbeing to be in a positive environment, at home and at work.”

The centre gave me the opportunity to be on their management board, first as a committee member and then as treasurer. The board and staff members were supportive and had empathy for me. It seemed to me that nothing was too much for them to accept. They definitely helped in my recovery and made me feel a valued member of the community.

At the same time I decided to undergo training to be a swimming instructor. Teaching swimming is one of the best experiences I have had. I have taught, among others, people with disabilities and ethnic women. Seeing the end result of helping someone gain new skills is sometimes mindblowing.

These two experiences really brought me back on to the track of life. I have found that life’s journey is never a straight line—it has its bumps, scrapes and fast tracks. How one deals with them is what makes the difference. I have found that all of those experiences have given me inner strength and confidence.

I have learned to laugh and fill my life with joy.

I also know now that it is vital for my wellbeing to be in a positive environment, both at home and at work. Hence, I am working again at EDAC as a project officer and I continue to dabble in swimming teaching.

I keep myself busy by exercising (tai chi and swimming), gardening (there is nothing like playing with dirt), reading, or just sitting and listening to the birds and the wind in the trees.
I have been working in the transcultural mental health sector for over two decades.

Currently I work with the Transcultural Mental Health Services at Royal Perth Hospital, and I can say that over the years it has been both challenging and rewarding.

I deal with people from various cultural backgrounds, including migrants and refugees, who suffer from a range of mental health problems. Among them are Italians who have lived in Australia for many years and are now ageing.

Mental health care workers often find it difficult to provide culturally relevant assessments to people from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds, formulate proper treatment plans for them and address the concerns of their families.

This is why staff at the Transcultural Mental Health Services conduct regular workshops and seminars for mental health services, community agencies and government organisations to assist them in their work with people from CALD backgrounds. We also provide training and seminars to multicultural organisations and educational institutions to raise awareness and reduce stigma.

There is clear evidence that cultural beliefs and practices are known to influence a person’s health and behaviour.

For instance, among Italians from the southern regions, it is thought that a person’s blood changes each spring, so when they feel weak or unwell it is accepted as being normal for the season. For this reason, some do not seek medical help.

In many cultures within Australia, mental illness is a taboo subject. In a lot of instances, it is not discussed among family members and friends because of the stigma and shame associated with it. Moreover, in some cultures the concept of mental illness, and therefore its terminology, does not exist, or is difficult to translate from English. There may also be a lack of understanding about the mental health system and the role of clinicians.

Depressive illnesses and anxiety states are the most prevalent psychological complaints among my older Italian clients.

Being aware of family structure and family dynamics also gives me an advantage, especially when negotiating psychiatric treatment and compliance. Often, gaining trust from family members and relatives and providing explanations in a language they can relate to, is essential to achieving this.

The type of work I’m involved with gives me satisfaction and constant rewards. Being able to help people with a mental illness and their families, and having the opportunity to work in my chosen field of transcultural nursing, is a plus for me.

For more information about the Transcultural Mental Health Services, call (08) 9224 1760.
On working to establish a centre to study social change

It’s in the school of psychology, linked to the Institute of Advanced Studies at UWA. The idea is to look at various contemporary social problems. I’m doing a lot of work on climate change at the moment.

About the difference between attitudes and behaviours

There is a big barrier between attitude and behaviour, and so part of what we are trying to do is to find ways of increasing the likelihood that people will change toward climate-friendly behaviour.

“We are very social creatures, constantly checking what others do.”

Modelling the behaviour of others is an example. There was a very interesting experiment in San Diego, California where they gave households hints about how to reduce electricity consumption. Four messages were given: it’s good for the planet, it’s good for future generations, it will save you money, and your neighbours are doing it. Want to know which was the most successful by order of magnitude? Your neighbours are doing it. We are very social creatures, constantly checking what others do.

About her conference keynote address, “The Power of Indifference”

We often think that explicit prejudice and violence are the only things we have to worry about. My argument is that turning away—denying and being apparently indifferent to the suffering of others—is as much of a problem. It allows the people who are violent and discriminatory to do what they do. It doesn’t protest their actions, it doesn’t seem to change them, and in fact it implicitly endorses their behaviour.

I argue that at the time of the very bad treatment of asylum seekers, a lot of Australians just turned their backs. That was a signal for the worst in the community to do what they wanted to do.

On human cruelty and conformity

I was reading Philip Zimbardo’s work on his prison experiments. As a young psychologist, he set up an experiment about conformity and response to authority.

Students were assigned as prisoners and wardens. They all knew that they were volunteers, yet within six days he had to discontinue it because the behaviour of some of the guards towards the prisoners was so appalling that it was breaching ethical standards. Equally, the reactions of some of the prisoners were such that they had to pull them out because of risks to their mental health.

What drives you to do these things depends on the situation: whether you have power, whether there is social pressure, whether you can remove your identity so you are not in any way held responsible—what Zimbardo calls deindividuation, where you lose your identity and are just one of the mob.

Soldiers. They killed tens of thousands of people. These were ordinary people doing horrible things to one another.

People can behave in the most brutal way and be able to detach themselves.

On handling the pressures of being a Premier

I tried to take a break from time to time, although that usually didn’t amount to more than about a week. I relied a lot on friends and family for support.

I always tried to maintain a sense of the fact that in politics you are replaceable, not irreplaceable.
Families and communities are often not prepared for the emotional and social impact of the suicide of a loved one or colleague.

To help the bereaved, Anglicare WA has launched the West Kimberley Region StandBy Suicide Response Service.

West Kimberley StandBy coordinator, Zoe Evans, says it is important to have a clear pathway for bereaved people to access and receive assistance, both immediately and on an ongoing basis.

“People who have experienced the trauma of losing a friend or loved one to suicide are not always able to articulate their needs, or they may require different types of support at different times,” she says.

“This program offers coordinated support services, reduces duplication of programs and assists in preventing further suicidal behaviour.”

Zoe believes that support for people suffering from grief and loss through suicide is most effective when it is available in their local community.

Research shows that postvention, that is, intervention following a suicide, is crucial to minimising further risks of suicidal behaviour among family members and friends. StandBy engages local community services and support groups to provide immediate assistance, so that the bereaved do not feel alone or unsupported in their communities.

Support is provided 24 hours a day, and families and communities can be assisted according to their needs. This includes, for instance, arranging practical support such as babysitting, organising family healing ceremonies, and providing counselling and community-based training.

StandBy also collaborates with local, state and commonwealth government and non-government services to build mental health support in the community. It aims to provide local, early, ongoing and culturally sensitive help for the bereaved.

Additionally, Anglicare has just launched the East Kimberley StandBy Response Service.

StandBy is run by KinWay, the counselling division of Anglicare, which provides therapeutic and education programs that enhance the quality of relationships and the personal wellbeing of children, individuals, couples, families and communities.

“Support for people suffering grief and loss through suicide is most effective when it is available in their local community.”

KinWay delivers services in Broome, Derby, Kununurra, Halls Creek and Dampier/Karratha in the North West.

Other services provided in the area include general, relationship and sexual abuse counselling, victim support, separation and mediation programs, housing assistance, and family and domestic violence support.

Regular outreach travel ensures that people in remote Aboriginal communities can also access Anglicare’s services in the region. Most of these services are provided to clients at no cost.

For further information about the West Kimberley Region StandBy Suicide Response Service, contact Jennie Gray at Anglicare WA on (08) 9194 2400 or visit www.anglicarewa.com.au
Delivering the Goods

A gallery in Fremantle is benefiting artists with a mental illness.

The Freight Gallery is part of the community-based arts organisation DADAA (Disability in the Arts, Disadvantage in the Arts Australia) that runs a number of arts programs statewide in mental health, disability and ageing.

According to Chris Williams, Manager of Arts Development and the Freight Gallery at DADAA, the gallery differs from other arts interventions in that it follows a social, rather than a medical, model.

“Freight is a work space for artists who have to accommodate the difficulties of living with a mental illness. We provide a supportive studio, where people have complete control over how and when they work.

“Freight is, ultimately, about the art; it’s not a mental health service and it’s not art therapy.”

“Freight is like another home. It gives you the opportunity to take responsibility and it is really good for your health.”

Participants will talk at length about both the personal and professional benefits of the program.

According to one artist, “Freight creates a way for you to cross the line from being an amateur to a full-time artist. You have access to a proper gallery and excellent curatorship.”

Says another, “Freight is like another home. It gives you the opportunity to take responsibility and it is really good for your health.”

Precisely how these benefits contribute to recovery is complex. “How people move through the space and use it is fluid, and will vary according to their changing personal circumstances,” says Chris. “It may or not work for people, depending on a number of issues.”

People with a mental illness are all too aware that recovery is ongoing and that the journey is a very individual one.

Artist Pauline Miles says that the gallery allows participants to be seen, first and foremost, as an artist and second—if at all—as a person with a mental illness.

Says Pauline, “Freight allows others to have hope in us, and when our families and the larger community have that faith, it gives us opportunities to believe in ourselves and to pursue meaningful activity.”

For more information about the Freight Gallery, call DADAA at (08) 9430 6616 or email arts@dadaawa.asn.au
Both local groups have reputations for being dynamic live acts.

For the last three years, Music to Open Your Mind has offered communities in the southern suburbs a free family concert and market day with live music, market stalls, children’s activities, and information stalls from a wide range of mental health and support services. The Minister for Mental Health, Dr Graham Jacobs, was on hand to open the event in 2009.

Music to Open Your Mind is hosted by the South Metropolitan Area Health Service, Mental Health and the South Metropolitan Mental Health Advisory Group, with the belief that the power of music can build social cohesion and reduce the stigma associated with mental illness.

Music to Open Your Mind 2010 will be held on Sunday 21 March 2010 at Kings Square, Fremantle. For more information, visit http://southmetropolitan.health.wa.gov.au/music

Dave Mann
Last year I started an art degree at Curtin University, following a period of chronic headaches, extreme exhaustion, clinical depression and anxiety that left me incapable of working or studying.

In September 2006 I was suicidal and desperate; my doctor had increased my doses of Zoloft, which were not only ineffective but made me extremely sick. In early 2007 I discontinued the medication and found that my head cleared a lot.

Later that year I held a solo show and participated in a group show at Kieth and Lottie gallery in Northbridge.

These heralded significant moves forward in my confidence and motivation. At the end of 2007 I decided it was time to really break out of the cycle and attempt study. I applied for the art degree and was accepted.

At university I have explored emotions, memories and how our history affects our present. The response to my work has been positive.

“My goal was to have a visual dictionary of what depression is in day-to-day existence.”

Last semester I worked on a photography project to discover how I can best describe depression. My goal was to have a visual dictionary of what depression is in day-to-day existence. In my personal journey over the last few years I have found depression to be a collection of moments, sometimes contradictory to each other.

A major hurdle during the project was my relapse into a state of depression. Therefore, instead of being retrospective in nature, the images became a firsthand account.

Some of these captured moments are bleak and empty, lifeless and grey. However, you can see that my depression wasn’t at the same level as it was before. You can see an underlying hope that I didn’t have in my previous struggle. This is very positive for me, and I hope that it brings hope to the viewer.
Taking a Stand

An arts educator recently travelled the state, using the performing arts to teach young people about physical and mental health.

David Williams, from New York’s NiteStar Program, toured Broome, Roebourne, Mullewa, Kalgoorlie, Albany, Narrogin and Perth to conduct workshops in schools and with community health and education groups.

The NiteStar Program uses drama, music and peer education to promote healthy attitudes and choices among young people.

David’s visit was funded by Healthway’s Arts and Health Visiting Fellow Program, while the workshops were hosted by the Pilbara-based Michael Leslie Foundation for the Arts.

He took time out from touring to answer some questions.

Do you see a link between performance and self-esteem?

Performance, sport, dancing—anything that a young person finds personally special or they can be proud of—does wonders for their self-esteem. In terms of health, someone who has high self-esteem is more likely to be empowered, find the information they need to take care of themselves, and stand up to people who pressure them to make unhealthy choices.

Are the issues for young people here similar to those in New York?

Yes, for the most part. The topics that come up are pregnancy, alcohol, drugs, peer pressure and bullying. Bullying has been a big issue. It’s been a big one in the States, too, and that’s something we have been asked to cover by the schools.

How have you been facilitating the classes in WA?

There is a concept of shame in a lot of Aboriginal youth that Michael Leslie has spoken about. I imagined people being embarrassed, shy and having low self-esteem, but I didn’t really anticipate the extent of it. You can have up to half the students in a class who wouldn’t even tell me their name aloud. If you can’t stand up and say, this is who I am and I’m proud to be this person, how are you possibly going to demand the care and information that you need?

So, we gradually get you to the point where you can be present as a person. We do things that are silly and fun because if you can act like an “idiot” in front of people then you can do anything.

We start with the group dynamic—it’s less intimidating—and then we move into more intense stuff like creating scenes and performing them in front of an audience. I’ve seen this achieved with various degrees of success. In some classes the students get really excited, while in other classes, just the fact they got up and said words in front of people was a big step.

“The topics that come up are pregnancy, alcohol, drugs, peer pressure and bullying.”

We play a game called “Take a Stand.” The game is pretty common in health work and other kinds of facilitation work. I read a statement and the students decide whether they agree or disagree, which helps them voice their opinions. With one shy group, we ended up having a discussion about the issues in their community. They were extremely forthcoming in talking about very serious topics. They had strong ideas about what needed to be done in their community. It was inspiring.

Visit: www.healthway.wa.gov.au
www.michaell Leslie.com.au
www.nitestar.org
Agency Updates

The Compassionate Friends of Western Australia Inc.
This volunteer-run, self-help group supports bereaved parents, siblings and grandparents. Friendship nights and morning teas are held each month for bereaved parents in the metropolitan area. Friendship nights are also offered in the city for siblings.
Compassionate Friends offers a range of support groups for families who have lost a child or children from a specific cause. It includes a coffee morning for families that have lost a member to suicide.

Friendship nights and suicide support groups are also hosted in Albany and Mandurah, while morning teas are held in Bunbury.

Compassionate Friends produces a comprehensive grief package and newsletters for the bereaved.

For further information, contact (08) 9486 8711, Freecall 1800 628 118, email tcf.wa@eftel.net.au or visit www.compassionatefriendswa.org.au

Ethnic Disability Advocacy Centre
The Ethnic Disability Advocacy Centre (EDAC) is a non-government organisation that advocates for people with a disability from a non-English speaking background.

EDAC has just completed a mental health project called Double Jeopardy of Mental Health: Dual Diagnosis. The project focused on EDAC's capacity to manage the increasing number of people with mental health needs accessing their service. Multilingual mental health posters and brochures were developed to raise awareness of mental health issues and encourage consumers to seek assistance and support.

The project was funded by the Mental Health Council of Australia and the Department of Health and Ageing.

For more information, contact EDAC on (08) 9388 7455, Freecall 1800 659 921, at admin@edac.org.au or visit www.edac.org.au

KidsMatter Early Childhood
KidsMatter Early Childhood will be piloted in over 100 preschools and long day care centres across Australia in 2010 and 2011.

KidsMatter Early Childhood is a national mental health promotion, prevention and early intervention initiative. It was developed in collaboration with the Department of Health and Ageing, beyondblue, the Australian Psychological Society, and Early Childhood Australia.

The initiative will assist preschools and long day care services to improve the mental wellbeing of young children. It focuses on strengthening protective factors and minimising risk factors.

Services participating in the initiative will be supported with resources, professional development, a KidsMatter Early Childhood facilitator and materials to share with families.

For more information about KidsMatter Early Childhood, or to register your interest, visit www.kidsmatter.edu.au

Equal Opportunity Commission
The Equal Opportunity Commission can help redress the discrimination that people with a mental illness often face.

Last year the Equal Opportunity Commission dealt with 2207 inquiries regarding discrimination. Some of these involved people who were denied accommodation, employment, access to facilities and educational opportunities because of their mental health condition or history.

Complaints can be made through the enquiry line. This free service provides professional and confidential advice based on the Equal Opportunity Act (1984). It can help a person understand their legal rights and determine what further action can be taken.

The Equal Opportunity Commission also provides a free conciliation service.

For more information, contact the Equal Opportunity Commission on Freecall 1800 798 149 or (08) 9216 3900 or visit www.eoc.wa.gov.au

Fremantle Multicultural Centre Inc.
The Fremantle Multicultural Centre provides services to migrants and refugees from a diverse range of cultural and linguistic backgrounds.

The centre runs a number of programs, including crisis accommodation and mental health services.

The centre also runs art classes each Wednesday afternoon as part of Mental Health Access Service, which is funded by the Department of Health’s Mental Health Division.

Participants have included people from around the world, including Europe, Thailand, Bali, China, Africa, Sri Lanka, South America and the US. New participants are welcome.

For more information, contact the Fremantle Multicultural Centre on (08) 9336 8282 or visit www3.fmcwa.com.au

Ishar Multicultural Women’s Health Centre Inc.
Ishar Director, Andrea Creado, co-convened the 3rd WA Transcultural Mental Health Conference, held in September. The conference was held jointly with TheMHS and the Refugee Health conferences.

Ishar provides inclusive, holistic and culturally sensitive services for women and their families to promote healthy living.

The centre provides multicultural mental health counselling, drug and alcohol counselling and education, pregnancy support, a parenting program, and a support program and counselling and for carers.

Many of the programs are free or at a reduced cost.
Women’s health information is also available in English, Arabic, Burmese, Farsi and Swahili.

For more information, contact Ishar on (08) 9345 5335, at info@ishar.org.au or visit www.ishar.org.au
The signs of mental illness aren’t always this obvious.

If you’re worried about yourself or someone you know,

call 1800 18 SANE or visit www.sane.org
Recognition for Carers

West Australian Tony Fowke AM has been elected President of the World Federation for Mental Health. He is the first carer to take the role. Tony was previously President of the Oceanic region.

Tony has been a carer for more than 25 years and has had a long history in campaigning for the needs of people with mental health problems and their carers. He was appointed a Member of the Order of Australia in 2003.

Carer representative Keith Wilson AM has been appointed a Member of the Order of Australia for service to people with a mental illness and their carers. Keith is a former WA Minister for Health and past President of the West Australian Association for Mental Health. He received the Leanne Wood Award for Excellence at the Mental Health Good Outcomes Award in 2007.

Ken Steele OAM was awarded a Medal of the Order of Australia. Ken is a long-standing advocate for mental health carers. He received the John Da Silva Carers Award at last year’s Mental Health Good Outcomes Awards.

Finding CALM

CALM (Computer Assisted Learning for the Mind) is a website focusing on positive psychology. Originally offered to students at the University of Auckland, it is now available to the public.

The site is dedicated to areas which promote enduring and genuine happiness: developing mental resilience; managing stress, anxiety and depression; cultivating healthy relationships; and finding meaning in everyday life.

Audiofiles containing specific information and exercises are included, as well as links to relevant sites.

Visit: www.calm.auckland.ac.nz

Caring for the Carer

beyondblue recently launched The beyondblue Guide for Carers, a 40-page booklet developed by carers.

The guide provides practical strategies, advice and guidance on how to deal with a range of situations. It also encourages people in a caring role to look after their own health and wellbeing.

The guide contains anecdotes from carers across Australia, allowing others to draw support and knowledge from their experiences.

beyondblue also has a reference group called blueVoices, which is made up of people with depression or anxiety and their carers. The aim is to ensure that their voices are heard throughout all beyondblue’s activities.

For more information, call 1300 22 4636 or visit www.beyondblue.org.au

Rural and Remote Help

People living with a mental illness in rural and remote Australia will benefit from the extension of the Personal Helpers and Mentors (PHaMS) program.

The Commonwealth Government is providing $10.9 million over three years for seven new regional PHaMS sites. The new PHaMs sites in WA are at Narrogin, including Katanning, and Warburton.

The program targets people who cannot manage their daily activities or live independently because they have a severe mental illness. Personal helpers and mentors work one-on-one, helping people manage every day tasks, stay connected with essential clinical and support services, and improve relationships and community involvement.

Three PHaMS sites have already been rolled out at Yuendumu in the Northern Territory, the West Kimberley-Broome, and the APY Lands in South Australia.

Visit: www.fahcsia.gov.au

Reaching Out to the Pros

Inspire Foundation’s Reach Out Pro is a new site that encourages health care professionals to become acquainted with new technologies and online resources to better assist young people. Reach Out Pro is closely linked to ReachOut.com, which offers young people access to an online community, mental health information and advice.

Resources for use with young people experiencing mental health difficulties include fact sheets, digital stories and other online media. Reach Out Pro also offers practical ideas and advice for using different technologies in clinical practice, through clinician reviews, interviews and step-by-step guidance. A glossary of technology terms is provided.

Visit: www.reachoutpro.com.au

When Relationships End

The latest edition of Men and Separation: Navigating the Future is now available.

The free booklet is produced by Relationships Australia (Victoria), beyondblue and MensLine.

The booklet highlights the vulnerabilities many men face during and after a relationship breakdown, such as depression. It explains the signs of depression and provides advice on getting help and treatment. The booklet talks about the grieving process associated with separation and loss.

Men and Separation offers practical advice on issues such as maintaining physical and mental wellbeing, managing the impact of separation on children, relating to former partners and navigating the legal system. It contains testimonials from men who have been through separation and divorce.

To download or order copies of the booklet, contact Relationships Australia on 1300 364 277 or visit www.relationships.com.au, or contact beyondblue on 1300 22 4636 or visit www.beyondblue.org.au
Acting From the Heart
Edited by Sarah Mares and Louise Newman
Finch Publishing. (Anthology)
Review by Fiona Rutkay, Melbourne writer

Acting from the Heart is a collection of personal stories written by refugee activists who were part of one of the biggest grassroots political campaigns in Australia's history. They are psychiatrists, psychologists, clergy, lawyers, journalists and everyday Australians who, in some cases, decided to act after seeing a single news report. The activists befriend and visit detainees, set up charities, take phone calls in the middle of the night from suicidal asylum seekers, and perform legal and bureaucratic gymnastics to halt deportations. The images in the book are unforgettable. A twelve-year-old boy inside the Baxter Detention Centre rocks back and forth, dribbling and sucking, flapping his hands trying to comfort himself. Inside Woomera, a psychologist kneels beside a wailing woman, using her hand as a buffer between the woman's head and the wall as the woman bashes herself against it.

The subject matter is hard to stomach, but for all the deportations, suicide attempts and families destroyed, there is the resilience of the detainees, the joy of release from detention and the hope of new beginnings.

Above all, Acting from the Heart shows that individuals do have the power to change people's lives for the better.

Growing up Asian in Australia
Edited by Alice Pung
Black Inc. (Anthology)

This book is filled with true tales of Asians growing up in Australia. Each short story reveals the sometimes confusing and conflicting moments of being raised the Asian way in an Australian environment.

Contributors include famous Asian-Australians like TV icon Dr Cindy Pan, chef Kylie Kwong, broadcaster Annette Shun Wah and film director Tony Ayres.

While I had many favourites in this book, I connected most with Ivy Tseng's "Chinese Lessons." Like Ivy, I dreaded the Saturday morning Chinese classes and wished we had sleep-ins instead.

I laughed when the author wished she could be "white or Aussie" as they were interchangeable according to her. There was a secret wish to be a part of "them"—like bringing vegemite sandwiches to school rather than a feast of rice and vegetables.

Despite my whining, however, I admit that reading this book brought on a sense of gratitude towards my parents. They left their home and endured hardships to raise their children in this beautiful country.

An important message of the book is that there is value in retaining one's heritage, whatever one's cultural background. It could be the ability to speak in one's mother tongue or know how to cook a traditional dish. (I'm much more proficient in the first category.)

Overall the book is a good read for all. But take heed—there are some tear jerking moments.

The Soloist
Written by Steve Lopez
Black Swan/Transworld. (Autobiography)

The Soloist is now a major film—the story of Nathaniel Ayers, homeless, schizophrenic, violin-playing prodigy, and journalist Steve Lopez who befriends him.

Being only one man's perspective on this relationship, it's understandable that the book is really about Lopez facing his own demons. Tough questions of patronising attitudes, one-off charitable actions, and the tremendous demands this relationship will place on his patience, are all raised and faced.

The relationship has many pitfalls and backsliding, as the two gradually learn to trust one another. As his relationship with Nathaniel grows, Lopez learns that having him "treated"—whether with medication, accommodation, or therapy—isn't as important as simply making a connection with him and nurturing his talents. Nathaniel is an individual with a profound gift for performance; music is healing and restorative for him, and gives him all the "quality of life" he desires.

Desire: this is the keyword.

Lopez learns painfully that no two people with a mental illness are alike, and that there is no one model for treatment. Nathaniel may never be "happy" on the terms dictated by Lopez; nor does he seek that kind of life. Lopez cannot "save" him, but then again, he doesn't have to. He just has to be his friend.

This book is about hard life lessons for people who don't live with a mental illness. Although over 300 pages, it's worth it for the wealth of detail.
Boys Boys Boys!

Yes

Independent

Review by Cindy Chi, Mental Health Division

Yes is the debut album from local indie pop sensation Boys Boys Boys! This promising band of six young vibrant musicians was nominated for four WA Music Industry Awards in 2009, including Favourite Newcomer and Best Commercial Pop Act.

Their songs are fun-loving, full of energy and have plenty of electro pop harmonies. The playful song about spandex-wearing budgies brought a smile to my face. I also couldn’t help but wonder, how they can say “Ticky-Ticky Boom” so fast?!

The band’s mission, as stated on their website, is to make sure their listeners smile and dance. I think they have achieved it.

Johannes Luebbers Dectet

Make Some Noise

Independent

Review by Philippa Martyr, Centre for Clinical Research in Neuropsychiatry

This release from local jazz ensemble Johannes Luebbers Dectet is part Gustav Holst and part cocktail lounge, like James Morrison composing the incidental music for the 1960s TV series Get Smart.

The Dectet sports the usual range of saxes, clarinet, trombone, and trumpet, but there’s also French horn, oboe, flugelhorn, and cor anglais. I have to single out special guest Troy Roberts for honourable mention; he lays down some very smooth soprano sax on track six, “The Illegal.”

If you like Radiohead’s “Paranoid Android,” you may not enjoy the Dectet’s version, which aims for irony but loses focus. The cover of the Beach Boys’ “God Only Knows” works better; it has a stronger melodic line which the Dectet work with, rather than against.

Paper Heart

Directed by Nick Jasenovec

Review by Jasmina Brankovich, Mental Health Division

What an endearing, funny and delightful little film! Charlene Yi, comedian and author, plays herself. She is searching for love about which she is, paradoxically, cynical.

Yi interviews a range of people, from friends to passers-by, about love: how it feels, where to find it. Enter actor Michael Cera (also as himself), and Yi starts blushing at the thought and talk of him. On their first date they share lunch at the local take-away.

The couple’s relationship encounters the usual obstacles common to most romantic relationships: the getting-to-know-you excitement and rush of meeting someone new, the conflicting expectations and mounting tensions. In fact, Yi lampoons the notion of sappy, Hollywood-style love as much as she is genuinely inquisitive about its nature. I strongly sympathised with her exploration of the (im)possibility of living a perfect romance in a postmodern age.

As the movie progresses, the constant presence of the camera and film crew becomes an increasing nuisance to the couple. This voyeuristic aspect of Yi’s search for love made me wonder about the almost universal need to know other people’s business, evident in the obsession with celebrity gossip that dominates popular culture. Rather than the nature of “real” love, it is the human need to persistently observe misery, scandal and unachievable happiness that is the underlying subject of this film.

Moon

Directed by Duncan Jones

Review by Tristan Fidler, Curtin University of Technology

Science fiction is primarily driven by special effects and explosive spectacle, so Moon is a refreshing example, an intimate film dealing with issues of isolation and identity in a near-future setting.

Astronaut Sam Bell (Sam Rockwell) has lived alone on the moon for three years, employed to oversee the harvesters that are mining excess solar energy to be sent back down to Earth. With a robot named GERTY (voiced by Kevin Spacey) as his sole companion, the only hope Sam receives is in the video transmissions from his attractive wife and their daughter. With his contract finishing in two weeks and a return home imminent, Sam begins to see strange things and causes several accidents, one of which results in a shocking discovery... another Sam Bell, a clone.

What is compelling about Moon is how Sam and his clone accept their situation in a matter-of-fact manner. Underlying their story is a concern for the fragility of the mind and the need for human contact, even if it is with a replicated self. In an amusing, touching scene, Sam asks his clone, “I’m real lonely. Will you shake my hand?”

Director Duncan Jones creates a suitably eerie atmosphere with the lunar landscapes and Clint Mansell’s excellent score emphasises the film’s haunting tone. In the end though, the strength of this film rests on the charismatic Rockwell, both funny and moving as the man confronted with the limits of his own self.
Stone Circle
385 Newcastle street
Independent
Review by Kieran Crowe, Mental Health Division

If one thing stands out upon first listening to Stone Circle’s debut album, it’s the band’s unashamed affection for non-pretentious, hook laden rock.

While it is easy to draw comparisons to the Nickelback-esque soft rock that has mired commercial radio of late, Stone Circle’s breakdowns and infectious choruses indicate the boys are there to enjoy themselves and so should you.

Lyrically, songs like “Touch The Other Side,” which explores themes of hardship and resilience, add layers of depth to what is otherwise an upbeat record.

A special mention should be reserved for the excellent vocals of Jeremy Harris and the work of Craig Skelton whose arrangements shine throughout. 385 Newcastle Street is a polished release that should have you humming its catchy riffs for weeks on end.

Chaos Divine
Avalon
Independent
Review by Bill Darby, Health Workforce

An impressive debut by highly regarded local metal quintet, Avalon features precise musicianship and dense, pulverising riffs aplenty. Chaos Divine has been compared to progressive metal acts such as Arch Enemy and Opeth, but has carved a sound that is distinctively its own.

The band explores sonic territory beyond traditional metal, while maintaining trademark rhythmic and vocal intensity. The opener, “Contortions,” features soaring vocal harmonies, while “Cages” displays an unexpectedly uplifting feel and quieter acoustic passages. However the band reliably returns to brutal riffage and growing vocals throughout.

The CD also includes “Refuse the Sickness,” which won a 2008 WAM Song of the Year award in the Heavy Rock/Metal category.

pool (no water)
Written by Mark Ravenhill
Directed by Adam Mitchell
Black Swan State Theatre Company
Performed at PICA (Perth Institute of Contemporary Arts) from 11 to 27 September 2009
Review by Mel Jenkins, Aspermont

We hate it when our friends become successful….

Morrissey’s astute observation above may not have played in this production, but as a persistent refrain thrumming through my mind it sums up the essence of pool (no water) very aptly.

The play opens with a collective of artists, embittered by a personal lack of success in their field. In contrast, former comrade Sally has grown too big for her Doc Marten boots since detaching from “the group” and garnering accolades far and wide for her work.

At her invitation, the friends find themselves at Sally’s palatial home where the pool serves as the visible measure of her success and intended means for the reunited peers to bond and re-live skinny-dipping experiences of days gone by.

A pool with no water puts paid to that plan and spins the collective off in an entirely new direction, one in which their artistic endeavours might be finally realised, albeit at the expense of some serious ethical quandaries.

The cast of five does well in portraying the unnamed characters that form the group. Perhaps a little less fluid is the transition made when some of the ensemble are intermittently required to channel Sally’s character within their dialogue. However, by the play’s denouement, Jacinta John’s final turn as Sally proves a most effective tool in offering a scathing observation of events.

Of paramount importance to the production is its centrepiece. The multi-faceted podium is a movable prop that serves well as pool, bed and platform to otherwise showcase the physical energy required of the cast.

I was hooked fairly early, thanks to a short frenetic dance montage. It was enough to maintain the smart pace of a show only an hour long, and to dislodge the aforementioned Morrissey dirge from my subconscious and contribute further to my overall enjoyment of the play.

WANTED
Albums from WA bands for review in Head2Head.
Work from WA artists, illustrators and photographers for inclusion.
Contact Duc Dau on (08) 9222 4072 or at Duc.Dau@health.wa.gov.au
Tara Gregson is a loving wife and a mother of two teenagers. She is also Alice, an immaculately dressed homemaker who believes in traditional values. At other times she is Buck, a Vietnam veteran who drinks beer and leers at women. And every now and then she is T, a wild teen who wears midriffs and flirts with men, including Tara’s husband.

Alice, Buck and T are the alternative personalities or “alters” of Tara who has dissociative identity disorder (DID), once known as multiple personality disorder.

“The show excels in that it is not simply about the multifaceted Tara; it is also about her family.”

Australian actor Toni Collette is both convincing and seemingly effortless in her roles as Tara and her alters. She describes Tara’s situation.

“Tara Gregson has a beautiful family; she has a very rich life. But, she also was someone who went through a lot of horrible things in her youth and subsequently lives with multiple personalities. That occurs within people who are abused, in order to survive. It’s incredible—part of the brain shuts down and creates a whole other personality that comes forth,” she says.

The alters come and go, leaving Tara with no recollection of their actions. As she achingly exclaims to her husband, chunks of her life have gone missing to these fragmented forces she cannot control.

Series creator Diablo Cody, who earned an Academy Award for her screenplay of Juno, says that when most people hear of DID, they think of tragic stories or comedies that make light of the disorder. She wanted to do something different.

“A sensitive show about a family coping with DID seemed revolutionary to me. I did my homework so I could make Tara as real as possible,” she says.

The series, while a comedy, takes DID seriously, as expert consultation is sought for each episode to make the show realistic. The show excels in that it is not simply about the multifaceted Tara; it is also about her family.

Devoted husband Max (John Corbett), feisty daughter Kate (Brie Larson) and sensitive son Marshall (Keir Gilchrist) juggle their individual joys and problems with the unpredictability of Tara’s alters. When the alters appear, events ensue that are by turns humorous and genuinely poignant; Buck’s and Marshall’s punch up against Kate’s boyfriend to save her “honour”—to Kate’s public embarrassment—is TV gold.

Unlike the other family members, however, Tara’s sister Charmaine (Rosemarie DeWitt) believes Tara is pretending in order to receive attention. It’s perhaps unfortunate that Charmaine’s scepticism is linked to jealousy rather than to the contentiousness of the disorder itself.

Nonetheless, the show is on the whole a tribute to the positive aspects of family. How does a family cope under unusual circumstances and stay together? While Tara’s husband and children undergo tribulations, they are genuinely supportive of her attempt to understand her selves and to heal. By coming off her medication in order to do this, the alters are given freedom to resurface.

Yet, we realise that the alters have been around for so long that they have become a part of the characters’ world. You can’t choose your family, but you can learn to live with them.

The first season of United States of Tara recently screened on ABC1. The second series is currently in production.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date:</th>
<th>Event:</th>
<th>Details</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| t: (08) 9431 3400  
| f: (08) 9431 2688 |
| e: reception@asetts.org.au  
| t: (08) 9227 2700 |
| 26 – 29 November 2009 | Conference – Australian and New Zealand Association of Psychology, Psychiatry and Law 29th Annual Congress (Perth) | www.anzappl.org  
| e: info@conorg.com.au  
| t: (03) 9349 2220 |
| 1 – 2 December 2009 | Workshop – ASIST – Applied Suicide Intervention Skills Training (Perth) | www.lifelinewa.org.au  
| e: lydiancheava@lifelinewa.org.au  
| t: (08) 9261 4411 |
| e: conferences@vajrayana.com.au  
| t: (02) 8719 5118 |
| 2 December 2009 | Workshop – Developing stepped care approaches to youth comorbidity (Perth) | www.dao.health.wa.gov.au  
| e: DAO.Education@health.wa.gov.au  
| t: (08) 9370 0327 |
| 2 December 2009 | Event – Live it with Line Dancing (Perth) | communitylife.disability.wa.gov.au  
| e: Amber.howard@dsc.wa.gov.au  
| t: (08) 9329 2392 |
| 2, 3 and 4 December 2009 | Workshop – DRUMBEAT (Perth) | www.holyoake.org.au  
| e: sfaulkner@holyoake.org.au  
| t: (08) 9416 4444 |
| e: aspr@consec.com.au  
| t: (02) 6251 0675 |
| e: gallery@central.wa.edu.au  
| t: (08) 9427 1318 |

**Future editions of head2head**

**Volume 3, Number 1:** Wealth and Wellbeing  
**Volume 3, Number 2:** Resilience

**Deadlines for contributions:**  
**Volume 3, Number 1:** 15 December 2009  
**Volume 3, Number 2:** 1 May 2010

We are also looking for contributors to review books, movies, CDs and plays.  
We can include your event on our Diary Dates page.  
Contact Duc Dau on (08) 9222 4072 or at Duc.Dau@health.wa.gov.au
WHAT IF WE TALKED ABOUT MUSIC THE SAME WAY WE TALK ABOUT MENTAL ILLNESS?

HOW ARE YOU FEELING? ARE YOU YABU [ROCK] SOLID?

How do you cope when you feel like you’re just about to crack? Tell us at: www.musicfeedback.com.au

You can win a CD/DVD of the hottest new WA music

‘Yabu’ means ‘rock’ or ‘gold’ in Wongatha