Sonia Vinci
a new media champion for mental health

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WA’s New Minister for Mental Health

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Welcome to the inaugural edition of Head2Head, the new magazine of WA Mental Health. This publication aims to headline the message of mental health to a broad, statewide audience. Fittingly, the theme of this edition is “What’s new.”

When you read through the interviews, articles and updates, you will see that many exciting things are taking place in the WA mental health sector. You will learn more about recent changes in leadership at prominent agencies Carers WA, ARAFMI, and the Council of Official Visitors. You will find out what’s new in WA mental health.

I want mental heath to be “out there” – as everybody’s business and owned by all, just as mental health problems can be experienced by all of us. So, if you are interested in mental health, if you have experience of mental illness, or if you provide a service to people with mental health problems, then Head2Head is for you.

Dr Steve Patchett
Executive Director, WA Mental Health

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Head2Head is also available online at www.health.wa.gov.au/mentalhealth

Head2Head is available in alternative formats upon request from a person with a disability.
Sonia Vinci a new media champion for mental health

When Channel Ten journalist Charmaine Dragun took her own life last year, her friend Sonia Vinci was one of many rocked by the news.

“She was gorgeous and talented and had so much to live for,” Sonia says. “Her death made me realise just how hidden this illness can be—such a beautiful face on our screens each night masking such a personal pain.”

The sadness Sonia felt strengthened her resolve to campaign for mental health. She agreed to be a media champion for mental health to help raise awareness and reduce stigma in the community.

The effects of mental illness, she knows, can touch us all. “I don’t believe there are too many people out there who are either not affected by it or not close to someone who suffers from mental health problems.”

“There have been some points in my life where I could have become depressed,” she continues. “Luckily enough, I am aware of the tell-tale signs to be able to seek the right help. Some members of my family have, at times, suffered from depression.

“I am hoping that I can assist the people who suffer in silence by letting them know that it’s okay to seek help and that they are not alone.

“If I can stop just one person from reaching the darkest depths of despair and ensure they seek the necessary assistance, then my job as a champion of mental health would be worthwhile indeed.”

While acknowledging the improvements in community attitudes in recent years, Sonia believes that more can be done. She is concerned by the intolerance of some communities towards people with a mental illness.

“I have covered and reported on many mental health issues over the years.

The ones that break my heart are of communities banding together to keep a person suffering from a mental illness out of the suburb—it’s that stigma that stops people from seeking help.”

“I don’t believe there are too many people out there who are either not affected by it or not close to someone who suffers from mental health problems.”

Sonia was impressed by Geoff Gallop’s decision to go public with his battle with depression and feels that it has done much to de-stigmatise mental illness.

“I believe his honesty has helped the cause greatly and I take my hat off to him. I think that hearing about his issues showed us that you can function and still have a mental illness and that it can affect anyone at anytime.”

Sonia believes that the media can play a vital role in informing the community about mental health issues. She would like to see mental health at the forefront of news reporting, and she encourages journalists and media outlets to enter future WA Mental Health Good Outcomes Awards, which includes a Media Achievement category that recognises responsible reporting and awareness-raising of mental health.

This year’s award in Media Achievement was won by Andrew Denton, Anita Jacoby and Sonya Pemberton for “Angels and Demons,” a thought-provoking and compassionate documentary on the experiences of those living with a mental illness, particularly schizophrenia. (For more on the film, see our article “Of Angels and Demons” on page 30).

“I believe,” says Sonia, “that balanced reporting of health issues and raising awareness will lead to an acceptance in the community of people who suffer from a mental illness.

“It’s this awareness that will allow us to speak freely and openly and in turn destroy the stigma that has been associated with mental illness for so long.”

She hopes Charmaine’s legacy will help. Sonia believes in the importance of talking about, and reporting sensitively on, issues such as suicide. She says that Charmaine’s story “is one of so many tragic tales that can be told by grieving families everywhere. To ensure her death was not in vain, we need to raise awareness about mental health issues in the community.

“The media can play a vital role in informing the community about mental health issues.”

“If a mental health story educates, raises awareness or helps just one person, then it’s a good story.”

Sonia Vinci joined Channel Nine Perth in October 2000 and two and half years later joined Dixie Marshall presenting the nightly news.
Dr Jacobs comes from a rural health background. After graduating as a doctor from the University of Western Australia in 1975, he returned to his hometown of Esperance where he began his 30-year career as a country GP.

“When you’re a country GP you soon realise that you have greater needs placed on you because support services that you take for granted in the city just don’t exist or are not as freely available in the country,” says Dr Jacobs.

“I have always believed we need a fresh approach to the care of people with mental health requirements. As a priority, we need to be able to keep people within the community itself, and supported accommodation is one of the key factors in achieving this. The state will continue to have this as a priority focus.

“The challenge is great but achievable. Improving mental health service provision is a challenge that can no longer be ignored by government.

“Mental health and wellbeing has become everybody’s business.”

Patients in many parts of rural WA currently do not have ready access to specialist mental health support. They may be required to travel by the Royal Flying Doctor Service to Perth to receive the care they require. To a person at this most vulnerable time, the distance from home, family and friends can only add to their distress.

Dr Graham Jacobs, the First WA Minister for Mental Health

On 23 September 2008, history was made when Dr Graham Jacobs was sworn in as the first Western Australian Minister for Mental Health.
“It is rare for any person today not to be aware of, or not to be in contact with, a person that has been a consumer of the mental health system, from depression through to psychosis. Mental health and wellbeing has become everybody’s business.

“My overall vision is to change the current mental health model so as to identify and address the needs for a range of services at a local level. For country people, I want to ensure their needs are met sooner and their requirements for metropolitan facilities are reduced.

“For the model to work, there needs to be a commitment statewide, from the Kimberley in the north to the Great Southern region. The model also requires a review of metropolitan services.

“The Barnett Government has made a number of commitments in this area and I look forward to carrying through on these promises.

“The stigma around mental health problems is one of our greatest barriers, but by working together we are breaking down that wall brick by brick.”

“We will appoint an independent Western Australian Mental Health and Wellbeing Commissioner to conduct a comprehensive review and recommend reform of the mental health system. We aim to develop a mental health safety net of services that will meet the needs of people, their families and extended support networks.

“The six month report from the Mental Health and Wellbeing Commissioner will be tabled in parliament to ensure that people with mental health requirements are treated with respect and dignity.

“We have currently committed $13 million towards the development and implementation of a comprehensive Western Australian suicide prevention strategy and action plan.

“We will introduce a new Mental Health Act based on the review of the current mental health act of 1996 (completed in 2004).

“There will always be a place for specialist mental health care, but what is just as important is that we support and assist people back into their lives and the community.

“The stigma around mental health problems is one of our greatest barriers, but by working together we are breaking down that wall brick by brick.”
Melbourne has the Choir of Hard Knocks which has found acclaim with concerts at the Sydney Opera House, appearances on TV programs, and successful CD and DVD sales.

Perth has its own Spirit of the Streets Choir whose profile reached new heights following its first performance at the Perth Concert Hall on 14 October. Two thousand concert-goers attended the uplifting event, which combined the voices of one of Perth’s newest choirs with one of its most established, the Perth Male Voice Choir, and one of its most socially-aware, the Working Voices Choir.

The concert was a fundraiser hosted by Sonia Vinci as part of Mental Health Week. Under the direction of Bernard Carney, the Spirit of the Streets Choir kicked off their performance with a rousing rendition of Bette Midler’s “The Rose.” The concert concluded with the 100 collective voices of the three choirs singing “Knockin’ on Heaven’s Door,” “Senzenia” and “I am Australian.”

The night celebrated in song the inspirational lives of some of the state’s most disadvantaged groups. The Spirit of the Streets Choir is composed of homeless people, those without stable accommodation, and people with a mental illness or a physical disability, who all share a love of song and music.

The Spirit of the Streets Choir started in 2007 as an initiative of musical director Bernard Carney and a vendor of The Big Issue magazine, which is sold by homeless people and the vulnerably housed.

“Being in the choir,” says Devo, “takes my mind off selling The Big Issue. It is relaxing and lets me meet new people.” Henry, a fellow member, states, “the choir is the best thing to happen to me in a very long time. I enjoy being able to play the drums and being part of a really good choir. I always look forward to practice on a Tuesday when I can meet with my friends, old and new. The whole experience is fantastic.”
Making a Difference: Peer Support Workers at Graylands Hospital

Mental health services recognise the valuable role that people with a mental illness play in contributing to the recovery of their peers.

Nine new Peer Support Workers recently celebrated their graduation from Graylands Hospital's Peer Support Training Program.

A number of the graduates are now employed at the hospital’s Peer Support Discharge Lounge Service. Carol Scherret, Statewide Consumer Participation Coordinator, says the value of having Peer Support Workers is that people who are about to leave hospital can talk with someone who can understand what they may be experiencing. Peer Support Workers are able to provide practical, social and emotional support.

Peer Support Workers also offer follow up phone calls to ensure that people are settling back into the community and connecting with relevant services. Peer Support Workers offer hope and proof to people that there is life after diagnosis.

Rachelle, a Peer Support Worker, says of her upcoming new role, “I will learn heaps but also be able to give valuable insight, perspective and suggestions.”

Peer Support Worker Sean states enthusiastically, “I am ready to be employed.”

For further information on the Peer Support Training Program, contact Carol Scherret on (08) 9347 6600.

“The choir allows for feelings of camaraderie and community that is beneficial to the members’ self esteem and place in society.”

Jim Petrie who manages the Spirit of the Streets Choir and The Big Issue in WA adds that “the choir allows for feelings of camaraderie and community that is beneficial to the members’ self esteem and place in society.” He believes that membership in the choir fosters creativity, a sense of belonging, and pride in a sense of achievement. Choir members, so often marginalised, find through performance social visibility and recognition.

The Spirit of the Streets Choir is sponsored by the City of Perth, ADG Global Supply, the Mental Health Division, Relationships Australia, and individual private sponsors.

The choir welcomes new members.

For further information, contact Jim Petrie on (08) 9228 4522 or at jimpetrie@ruah.com.au, or Ken Steele on (08) 9291 7451 or at kensteele@dodo.com.au, or visit www.spiritofthestreetschoir.org.au

Carol Scherret (front centre) and Peer Support Workers
Using Open Space Technology for Mental Health

Open Space Technology. It sounds complex, but is in fact a simple method that enables people from different walks of life to take part in meetings, workshops and forums.

The method encourages participants to speak freely and engage in a process that values each contribution. At open space events, participants identify topics and lead the discussion groups. While the topics can be diverse, they all cluster around a central theme.

Two open space forums were recently run by the Department of Health’s Mental Health Community Network.

Held in Perth on Friday 4 April and in Broome on 19 June, the forums saw participants from a cross-section of the community gather to discuss the question, “What can we ALL do to better the mental health of ALL West Australians?”

Over 60 topics were discussed by almost 250 people at the inaugural forum in Perth. Prominent themes included mental health workforce recruitment and retention, services for people from diverse cultural backgrounds, and support for carers.

Over 100 people, a third of whom were from local Indigenous communities, participated at the forum in Broome. Over 20 topics were raised throughout the day. Some of the key issues included the need for early intervention services and for positive mental health promotion, especially targeting Indigenous people.


A third open space forum was held in Perth on 17 November.

For more information, contact Carly Dolinski at the Mental Health Division on (08) 9222 4039 or at Carly.Dolinski@health.wa.gov.au
Navigating the system

Improving care coordination for people with a mental illness is a key component of the 2006 National Mental Health Action Plan.

Four Care Coordination projects are being trialled in WA to support people who are most at risk of falling through gaps in the system. The projects bring together people with a mental illness with their service providers and other appropriate supports to aid recovery and develop individualised care plans.

The Care Coordination project at Armadale Mental Health Service offers a shared care plan with the Ruah Community Services, along with other agencies that provide support such as housing and tenancy.

At Hawthorn House, a model has been developed that maintains continuity of clinical care from Hawthorn House to a person’s local community mental health service, with UnitingCare West coordinating the psychosocial community support.

Planning is underway for Care Coordination projects at Rockingham-Kwinana, Fremantle and locations in country WA. Edith Cowan University is assisting in the evaluation of the projects.

For more information on the Care Coordination projects, contact Wynne James at the Mental Health Division on (08) 9222 4099 or at Wynne.James@health.wa.gov.au

New WA Mental Health Website Online

WA Mental Health has launched a new website that provides up-to-date information and resources on mental health and mental illness.

“The new website is community-focused with a wide range of topics covered. Everyone can learn more about mental health and mental illness by reading the fact sheets and personal stories. Carers and consumers can find out how to access support and participate in the community. Health professionals are able to easily search for mental health guidelines, publications and events,” says Dr Steve Patchett, Executive Director of WA Mental Health.

Go to www.health.wa.gov.au/mentalhealth

Send us your feedback!
Help us improve our website. Email us at MentalHealthReception.RoyalSt@health.wa.gov.au

Government of Western Australia
Department of Health
Mental Health
Making Babies Healthy

Women with a serious mental illness, such as schizophrenia and severe mood disorders, are at greater risk of suffering complications during pregnancy and the birthing process.

These complications could in turn affect the child’s neurodevelopment.

Healthy Babies for Mothers with Serious Mental Illness: A case management framework for mental health clinicians is a unique prevention initiative, which aims to improve pregnancy and birth outcomes for women with a serious mental illness.

The framework was developed in collaboration between the North Metropolitan Area Health Service, Mental Health; the Centre for Clinical Research in Neuropsychiatry (CCRN); the Telethon Institute for Child Health Research (TICHR); and Curtin University of Technology.

For Dr Daniel Rock, Co-Director of the CCRN, “incorporating factors such as early and ongoing compliance with good quality antenatal care, and linking women with a serious mental illness to appropriate support services at the earliest opportunity, can improve outcomes for them and their children.”

A holistic approach based on continuity of care and reproductive choice is integrated within the framework, which also emphasises the significance of early detection and monitoring of pregnancy.

According to Tanyana Jackiewicz, Project Leader from the TICHR, “good maternal and child outcomes depend upon the health of the mother prior to conception as well as excellence of care in the antenatal, birthing and postnatal period.”

Ultimately, the framework aims to facilitate links between mental health and obstetric services to benefit at-risk women and their unborn babies.

Healthy Babies for Mothers with Serious Mental Illness: A case management framework for mental health clinicians can be downloaded at www.nmahs.smh.health.wa.gov.au/projects/healthybabies.cfm

For further information, contact
Dr Yvonne Hauck on (08) 9266 2216 or at Yvonne.Hauck@health.wa.gov.au

Clinical Applications Unit: Making Research Make Sense

A collaborative service approach can enhance the provision of efficient and effective health care.

In mental health, the importance of coordinated care is all the more imperative, given that people with a mental illness often have complex needs and therefore access services from a variety of agencies.

According to Dr Daniel Rock, Director of the new statewide Clinical Applications Unit (CAU), based in the Centre for Clinical Research in Neuropsychiatry at Graylands Hospital, integrated care coordination within and between agencies makes better use of health dollars and improves quality of life.

The CAU will use research findings to develop a range of simple and effective care coordination packages aimed at improving care for individuals who have complex needs.

The first package, coordinated care for pregnant women with a serious mental illness, was launched in July this year and is the focus of the above article, “Making Babies Healthy.”

For further information, contact
Dr Daniel Rock on (08) 9347 6405 or at Daniel.Rock@health.wa.gov.au
Minding the Gap

Dr Jacques Esterhuizen, by his admission, “fell into” psychiatry. He tells us about himself and his new role at the Princess Margaret Hospital for Children (PMH).

Dr Esterhuizen completed his medical degree in South Africa and his psychiatry training in the UK. He gained Membership to the Royal College of Psychiatrists in 2004. This was followed by a move to Australia and his recent admission as a Fellow to the Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Psychiatrists.

During his medical training in South Africa, Dr Esterhuizen did not consider psychiatry as a career option. Only after moving to the UK did his interest in the mind lead him down the path of child and adolescent psychiatry. “Learning about the human condition, and how we as people interact and affect each other, has promoted my interest in the impact of early childhood experiences and childhood mental illness,” he says. “To me, the appeal of this line of work is the focus on the intricacies of the mind. The more you learn, the more you realise you don’t know.”

Dr Esterhuizen believes that positive mental health in adults can be nurtured in the early years of a person’s life. “Intervention during this early stage of life can introduce an alternative pathway for young people which will guide them for the rest of their lives,” he declares.

ACIT will provide mental health care for children and adolescents, and their families, in the community until they are linked into appropriate community services.

Says Dr Esterhuizen, “we have started closing the gap between PMH and external agencies to ensure that no child seen by our service is left without ongoing care and treatment. The aim is to have a seamless transition of care between PMH and other services.”

ACIT is located at new premises on Hay St, West Perth.

“Positive mental health in adults can be nurtured in the early years of a person’s life.”

Dr Esterhuizen has been at PMH since March 2008 in the role of Consultant Psychiatrist to the Acute Services, Psychological Medicine. He manages the acute inpatient ward and supervises clinicians working in the Emergency Department.

He is also the clinical head of the new Acute Community Intervention Team (ACIT), which aims to ensure that children and adolescents, as well as their families, experiencing an acute mental illness receive prompt care and support. Many of the families that present in crisis yearly to the PMH Emergency Department will now have access to immediate mental health care.

The team, consisting of clinicians in psychiatry, clinical psychology, social work, nursing, and Indigenous mental health, will provide an alternative to hospital admission.

Members of the new PMH ACIT. From left: Shelley Tamatoa, Dr Jacques Esterhuizen, Jane McCormack, John Julian
Between 7 and 9 October, the Department of Health’s Mental Health Division, together with local councils and libraries, provided the public with a living library experience at Midland Library, Fremantle City Library, State Library of WA, and Gosnells Knowledge Centre.

Living library “books” share their personal experiences one-on-one with “readers.”

Living libraries help counter discrimination and stigmatisation by encouraging active dialogue between books and readers. The purpose of the dialogue is to broaden readers’ minds to the personal experiences of others, particularly those who are marginalised.

The 15 books, as diverse as their readers, included people with a mental illness, their carers, mental health professionals, and meditation teachers. Books shared their experiences on topics such as postnatal depression, caring for loved ones with a mental illness, positive thinking, recovery, and maintaining good mental health.

“Living libraries help counter discrimination through active dialogue between books and readers.”

Many readers found the initiative valuable. One said, “the time spent reading was a great way to be encouraged professionally and personally.” “I was looking for answers in the conventional books,” said another, “but couldn’t find anything. Today, through reading a living book, I have finally found my answer.”

Books themselves thoroughly enjoyed the experience. One stated, “I am happy that people will have an understanding of what it is like to have a mental illness, as well as a sense of hope and a reduction in stigma.”

Readers and books indicated that they would like the opportunity to experience the living library again. One book had this advice for future books and readers:

“Future books: enjoy the experience—there is a benefit. Future readers: Don’t be shy!”

To be involved in future living libraries, visit WA Mental Health at www.health.wa.gov.au/mentalhealth
Music to Create Mentally Healthy Communities

The theme of the 2008 WAM Song of the Year competition was “Creating a mentally healthy community.”

The Western Australian Music Industry Association (WAM) songwriting competition received an impressive submission of 1640 songs this year.

Winners in 19 categories were announced on Thursday 9 October at the Fly By Night Musicians Club in Fremantle.

The state’s premiere songwriting competition, now in its nineteenth year, enables songwriters of all ages across WA to win prizes and gain industry recognition. Schoolchildren are encouraged to be involved, with the competition featuring awards for songwriters at primary, secondary lower and secondary upper levels.

The Department of Health’s Mental Health Division sponsored the popular competition as a positive initiative to create a mentally healthy community.

“The $5000 Grand Prize was awarded to Roly Skender and The Tonics for “Feel,” which also won in the Pop category. In their acceptance speech, the band commented that the song was about insecurity, a theme relevant to mental health.

The Grand Prize was presented by Helen Morton MLC, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Mental Health. In her speech, Ms Morton spoke of the importance of music and the arts as a means of sharing stories, connecting with others, and creating social inclusion.

“By openly communicating, whether it be through song or any other art form, about mental health issues and mental illness, we can create a healthier and more inclusive community,” she said.

The main act of the evening was Abbe May and the Rockin’ Pneumonia. Abbe May’s song “Howl and Moan” won in the categories of Blues and Roots as well as Rock.

For a complete list of winners and finalists of the 2008 WAM Song of the Year, visit www.wam.asn.au
The awards were presented at a breakfast on Tuesday 7 October by the Department of Health’s Mental Health Division and sponsors who promote good mental health in the workplace and community. The awards recognise and celebrate the contribution of individuals, groups and organisations that foster leadership, innovation and continuous improvement in mental health. Finalists and winners have demonstrated their commitment to improving the lives of people with a mental illness, their carers and families.

Country services scooped several awards. The Statewide Clinical and Service Enhancement Program received the Government Organisation Award, Lamp Incorporated was successful in the category of Non-government Organisation (not-for-profit and private), and the Rural Community Support Service won the Edith Cowan University Award for Mental Health Promotion and Mental Illness Prevention. Carolyn Ngan, of the WA Country Health Service, received the Leanne Wood Award for Excellence.

Pauline Miles received the Consumer Award for her promotion of community-based creative art studio space for people with a mental illness. She believes the award furthers her opportunity “to champion the importance of the arts and health for people who experience mental distress and for the community as a whole.”

Leslie Nolan, a clinical nurse consultant in older adult mental health at Sir Charles Gairdner Hospital, received the Freehills Award for Mental Health Employee, a category in which he was a finalist last year. According to Carolyn Wood, a colleague and senior social worker, “testimony to Les’s standing as a person and clinician is that, often, rather than saying, ‘let’s consult the Older Adult Psychiatric Liaison Team,’ we just say, ‘let’s ring Les.”

Dr Graham Jacobs, the new Minister for Mental Health, announced the winners. To find out more about the winners and finalists of the 2008 Mental Health Good Outcomes Awards, visit WA Mental Health at www.health.wa.gov.au/mentalhealth
St John of God Health Care has an established Social Outreach and Advocacy program, extending its mission beyond the walls of our hospitals and diagnostic services. The program comprises group-wide strategies, services and advocacy initiatives across several key areas.

In the area of mental health, St John of God Health Care have the following services:
- Raphael Centres in Subiaco, Geelong, Warmambool and Benwick – perinatal and infant mental health services
- Pomegranate House in Ballarat, Victoria – a community mental health service

To find out about these services, go to www.sjog.org.au/outreach, or contact us at info@sjog.org.au

Bell-Vista is proud to support the John Da Silva Carers Award in the 2008 Mental Health Good Outcomes Awards

John Da Silva CitWA JP is the Managing Director of the Bell-Vista Group of companies which consists of Bell-Vista Fruit and Veg Company, one of Western Australia’s largest fruit and vegetable wholesalers, Allstates Fruit and Vegetable Merchants, a growers agent, Allstates Export, fresh produce exporters, Allstates Marine and Food Services, ship suppliers and international offices, Allstates India and Allstates Mauritius.

Bell-Vista supplies premium produce to major hotels, restaurants and caterers in the city as well as country towns and remote mining operations throughout Western Australia. Allstates Marine and Food Services provides all the requirements of cargo and passenger vessels calling at Australian ports.

If you would like to know more about this diverse group log on to www.bell-vista.com.au or contact us at sales@bell-vista.com.au

ECU is proud to support the 2008 Mental Health Good Outcomes Awards

The School of Nursing, Midwifery and Post Graduate Medicine is committed to enhancing the skills and knowledge of health professionals to deliver the most effective care to people with mental health problems and their carers.

We are equally committed to promoting good mental health for our students, staff and community. We are proud to sponsor the Edith Cowan University Award for Mental Health Promotion and Mental Illness Prevention for the 2008 Mental Health Good Outcomes Awards.

For more info visit www.snmpr.eCU.edu.au

Curtin University of Technology Faculty of Health Sciences is the largest, most comprehensive provider of health sciences education, training and research in Western Australia.

Through the Curtin Health Innovation Research Institute, the Faculty of Health Sciences delivers solutions to address the major State, national and international health issues.

Of particular importance are vulnerable populations such as Indigenous people, people living with a physical disability, migrant populations, socially disadvantaged people and those with mental health problems.

We are proud to support the 2008 Mental Health Good Outcomes Awards, that recognise innovation and excellence in mental health, through the Mental Health Research and Education Award.

For more information visit http://healthsciences.curtin.edu.au
Erin’s Story

The Eating Disorders Program at the Princess Margaret Hospital for Children (PMH) recently opened a day program that will help more young people who have eating disorders.

Erin

The Eating Disorders Program at PMH gave me my life back. Much against my will I was dragged into the clinic in a very irrational and emaciated state. I was adamant I would not be cooperating with staff.

However, it did not take long for me to warm up to the friendly people who would become my team. The Eating Disorders Program provided me with a multidisciplinary team who worked closely with me through my struggles to keep me alive. Having different professionals for each aspect of my treatment—medical, dietetics and psychological—helped me to separate my disorder into medical and psychological parts, which I feel greatly assisted my progress.

Staff members were always warm, supportive, understanding and very patient with me. As an inpatient, the program provided me with the structure I needed to make it through each day. The group programs forced me to continue socialising, making it easier for me to integrate back into my family and school life when discharged. As an outpatient, the regular appointments kept me accountable to someone and also provided me with a constant support network.

The Eating Disorders Program and the staff who work so hard to keep it running were a major part of my recovery. I am very excited about the new premises, day program and additional staff. These major improvements and changes are going to provide many more young sufferers with the opportunity to get well. The program and staff are doing an amazing job and I know that each and every day they continue to touch the lives of youth who greatly need them.

Living with an eating disorder is no life but my treatment at PMH helped me to once again live.

The Intensive Eating Disorders Day Program, Child and Adolescent Health Service, is located on Wellington St, West Perth 6005.

The contact number is (08) 9429 5000.

“These major improvements and changes are going to provide many more young sufferers with the opportunity to get well.”
Opportunity Lost

Research from SANE Australia has found that people with a mental illness are missing out on critical health checks.

Information for the Research Bulletin *Physical health care and mental illness* was gathered from respondents who completed a questionnaire on the SANE Australia website.

Seventy percent of respondents claimed to see a GP regularly for both their physical and mental health care. While 90 percent of respondents reported a chronic physical condition, nearly half reported that their doctor did not discuss ways to improve their health.

Only 50 percent claimed to have received blood tests for cholesterol, sugar levels and liver function and just over half have had their smoking status checked. Almost all were using some form of complementary medication without discussion with their doctor, despite the possibility of harmful interactions.

SANE Australia’s Executive Director Barbara Hocking says that even though most people are in regular contact with their GP, opportunities to prevent or pick up early signs of other chronic illnesses are being lost.

“When we look after our physical health, we feel better and more able to cope with challenges. This is even more relevant when dealing with a mental illness. We need to make sure people have access to information and services that best help them achieve and maintain a healthy lifestyle.”

For more information, visit SANE Australia at www.sane.org

Mental Health Awareness Training for Recreation Service Providers

The HealthRight Project 2006–2008 promotes the physical health of people with a mental illness.

It was developed in response to the 2001 University of Western Australia report *Duty to care: Physical illness in people with mental illness*, which reported poorer physical and life expectancy outcomes in people with a mental illness than the general community.

The HealthRight Project encourages physical activity as an important way of becoming and remaining physically healthy. Recreation and sporting groups play a significant role in encouraging community members to be active. HealthRight recently conducted a free training session for recreation service providers to help them learn more about supporting people with a mental illness to become physically active.

Participants came from a range of non-government, local government, and public service organisations and included individuals working in the field of health promotion.

For more information on the HealthRight Project, visit www.healthright.org.au
What did you do before coming to Carers WA?
I am new to Australia and this is my first role. Prior to this I was the Finance Director for a large London-based social housing organisation. I held this post for nine years prior to resigning in order to move to Perth with my partner Kerryn and our son Jake. I have worked in many sectors, from health and central government to management consultancy on international aid programs for PricewaterhouseCoopers in East Africa.

Why Carers WA?
I just thought it was a fantastic organisation with thoroughly worthwhile objectives. Most of my career, even when working for the private sector, has focused on social and health programs which I find far more satisfying than the commercial profit motive.

What is in store for Carers WA?
Fulfilment of our new vision, “A positive caring culture throughout Western Australia.” This means all of society. I want to see us engaging not just the health sector but other key areas such as education and private enterprise. I want to add different perspectives to the perception of carers. Take the issue of employment: it is well known that we have a workforce and skills shortage in WA. Carers are a valuable resource base. There are very few areas of endeavour that can match their work ethic, skill, determination and compassion. They make the hard yards on a daily basis. These are skills that the private sector value and through flexible work practices companies could access untapped human resources. Carers should be recognised and valued not just for their caring role but for their abilities, drive and skills.

What is one thing your employees don’t know about you?
As a student I was (wrongly) arrested on suspicion of espionage in Hungary...

For more information on Carers WA, call 1300 CARERS (1300 227 377), email info@carerswa.asn.au or visit www.carerswa.asn.au
Leaders

A Change at ARAFMI

With a new Executive Director at the helm, ARAFMI Mental Health Carers & Friends Association is expanding its services in rural and remote regions.

Executive Director David Kernohan is a former Director of crisis and short term accommodation centres 55 Central and St Bartholemew’s House. These experiences, as well as his background in psychiatric nursing, ensure that he brings to ARAFMI a strong commitment to the mental health sector.

ARAFMI recently moved to new premises with Carers WA and is currently undergoing a period of change, expansion and consolidation.

It’s no surprise then that David is, by his own admission, a very busy man.

David joined ARAFMI at the end of March this year and is leading its plans to expand services to Indigenous communities in the north.

Plans are underway on an Aboriginal Outreach Program, which will provide educational and counselling support to communities along the remote area of Dampier Peninsular, north of Broome. The new services will cover One Arm Point, Lombadina, Eagle Bay as well as an area south-east of Broome called Bidgidanga.

In May, David flew to Broome to visit the Family Support Service which in June became a fulltime service. The service provides support for Indigenous and non-Indigenous mental health carers.

What struck him on his visit was the high incidence of suicide and what he calls its “staggering” impact on family relationships and the wider community.

ARAFMI is in the process of establishing similar family support programs in Karratha and Carnarvon.

David hopes that, under his guidance, ARAFMI will continue to further its links with Indigenous communities in rural and metropolitan areas as well as provide them with culturally appropriate services.

For more on ARAFMI, call (08) 9427 7100 or rural freecall 1800 811 747 or visit www.arafmi.asn.au
The role of Official Visitors
Official Visitors are mental health advocates for involuntary patients and residents of licensed hostels and group homes. They advocate for people who are very unwell and at their most vulnerable to make sure their rights are respected. It may be as small as making sure the meals are hot, to dealing with complaints of abuse.

My background in journalism and law
Journalism and law have helped to hone my writing and communication skills which are the tools of trade for an advocate. I was a litigation lawyer and this combined with journalism also means I tend to ask a lot of questions which can be important when you are trying to find out what the real issue is and how it might be solved. You don’t easily get fobbed off with the first answer.

My role
Generally the Official Visitor tries to deal with the issue at ward level but if they do not get satisfaction there, or if the problem appears systemic, then as Head of Council I get involved.

I have regular meetings with the management teams of the various hospitals as well as the Executive Director of WA Mental Health, the Chief Psychiatrist and the Minister for Health.

Each year as Head of Council I also have to present a report to Parliament which sets out what issues we have dealt with during the year.

My goals
My key objective is always to make sure rights are observed and that the conditions in hospitals and hostels are “safe and suitable.”

The next key objective is to make sure we help everyone who we are able to help when they need our help.

Currently we are focusing on people who are on Community Treatment Orders to make sure they know we can be of assistance. We are also starting to plan for the changes to the Mental Health Act when we will be able to assist voluntary patients.

For more information on the Council of Official Visitors, phone (08) 9226 3266, freecall 1800 999 057 or visit www.coov.org

Debora Colvin

The new Head of the Council of Official Visitors talks about her role.
The Respite Services initiative provides respite care places to help carers and families of people with a mental illness or an intellectual disability. This initiative will increase the availability of respite services where there are shortages that prevent carers receiving support. The new services will address the needs of the carers, and those being cared for, through overnight stays in respite care, in-home care, and other recreational activities.

Carers and service providers can access more information by calling the Commonwealth Carer Respite and Carelink Centre in their area on freecall 1800 059 059.

### Respite Services – Phase 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Service provider</th>
<th>Provider contact details</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>North Metropolitan</td>
<td>Intework</td>
<td>13/200 Winton Rd, Joondalup</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Life Without Barriers</td>
<td>176 Fitzgerald St, Perth</td>
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<tr>
<td>Great Southern</td>
<td>Schizophrenia Fellowship Albany &amp; District</td>
<td>23 Stead Rd, Albany</td>
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Drugs, alcohol and mental illness

Three new initiatives are helping workers in Alcohol and Other Drug (AOD) agencies respond more effectively to people who present with co-existing mental health problems.

Victoria’s Turning Point Alcohol and Drug Centre has developed the PsyCheck training program. This program trains staff in the use of a simple tool that aids in the assessment of a person’s mental health. WA’s Drug and Alcohol Office is currently rolling out the PsyCheck program across the state. Ten programs have already been conducted, mainly in country WA, with over 150 AOD workers completing training.

The second initiative is the Commonwealth Government’s Improved Services Initiative to build capacity within AOD agencies to better manage mental illness in people accessing their services. Ten grants have been awarded in WA, totalling approximately $6 million. The Western Australian Network of Alcohol and other Drug Agencies (WANADA) also received funding to support WA grant recipients and coordinate a statewide approach to the project.

Finally, the State Dual Diagnosis Planning Group is developing formal agreements between agencies for collaborative activities such as joint assessments, case conferences and shared care arrangements. A Dual Diagnosis Resource Kit has been developed for AOD and mental health services, which contains literature, sample forms and a list of recommended assessment and screening tools.

For more information on the Drug and Alcohol Office, phone (08) 9370 0333 or visit www.dao.health.wa.gov.au

Understanding depression

The Black Dog Institute recently launched DepEd, an online community education program to help people better understand and manage depression.

Executive Director, Professor Gordon Parker, says the program challenges the “one size fits all” approach to depression which assumes that depression is a single condition. In fact, there are many kinds of depression, and a variety of causes.

DepEd attempts to redress the generalisation. The program looks at a range of depressive disorders and includes personal stories, a depression self-test and tips on getting healthy and keeping well.

For more information, visit The Black Dog Institute at www.blackdoginstitute.org.au

Improving Access

The federal government recently extended the Access to Allied Psychological Services (ATAPS), which enables GPs under the Better Outcomes in Mental Health Care to refer people with a mental illness to allied health professionals who deliver focused psychological strategies. Individuals can receive up to 12 Medicare subsidised sessions per year.

Eligible professionals include psychologists, mental health nurses, occupational therapists, social workers, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health workers with mental health qualifications.

A trial of telephone-based support has begun to improve access for people living in rural areas. Better support and referral pathways for GPs supporting people at high risk of suicide will also be implemented.

With one in ten GP consultations related to mental health, GPs, nurses and other clinicians will continue to be offered appropriate mental health training.
The National Mental Health Report 2007

The National Mental Health Report 2007 provides a summary of twelve years of reform under the National Mental Health Strategy, which aims to achieve major reform in the quality and range of community mental health services.

The 2007 report highlights government funding of the mental health sector, progress towards a community-based system of care, trends in the level and mix of psychiatric services, state and territory investment in service mix reform, consumer and carer participation, and outcomes in mental health.

Key achievements include a $3.9 billion investment in mental health in 2004–05, an 85 percent increase in real terms since 1993.

A full copy of the 2007 report can be downloaded at www.health.gov.au/mentalhealth

Professional Education Online

The Mental Health Professional Online Development (MHPOD) is an educational initiative for mental health professionals.

Funded by the state, territory and commonwealth governments, the project is a collaboration between CADRE Design and the Psychosocial Research Centre at the University of Melbourne, and is managed by the Mental Health Workforce Advisory Committee (MHWAC) Secretariat.

MHPOD aims to improve knowledge and awareness of the treatment of mental disorders. As a web-based model, it will provide greater access to professional development, especially for people working in rural and remote areas.

For more information, contact Wynne James at the Mental Health Division on (08) 9222 4088 or at Wynne.James@health.wa.gov.au

New DVD to Help Rural Men

Farmers experience one of the highest rates of suicide of any industry, with research indicating that stressors associated with farming are linked with higher incidences of mental health problems.

Wheatbelt Men’s Health Inc (WMH) and the Kondinin Group have joined forces with the Department of Agriculture and Food to produce Working with Warriors: a DVD on men’s health to assist farmers and their families in understanding both the issues created by stress and depression and the importance of seeking professional help.

Focusing on the stories of four farmers, the DVD is based on a program pioneered by WMH’s Julian Krieg who believes that mates can be the first line of defence in helping men with a mental health problem.

Contact Sally Naughton at snaughton@agric.wa.gov.au

Call for Volunteers

The Centre for Clinical Research in Neuropsychiatry (CCRN) in Mount Claremont runs research projects on a range of mental disorders.

Schizophrenia is unique to humans. It can only be researched with the help of people with schizophrenia, their relatives, and people without a history of mental illness.

We are seeking two groups of people to help us in this vital research:
1) People with a diagnosis of schizophrenia
2) People with no history of diagnosed mental illness in their immediate family

The information provided by volunteers may lead to the development of new treatments, or even to a way of preventing schizophrenia happening.

To find out more, please call 1800 648 223.
**Carers WA**

Carers Week raises awareness of the vital role that carers play. Between 19 and 25 October, over 20 Carers Week events were held across the state. Funded by grants from Carers WA, events included pampering sessions, lunches, movie sessions and jewellery-making workshops. This year's theme was "...because I care."

The **Mental Health Carers Participation and Representation Program** provides mental health carers with an opportunity to contribute to the planning, delivery and evaluation of public mental health services. Funded by the Department of Health’s Mental Health Division, the program recruits, trains and supports mental health carers to be involved as carer representatives on committees and advisory groups.

A fulltime Carer Consultant will be employed to provide information and support to families and carers at the new Rockingham-Kwinana District Hospital mental health inpatient unit, due to open in January 2010. Carers WA believes this initiative recognises the important role of carers in achieving good mental health outcomes for individuals, their families and carers, and hopes that it will set a precedent for other mental health services.

*For more information, contact Carers WA on 1300 CARERS (1300 227 377) or at info@carerswa.asn.au*

**Health Consumers’ Council**

The Health Consumers’ Council, an independent, community-based organisation, is currently advocating for the establishment of a rehabilitation unit to support mental health consumers wanting to cease medication.

*For further information, contact Maxine Drake at the Health Consumers’ Council on (08) 9221 3422 or visit www.hconc.org.au*

**Mental Illness Fellowship WA (MIFWA)**

The new **Family Support Program** (FSP) offers information, education, referral and family-centred support for people with a mental illness living in the north metropolitan area. The FSP recognises that building family resilience is the foundation for achieving positive mental health outcomes. For families with children, the Children of Mentally Ill Consumers (COMIC) WA will work with the FSP. Health professional and self-referrals are accepted.

*For further information, contact the FSP Team Leader on (08) 9228 0200 or visit www.mifwa.org.au*

**North Metropolitan Area Health Service**

Clinical Psychologist Dr Peter McEvoy has returned to the Centre for Clinical Interventions (CCI) in Northbridge, having spent several years working at the Clinical Research Unit for Anxiety and Depression, a joint facility of St Vincent’s Hospital and the University of New South Wales.

Dr McEvoy's special interest in Social Anxiety Disorder has led him to establish a new program at the CCI that aims to assist people with a mental illness to reconnect with social support systems and the community, and return to the workforce.

“People frequently confuse shyness with this complex and distressing disorder,” says Dr McEvoy. “Mental health clinicians are often unaware that Social Anxiety Disorder accounts for a similar burden at a population level as schizophrenia in terms of years of life lost due to disability.”

*For more information, please contact Dr Peter McEvoy directly on (08) 92274399 or visit www.cci.health.wa.gov.au*

**South Metropolitan Area Health Service**

Mental health clinicians working with people from diverse cultural backgrounds require culturally-sensitive training to meet the consumers’ diverse needs. Given this, the South Metropolitan Area Health Service, Mental Health, working closely with consumers and the Fremantle Multicultural Centre, has produced a DVD called **Assumptions Assumptions… Is Migration a Health Hazard?** The training resource features people from diverse backgrounds sharing their migration experiences and journeys after arriving in Australia.

The DVD is available to interested agencies.

*For more information, contact Siewho Yeak on (08) 9431 3549.*

**Western Australian Association for Mental Health (WAAMH)**

Non-government organisation (NGO) Mental Health Standards Mentoring Implementation Grants are currently available through the Western Australian Association for Mental Health (WAAMH).

Under this scheme, mentors (whether individuals or agencies) are assigned to assist NGOs to map their current and future service demands and apply the **Service Standards for Non-Government Providers of Community Mental Health Services** to their current and future actions.

*For further information, contact the WAAMH on (08) 9420 7277 or visit www.waamh.org.au*
WA Country Health Service (WACHS)

The WACHS is proud to host the annual Rural & Remote Mental Health Conference, from 5 to 7 November 2008 in Geraldton. The conference theme “Where to from here?” will look at initiatives in the mental health arena that will assist in planning for the future. Visit www.wacountry.health.wa.gov.au\mentalhealthconference2008

Psychiatrist Dr Sudendra Jayaswal has joined the Goldfields Mental Health Service as the new Clinical Director. Dr Jayaswal has more than 28 years experience in psychiatry in Libya, Malaysia, New Zealand and Australia.

WACHS Mental Health Services would also like to welcome psychiatrists Dr Peter O’Brien (Pilbara), Dr Mohammed Allam (Midwest), Dr Sanjay Patel and Dr Adam Brett (South West), and Dr Subhash Bhargava (Great Southern) who have all joined its services in the past 12 months.

Congratulations go to three WACHS mental health professionals from the Goldfields who were successful in winning Department of Health postgraduate scholarships. The successful candidates were: occupational therapist Megan Smith (Australian Rural and Remote Health Professional Scholarship, University of Melbourne); social worker Darryl Nettleton (Post Graduate Certificate in Mental Health Theory and Practice, UWA); and Jo Owen, a clinical manager at Kalgoorlie Hospital (Nurse Practitioner—Mental Health, Curtin University).

WA Perinatal Mental Health Unit (WAPMHU)

The WAPMHU is expanding its specialist clinical and community services to include a number of new services.

The Carnarvon Indigenous Perinatal Mental Health Project sees the Central Midwest Mental Health Service, Carnarvon Aboriginal Medical Services, and Carnarvon Hospital delivering perinatal mental health services to Indigenous mothers and their families in Carnarvon and surrounding districts. The program provides psychological support, health promotion and early identification and intervention for women at high psychological and obstetric risk.

For culturally and linguistically diverse communities, three women’s perinatal support groups are currently being established for the Iraqi, Sudanese and Ethiopian communities in the metropolitan area. These groups aim to increase perinatal mental health awareness and social support within the respective communities.

The WAPMHU and the Red Cross are trialling an in-home practical support service for women diagnosed with, or at risk of, perinatal mental health problems. The service provides assistance with domestic duties, basic childcare and the development of practical skills. For further details, contact Carmel Bower on (08) 9225 8808.

The WAPMHU has also produced DVDs for Indigenous and CALD communities which look at issues such as depression and anxiety that can occur during pregnancy and after birth.

Boodjarri Business: Yarning about Feelings After Baby DVD is aimed at Indigenous mothers and families and Boodjarri Business: Working with Aboriginal Mums, Babies and Families is aimed at health professionals.

The DVD You Are Not Alone: Emotional Health for Mothers has been developed for the Iraqi, Ethiopian and Sudanese communities and is presented in the Arabic, Amharic and Dinka languages.

The DVDs are free for people living in WA and can also be viewed online at www.yourzone.com.au/perinatalhealth

Other resources are available at wnhs.hdwa.health.wa.gov.au/section_redirects/perinatal_resources

For further information on WAPMHU and their new services, call (08) 9340 1795 or email wapmhu@health.wa.gov.au

Women’s Healthworks

Women’s Healthworks is a confidential, affordable and supportive health and referral service for women living in the north metropolitan area. The centre provides health clinics, counselling and health promotion.

It also hosts several programs. One of these is the Body Esteem Program (BEP) for women living with an eating disorder such as anorexia nervosa and bulimia nervosa. Facilitated by women who have recovered from eating disorders, the BEP offers 20-week self-help groups for women aged 18 years and over.

Women’s Healthworks also operates the Village Project, a therapeutic program for mothers who would like to manage drug and alcohol issues, as well as Stepping It Out, a community exercise program offering facilitator-led walks, workshops and other physical activities.

For more information, contact Women’s Healthworks on (08) 9300 1566 or visit www.womenshealthworks.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
Poems from the Madhouse
2nd edition
Written by Sandy Jeffs
Published by Spinifex Press, 2002. (Poetry)

Review by Duc Dau, Mental Health Division
If you watched “Angels and Demons,” Andrew Denton’s special edition of Enough Rope, you would have encountered Sandy Jeffs talking about her life with schizophrenia. Jeffs’ business card reads, “poet, lunatic and insanity consultant.”

The poet’s business card presents her mental illness with obvious and deflective humour. In contrast, her first collection of poetry, Poems from the Madhouse, invites the reader into the very real experiences of someone suffering from schizophrenia. Its rare moments of comedy are black and full of pathos: “On Being Certified Insane” offers a good example.

One of the most striking aspects of the collection is its ability to render the extreme depths of confusion, despair and alienation. “There is a Sadness in Me” details the speaker’s sorrow in realising her wondrous “visions” of the maternal Virgin Mary are “only an/invention of my tumbling mind.”

Jeffs makes it clear that schizophrenia often causes the individual to question their very identity: if our minds are so integral to our sense of self, who are we when our minds turn against us?

The word “madness” is used many times in the collection, but don’t let that deter you. By writing with honesty and humanity, Jeffs aims to de-stigmatise and broaden our understanding of this frequently misunderstood illness. Perhaps the most valuable feature of Poems from the Madhouse is that it breaks down borders and makes both poetry and the subject of schizophrenia accessible to a wide audience.

Silent Scream
Written by Josh Cannon
Published by John Murray, 2008. (Memoir)

Review by Duc Dau, Mental Health Division
Silent Scream is a deeply unsettling and ultimately gutsy memoir on the taboo topic of male rape. The book begins with an Author’s Note warning that certain passages may be an emotional trigger to readers who have experienced sexual abuse. Some readers would do well to heed this warning.

One of Josh’s earliest memories is of his father sexually abusing him at the age of three. What ensues is a multitude of physical and mental health problems that will take Josh 27 years to overcome. The years of abuse by his father and gym teacher, his subsequent obsessive-compulsive behaviour, addictions, eating disorders, self-mutilations, anxiety, depression and suicide attempts are vividly detailed. So too are the occasional moments of grace: Josh’s love of the cello and classical music, his first meeting with the woman who will become his wife, the birth of their son.

The final chapters, which chart Josh’s recovery at a clinic in Arizona, USA, are truly riveting and moving; it would be difficult to find in other memoirs passages as stirring and heartbreaking. In these final chapters, the author’s guarded tone gives way to an openness to the reader and, most importantly, to himself when he finally and fully commits to becoming the man he was supposed to be.

Silent Scream is a strong indictment of parents and guardians who fail in their duty to protect children. It is also a testament to the resilience of survivors, even when all seems lost.

Lars and the Real Girl
Directed by Craig Gillespie

Review by Tony Hughes-d’Aeth, UWA
Lars Lindstrom (Ryan Gosling) has a problem. His girlfriend is a doll. Her name is Bianca and she’s from Brazil, though she’s actually half Danish. Lars ordered her from the internet. He talks to her, loves her, fights with her, and introduces her to others, patiently explaining to them that she does not speak much English.

Clearly Lars is delusional. He suffers from the hallucination that Bianca is a real woman and not a deluxe latex sex toy. The originality of this film, and what makes it one of the best of the year, is that this hallucination is taken seriously by the filmmakers; it does result in comedy, but it is not at Lars’ expense.

Set in a small and thoroughly conventional midwestern town, we fear that Lars’ predicament might not end happily. The charming thing about this film is the way that the town is prepared to trust the local family doctor Dagmar (Patricia Clarkson), who first treats Lars. She says that Lars believes in Bianca because he needs to, and he will stop believing in her when he no longer needs to. “What do we do in the meantime?” asks his rather embarrassed brother (Paul Schneider). “Nothing,” says the doctor. And so he, his wife, and eventually the entire town, play along. Initially they do so out of dismayed pity, but ultimately they do so because it is, as the doctor had said, the right thing to do.

A gentle and surprising fable, Lars and the Real Girl caused me and many in the theatre to cry. Why do we cry if she is not real?
Of Angels and Demons

Sonya Pemberton is originally from Perth. These days she lives her dream of making films that aim to inspire and enlighten.

Sonya wrote, directed and was supervising producer of the acclaimed documentary “Angels and Demons.” It aired on Enough Rope and won the Media Achievement category at the 2008 Mental Health Good Outcomes Awards.

She tells us about her experience of making the film.

**What was your motivation for writing and directing “Angels and Demons”?**

Every hour of television is an extremely valuable resource. It can reach hundreds of thousands of people. It can shape how we feel and think. As a filmmaker, I believe I need to use each hour wisely.

Andrew Denton and I had a strong interest in exploring the realities of living with a mental illness. We both have people in our lives that have struggled with mental illness, and we wanted to reveal the subject in a way that could illuminate. We knew from the start it would be confronting; there are no easy solutions and we knew we would encounter a great deal of darkness and pain. We wanted to shine light on a world rarely seen on television, and, if possible, to highlight the things that unite us all.

There was a risk that people may not want to watch, but we were wonderfully surprised. “Angels and Demons” reached 1 million people—more watched the program that night than watched CSI and Dirty Sexy Money! And over the following 24 hours we had over 2000 responses from the public, saying, “Thank you, I now understand my mother/father/brother/sister/friend better,” or, “I no longer feel so alone.”

We had a powerful sense that we had touched people. That was special.

**What did you learn from people with a mental illness featured in the film?**

I discovered how hard it is to live a life where, every day, your sense of reality is uncertain. I came to understand how strong you had to be just to get through a day, to do ordinary things many of us take for granted. I remembered how important it is to see the potential of every person, to have compassion for when they are struggling, and to remember we all need to feel that we belong.

Since making the film, I no longer feel compelled to cross the road to avoid someone having a psychotic episode. Recently in New York I found myself going up to a man who appeared lost in an inner landscape. He was extremely distressed. I found the words of Heidi Everett (a singer profiled in the film) ringing in my ears: “I would have liked somebody to come up to me and say, ‘Heidi, just relax. Just relax. It’s OK. It’s OK.’” So I did just that, and he seemed to focus and settle. That was an extraordinary moment.

**How do you think the documentary has worked to break down stigma?**

When we get close to people like Sandy Jeffs, Arana Pearson, Heidi Everett, or the young people at ORYGEN Youth Health, and we see how real and smart and funny they are, how can we be afraid? How can we ignore them? When we see Andrew Denton struggling with hearing voices (played on headphones for only a few hours), how can we not marvel at those who manage to live like this, every day?
What do you feel is the significance of winning the Media Achievement category at the Mental Health Good Outcomes Awards?

It is an honour to have this film acknowledged. It makes a difference to know that professionals, who deal with this world every day, tell us we did well.

I feel encouraged. It tells me that all the careful thinking and crafting, taking advice and listening, editing and re-editing, was worthwhile. We are fortunate indeed if we are told our work is contributing.

What advice do you have for other filmmakers or media in covering mental health issues?

Read Anne Deveson’s book *Tell Me I’m Here* before you begin. It will give you such insight. It helped me understand the responsibility I had to communicate responsibly.

Don’t be afraid.

Get good advice—talk to the experts, including the people with the illness.

Do a hearing voices workshop. You will never be the same.

Be aware of the stereotypes, and how powerful they can be.

Remember, we are all precariously balanced on the tightrope of sanity.

Sonya Pemberton is one of Australia’s leading science documentary writers, directors and executive producers. She is co-authoring a pop-up book on mental illness.

“Angels and Demons” is available on DVD from ABC Shops for $19.95. Call 1300 360 111 or visit http://shop.abc.net.au

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### Diary Dates

#### JANUARY

**Date:** 28 January 2009  
**Event:** Meditation workshop – Self Investment for a Secure Future (Perth)  
**w:** www.bkwsu.org/au/whatson  
**e:** perth@au.bkwsu.org

**Date:** 29 January 2009  
**Event:** Meditation Forum – The Ultimate Connection (Perth)  
**w:** www.bkwsu.org/au/whatson  
**e:** perth@au.bkwsu.org

#### FEBRUARY

**Date:** 12 February 2009  
**Event:** Workshop – Psychopharmacology Workshop for Non-Medical Mental Health Professionals (Canberra)  
**w:** www.ppleducation.com.au  
**e:** sally@ppleducation.com.au

**Date:** 24 to 25 February 2009  
**Event:** Workshop – Understanding Dissociative Disorders Workshop – Diagnosis, Management, Treatment (Melbourne, Sydney)  
**w:** www.ppleducation.com.au  
**e:** sally@ppleducation.com.au

**Date:** 26 to 27 February 2009  
**Event:** Forum – TheMHS Summer Forum: Leadership for Mental Health Services of the Future (Sydney)  
**w:** www.themhs.org  
**e:** info@themhs.org

#### MARCH

**Date:** 4 to 6 March 2009  
**Event:** Conference – Expanding Our Horizons: Moving Mental Health and Wellness Promotion into the Mainstream (Canada)  
**w:** www.toronto.cliffordbeersfoundation.co.uk  
**e:** michael_murray@charity.demon.co.uk

**Date:** 6 to 7 March 2009  
**Event:** Conference – National Women’s Conference: Refugee and Immigrant Women Setting the Social Inclusion Agenda (Fremantle)  
**w:** www.multicultural.online.wa.gov.au/eccwa  
**e:** eccwa@iinet.net.au  
**t:** (08) 9227 5322

**Date:** 9 to 10 March 2009  
**Event:** Conference – National Conference on Caring: Building the Future with Family Carers (Gold Coast)  
**w:** www.astmanagement.com.au/Carers9  
**e:** carers9@astmanagement.com.au

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Future editions of **head2head**

- **Autumn 2009:** Recovery and Rehabilitation
- **Winter 2009:** Young People, 12-25 years

**Deadlines for contributions:**  
**Winter edition 2009 – 1 May**

*Diary Dates* submissions should include event name, organisation, date(s), venue and contact details.

**Contact the Mental Health Division on:**  
Tel: (08) 9222 4099 Fax: (08) 9222 2351  
**Email:** mentalhealthreception.royalst@health.wa.gov.au

For more events, go to www.health.wa.gov.au/mentalhealth
Do you want a career that offers satisfying rewards and challenges, competitive salaries and professional development opportunities?

Then a job in mental health could be for you.

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Colleen.Wood@health.wa.gov.au
or 08 9347 6556

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