



The Consumer Connection



Formerly "Livewire", a publication of the Ballarat Health Services—Mental Health Services (BHS-MHS) Consumer Consultancy

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Some of the fruits of a decade's work.....

Mark Lacey, Consumer Consultant

When I started work as a consumer consultant in 1997, I was asked to take over the Ballarat Psychiatric Fellowship newsletter and make it a newsletter by consumers, for consumers. We didn't have a name for it, so we ran a competition to design a name and a front cover. My memory is that we had just the one entrant for the artwork for the masthead for the newsletter—Kathryn Anderson's cartoon image of a smiling face—that won the comp and graced the front of the newsletter for the best part of ten years. And we had I think three or four entrants for the name, settling on the name Livewire, which I think was a name suggested by Phil Arnott. Since then a fair bit of water has flowed under the bridge—culture change at the hospital meaning that the newsletter now goes out just to those on the consumer participation program of 150 or more members was one cubic tonne or so of water under the bridge. Another was the redesign of the newsletter to make it look more professional and modern. But solving one problem sometimes creates

another, and the feedback from my advisory committee was that the professional look had also rendered the newsletter a bit sterile. So we ran another comp to come up with a new name and a new masthead. This time, with the usual networking, we had over 15 entrants in each comp—a testament to the fact that consumer participation works. That is, new comp in 1998 plus the infancy of consumer participation in the region = 3 or 4 entrants or 6 in full. Second comp in 2011 plus a well-developed participation program = 15 or more entrants or 30 in full. And I think you will agree with me that the quality is first rate. That is, the consumer advisory committee voted for the winner and the good news is that Trish Neil's painting makes what I think is a brilliant masthead emphasising human contact and connection. And John Harrison's title "The Consumer Connection" gives to me the idea of a community of people working for the good of one another, which of course we are. So please read on....

Vale Andrew Pollock Jnr 1981-2011



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Sometimes people leave you when you are only halfway through the journey. Andrew Pollock was a feisty and principled member of our consumer advisory committee for four years, a vibrant and conscientious man, a much-loved Dad and a friend and inspiration to many. No-one seems to be sure how

he died. I heard the news from the treating clinician who worked with Andrew—Dev Raithathaththa—that Andrew had died in a way that was unexpected, sudden and tragic. Dev, the treating team, the consumer advisory committee (CAC), Andrew's friends and family and I were all devas-

tated by the news. The CAC has commissioned Trish Neil to paint a memorial painting for Andrew. Please ring me if you want to come to its unveiling. Please, if you knew about Andrew and cared about him, nurture, protect and celebrate life in the way Andrew did and keep fighting for better services and better mental health for all.



Your consumer consultant at work—a re-enactment of Mark ordering a repentant Tristan Brumby-Rendell to take his car out of the car-park for consumers, visitors and families. For your part in using the car park and winning a \$30 prize, please see the article on page 3.

News from your Consumer Advisory Committee

Current members of the CAC are:

Horsham: Sue Elwin, Robert Walter, Heather-Maree Wickes, Jo Harries

Ararat: Lesley Hart, Darrell Smith

Ballarat: Kathryn Anderson, Karen Aitken, John Horton, Trish Neil, Douglas Spencer, Alison Smith, Jo Cavanagh, Simon Maynard, Alice Lamb

For this edition of the newsletter, the committee asked me to highlight the existence and use of clinical treatment plans. These plans are central to recovery for anyone who receives a service from us. They should include your

goals and the hurdles you see that might stop you from reaching those goals. The plans are designed by treating clinicians, but it is vital that you have ownership of anything that goes in your plan, as it outlines your road to recovery.

The consumer advisory committee negotiated successfully in regard to situations where you as the consumer decline to sign your plan. That might be because you don't think you need the service's help. Or it might be that you are frustrated with the clinician with whom you work and want to see

real reason for why you should trust him or her. Either way, whatever reasons you give for declining to sign the plan should now be noted on the plan itself and you should get a copy of the plan.

That will mean that over the next six months until the next plan, you have a chance to review your decision. So if, for example, you change your mind about the clinician and find that you can trust him or her, you can then sign the next plan.

If you don't have a plan, please ask your clinician for a copy of that plan. Or give me a call.

A campaign of the CAC—smoke-free zones

The committee has lobbied for the service to seek an exemption on the smoke-free zone at the hospital. For those of us who think that the service should support what is called a "dignity of risk" for consumers, the news is that we haven't had much success so far.

That is, in spite of the generosity of our Executive Director, Tamara Irish, our CEO of the hospital, Andrew Rowe and the Governance committee of this organisation, who have all given time to hear our concerns, we are at an impasse.

That is, the hospital has no plans to change the smoke-free zones on the grounds of protecting people's health. But our consumer advisory committee still sees the issue differently and thinks people should be free to make their/our own decisions at a time of great stress like an admission to hospital.

Both Tamara and Andrew have been very fair-minded in allowing us to follow our own consciences. So we plan to write a letter to the Mental Health Minister, the

Honourable Mary Wooldridge and to the Chief Psychiatrist, Dr Ruth Vine, and ask that the state services take a broader look at the issue that truly balances consumer rights with the rights of non-smokers and the long-term health needs of consumers. We believe that if all factors are taken into account, a set of exemptions that allow that people are able to smoke at an admission is the best resolution to a thorny issue. We will keep you posted as to the outcomes of the next step in our campaign.

Please note that a newsletter from the child and youth redesign project is not available for this mail-out. It is hoped one will be available for the December newsletter.

A new position—the Child and Youth consultant

Hi everyone,

My name is Lisa and I have been appointed as the Child and Youth Consultant with the Child and Youth Mental Health Service (CYMHS) Redesign Demonstration Project in the Grampians Region. My position involves the development and implementation of a youth participation and engagement strategy which will assist service planning, delivery and evaluation of the CYMHS Project in relation to the youth perspective.

It's early days for me in this project and I am currently working with agencies across the region to gather an understanding of the broad systemic factors that promote and facilitate youth participation in their agencies. The next step in the process will be to consult with young people aged 0-

25 years to learn from their lived experience, their needs and their thoughts on ways in which youth participation can be enhanced across the Grampians region. Key themes identified throughout the consultation process will be included in the development of a Regional Youth Engagement & Participation Plan.

This consultation process will be undertaken by a variety of methods which includes consulting with identified existing groups across the region, individual consultations and also includes speaking with young people who haven't accessed services. In the future there is scope for the development of a Regional Youth Reference Advisory Group that is representative of youth from across the Grampians Region.

If you wish to be involved please contact me on the number listed below. I look forward to meeting with everyone as the project

progresses and I will continue to make updates in this newsletter on the progress of this very exciting project. Please contact me with any enquiries or questions on 5320 3039 Monday – Wednesday
Lisa Bow

Mark's note:

Please note that as Adult Consumer Consultant, I am contacting the 16 people on my consumer participation program list aged up to 30 years old, whose experience of services is in the last 5 years, to see if any of those people want to talk to Lisa in order to build better services for young adults, teenagers, and children.

Lisa Bow, our youth and child consultant, is pictured below. Please read the article above and consider giving Lisa a call.



as it progresses as well.

Mental Health Reform Council news

One of the truly great things done at this service over the least eight years has been the introduction of evidence based practice. Services where this practice is delivered tend to get more consumers through to recovery. So we end up with lower acute unit admission rates, lower relapse rates as people recover fully before discharge and more involvement of families in day-to-day treatment, for example.

One of the challenges I have taken on at the Reform Council is to be part of a team of Coun-

cil members that lobbies for this evidence base to be delivered across the state. So that people in Sale, in Seymour or in Sassafrass have the same chance at recovery as someone from Sebastopol.

To achieve this, we need to spread the movement to an evidence base, but also measure some of the things I have mentioned at each service. That way we can do a couple of things. First we can have evidence for where services are working and where they aren't. And if we eventually

make this information public, we can assist consumers and families across the state to help us lobby for these evidence based practices.

That has meant that my work on the Council over the last couple of months has involved convening a working party to attempt to drive some of this reform.

I will keep you informed of this work

The car-park campaign—getting your licence after being unwell

A time of unwellness can make driving difficult or even positively dangerous for yourself and others. When we put two and two together, most of us would acknowledge that a period of psychosis, for instance, is not at all a good time to be on the road.

But most of us also recover. And it can be difficult to know what we should look

for before we return to drive, or learn for the first time.

Some facts:

- VicRoads requires a report from your GP or psychiatrist to say you are ready to drive again or to learn for the first time. But the good news is for most people, once you have recovered, well-treated mental illness offers no barrier to driving.
- There are specialist occupational therapists that can

arrange an assessment to see if you are ready to drive. that you have done so, and he will record your name and phone number.

Now that the car-park out the Then at the end of January, we will draw one Building in Ballarat is largely name of those recorded free for the cars of consumers out of a hat. The winner and families, I am planning a will win a \$30 gift card competition to get you using from JB Hi Fi. So please it more often. get your licence back, or If you are a consumer or fam- get it for the first time, ily member and use the car and use the car park when park over the next two you come in for an ap- months to the end of January, pointment. please tell Craig on reception

The Consumer Connection summarises news and events relevant to Ballarat Health Services Mental Health Services consumers.

It is produced by Consumer Consultant Mark Lacey, and feedback or suggestions for improvement are welcome.

Please contact Mark on:
Email: markl@bhs.org.au
Phone: 5320 4100

The purpose of consumer consultancy is to collect the views of consumers throughout the region.

This information is used to guide service planning, delivery and evaluation to improve the quality of service for people with a mental illness and their families.

Consumer consultants are people who have first-hand experienced of both mental illness and mental health service provision. That means we have some empathy and understanding of the lives, difficulties and recovery stories of other consumers

www.bhs.org.au

Consumer-led groups—Insights and Pendulum

The Pendulum Mental Health Support Group has operated for about nine years. Members meet at Horizons Services in Urquhart St, Horsham on the third Thursday of the month from 7:00 pm until 8:30 pm to learn about the things that get and keep us well, and to support one another in our movement towards recovery.

Actions of the recent past and near future include:

- The group has been led by member Rob Walter to have a look at meditation as a means of working towards recovery. Rob led us in two sessions of DVD's of talks presented by Rob's mentor Sandy MacGregor.
- Jo organised for members to attend Wimmera Uniting Care Alcohol and Other Drug services in October.
- We plan to have a Christmas gath-

ering. If you have been a regular member of the group in 2011, expect an invitation in the mail.

Those who want to join the group should contact Jo on 5384 7300 or me on the contact details provided.

The Insights Bipolar Support Group has operated for about six years. Members meet at APROTCH in Queen St Nth, Ballarat on the fourth Thursday of the month from 7:00 pm until 8:00 pm with much the same aims as the Horsham group.

Actions we have taken recently and plan to undertake soon include:

- We plan for the November meeting to be a talk on a strategic approach to weight loss, one of the issues that affects many peo-

ple required to take medication for bipolar disorder.

- The July meeting was led by Geraldine White from Centacare. It was an excellent session on the central theme of intimate relationships for people with bipolar, something I think all of us are looking for, but few seem to find.
- The Christmas gathering will be on Thursday December 1st. A meal at LaPorchetta's at 5:30 will be followed by a session taking photos, led by Lisa Bow, at the statuary at Lake Wendouree from 7 until dusk. Please ring John Harrison 5336 0565 or me if you want to attend.

Please note: the December edition of *The Consumer Connection* will feature art works and pieces of writing from entrants to the Mental Health Week competitions.

Did you know?

No-one doubts that financial affairs are sometimes really difficult to deal with. A financial counselor can help you get your budget in order, assist you to negotiate for debts to be paid over time rather than all at once, and help put you back on track financially. In Ballarat, Child and Family Services have these workers. In other parts of the region, talk to your clinician to find out where you can access a financial counselor.



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