



Building Resilience Tools for Recovery



New Horizons held its inaugural Mental Health Support Workers' Conference on Monday & Tuesday, 10 & 11 November 2008 at Sydney's Citigate Central Hotel.

The aim of the conference was to build resilience within support workers, the people they support, and within the industry. The general consensus was that our goal was met, and in many ways exceeded.

On day one, NSW Health's David McGrath officiated the opening of the conference, followed by Michael West from the Metropolitan Aboriginal Land Council who performed a traditional 'Welcome to Country' ceremony, ensuring the event started on a positive, respectful note.

Key note speaker, Arana Pearson, a musician and writer who became involved in the Mental Health service sector some years after his own experience of using Mental Health services in New Zealand, energised attendees with his informative and entertaining address, where he spoke about the skills and attitude that make a good support worker.

Following morning tea, delegates split into groups to participate in workshops where they learned about everything from cross-cultural and cross-contextual support, to 'fighting the fight' in order to create change.

A sumptuous lunch was followed by a keynote address from Fay Jackson, who captured the imagination of the audience with her humorous, confronting, and very personal style of presentation. Fay spoke frankly about creating acceptance, support and understanding.

Afternoon workshops covered a range of challenging topics including suicide and self harm, which gave delegates an opportunity to share prevention techniques, and personality disorders, where participants learned practical strategies for managing the associated behaviours.

The atmosphere by the end of day one – a time at which most people are often exhausted after so many hours of learning – was described by one conference organiser as 'electric'.

Fay Jackson kick-started day two of the conference with her second key note speech, during which she talked candidly about the challenges and joys of working in mental health. Fay's unique approach once again wowed the crowd.

Morning workshops took on some challenging subjects, with participants learning how to better support people who live with mental illness and substance abuse (dual diagnosis), or how to cope with threats, incidents of violence, injury and even death.

After another delicious lunch, delegates heard from Dr. Peter Stebbins who delivered an informative key note address, speaking passionately about how support workers can turn stress into success.

The conference was wrapped up in the afternoon with workshops that delved into interesting topics such as Love, Sex & Mental Health, and Stress Vs. Laughter.

By all accounts, the event went very smoothly. Organisers were encouraged by the overwhelmingly positive feedback, as well as some insightful ideas for next time.

Keep your eyes peeled for your chance to be involved in the next Mental Health Support Workers' Conference!