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## **MHFA Instructors Newsletter, February 2005**

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Welcome!

The first newsletter for 2005 has finally arrived. We hope you all enjoyed the Christmas break, are full of enthusiasm and ready to deliver more courses in 2005. In the past twelve months, we have doubled the number of trained instructors and spread to Western Australia, South Australia and Queensland. In March this year, following our first instructor course in Darwin, we will have instructors in every state and territory of Australia.

In 2004, the program has continued to be recognised both nationally and internationally, featuring in the media, being translated into different languages (Croatian, Vietnamese, Italian, and Finnish) and continuing to receive awards. We're hoping that with our move to Melbourne in April this year, the program will continue to grow.

Good luck with all the courses you have planned for the coming year. We look forward to hearing your stories.

Betty Kitchener and Tony Jorm

### **What's New with the MHFA Web Site**

The website continues to grow in popularity. During 2004, there were 31,826 visits to the site. A "visit" is a series of clicks on a site by an individual during a specific period of time. These visits involved 580,900 hits, where a "hit" is any request to the site for any type of file. The most requested page on the site was the PDF file of the "Mental Health First Aid" manual.

The MHFA Instructors' Resources web page is continually being added to. By early March, there will be some extra case studies available in different settings - eg work place, school & in custody. Thank you to the MHFA Instructors who have contributed to this list: Susan Goldie, Ronda Pearce, Helen Burfitt, Joy Sheargold, Rob & Greg Robinson and Prue Clark.

There will also be a listing of the answers to the questions you send me from your MHFA course participants.

## **Instructor Features in National Museum Exhibit**

Victorian MHFA Instructor Ingrid Ozols is currently being featured in a display at the National Museum of Australia in Canberra. The display gives information about the lives of a range of Australians, including Lindy Chamberlain, Prince Leonard of Hutt and Caroline Chisholm. The display has photos and a video of Ingrid's work to raise awareness about depression and in it Ingrid explains how depression has affected her life. The video is a clip from an ABC TV documentary and shows Ingrid teaching a MHFA class and explaining the steps of MHFA.

## **Latest Research Evaluating MHFA**

MHFA now has two randomised controlled trials showing its benefits, both of which were published during 2004. The first involved 301 employees of government departments. As expected, the training produced improvements in mental health literacy and a reduction in stigma. However, the most surprising finding of this trial was an improvement of the mental health of course participants themselves. Even though participants attended the course to assist them to help others, there was an unexpected personal benefit, probably because the high quality information allowed the participants to take better action for their personal mental health. These findings will be useful for instructors who want to persuade employers to run courses in workplaces.

A second randomised controlled trial of MHFA has been published. The trial involved 753 members of the public from rural New South Wales. The instructors who conducted the courses were from the NSW Southern Area Health Service. The trial found benefits to participants' knowledge of mental disorders, a reduction in stigmatising attitudes and an increase in helping behaviour.

The results of both trials were published by the journal *BMC Psychiatry* and copies are available from the MHFA website: <http://www.mhfa.com.au/evaluation.htm>

A follow-up study is currently being carried out to gather first aiders' stories about what happened when they used the skills they got from the course. The aim of this study is to find out how often course participants use their skills, what types of help they give, and what are the effects of this help on the person with the mental health problem.

Over the next two years, a large research project will be developing MHFA standards. Just as the Australian Resuscitation Council sets standards, which are followed by conventional first aid courses, we need national standards for mental health first aid. The standards will cover how to help people in various crisis situations (including self harm), as well as the best first aid for first-onset mental disorders (including eating disorders). The standards will be developed using systematic reviews of the scientific evidence and the consensus of panels of clinical experts, consumers and carers. Development of the standards will be an important step to getting national accreditation of MHFA training and is being funded by the Australian Rotary Research Fund.

## **MHFA Will Soon Cover Australia**

A MHFA Instructor Training Course was held in Perth (WA) in November and in Toowoomba (QLD) in December 2004. This leaves the Northern Territory as the only state or territory without instructors. However, an Instructor Training Course will be held in Darwin in March 2005. This will be a significant step in achieving national coverage of Australia by instructors, who by then will number over 180.

## **Scotland Embraces MHFA**

The Scottish government has adopted MHFA as part of "Choose Life, A National Strategy and Action Plan to Prevent Suicide in Scotland". In 2003, Betty travelled to Scotland to train 15 instructors as part of a pilot of MHFA in Scotland. An independent evaluation of this pilot reported

favourably on the training course. A decision was then taken by the Scottish government to “tartanize” the course and roll it out nationally. In October 2004, Betty participated in a training course in Edinburgh to establish 6 Trainers of MHFA Instructors in Scotland. It is planned that these Trainers will train 144 instructors who will then offer the course across the country. Scotland’s bold plan is to have 6% of its population trained in MHFA by 2010. By July 2005, one of the first steps is to have all new trainee Ambulance Officers in Scotland undertake the MHFA course.

### **Hong Kong evaluates their MHFA program**

The Hong Kong MHFA Instructors are conducting a pre & post evaluation of 400 MHFA course participants. The MHFA manual is modified for the Hong Kong community.

### **Finland to Translate MHFA Manual**

An agreement has been reached with Finland’s Ministry of Social Affairs and Health to translate the MHFA Manual and partially revise it to suit the Finnish health system and culture. The translation will be carried out by the Finnish Association for Mental Health.

### **Hollie Jackes Memorial Scholarship (HJMS)**

Hollie Jackes was a lovely young woman from NE NSW who trained as a MHFA Instructor with the aim of taking the MHFA program to rural areas. Unfortunately she lost her life to mental illness. In order to carry on the work Hollie felt passionate about, Hollie's family & friends raised money for the HJMS for 2004. These scholarships provided half the cost of training to become a MHFA Instructor for people who will teach the course in rural areas.

Eleven people, who would not have otherwise afforded to do the training course, have now been able to become MHFA Instructors, thanks to these scholarships. These Instructors have or will conduct the 12-hour MHFA course in rural areas places in NSW (Grafton, Glen Innes, Coffs Harbour, Goulburn & Albury), QLD (Gatton, Kingaroy, Gold Coast), NT (Alice Springs), SA (Fleurieu Peninsula) and VIC (Geelong & Colac).

Scholarship holders have been publicizing the HJMS fund in their areas. The work of these Instructors will perpetuate Hollie's aims for many years to come.

### **Award for MHFA Research**

At the 2004 Conference of the Australasian Society for Psychiatric Research, held in Fremantle in December, Betty Kitchener was presented with the Society’s Consumer-Researcher Award. This award is given annually to a mental health consumer who has made a contribution to research from a consumer perspective and was given to Betty in recognition of her MHFA research. The award was presented by Keith Wilson, the Chair of the Mental Health Council of Australia.

### **MHFA Babies**

Congratulations to the following MHFA Instructors on the birth of their babies:

Mari Todd in Shetland, Scotland (Alexander)  
Melissa Lyons in Canberra, ACT (Madison)  
Kelly Rothschild in Canberra, ACT (Harper)  
Christine Minkov in Lismore, NSW (Daniel)  
Algee, the MHFA koala has been sent to them.

## **MHFA to Move to Melbourne**

For the last few years, the home of Mental Health First Aid has been the Centre for Mental Health Research at the Australian National University. However, from April 2005, the MHFA program will move to the ORYGEN Research Centre in Melbourne. This relatively new Centre, affiliated with the University of Melbourne, specializes in the study of first-onset mental disorders. The move will bring a significant increase in the resources available to support the MHFA program and will aid its expansion nationally and internationally.

## **MHFA for Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Groups**

Thanks to funding from the Commonwealth Department of Health and Ageing, the MHFA is being adapted to suit community members of Italian, Vietnamese and Croatian backgrounds. This is an eighteen month project that intends to train six instructors from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds to conduct the MHFA course for members of their respective communities. The project recognises that translated materials are needed in order to encourage participation of communities. The first instructors for this program will be trained in March this year.

## **Media Coverage**

In November, the MHFA program featured in the health pages of the Sydney Morning Herald. A copy of the article is available on the MHFA website at:

[www.mhfa.com.au/media/smh\\_181104.doc](http://www.mhfa.com.au/media/smh_181104.doc)

In August, when the successful evaluation trial of the MHFA program in the workplace was published, Dr Norman Swan interviewed Prof Tony Jorm and Betty Kitchener on ABC Radio National for the Health Report. The script can be read online at:

<http://www.abc.net.au/rn/talks/8.30/helthrpt/stories/s1186674.htm>

## **Information for this Newsletter**

Please send any information for this newsletter to Betty:

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This email address will remain current for a number of months and will be redirected to our new workplace in Melbourne.

