

## Ermha builds on dual disability expertise

25 years after deinstitutionalisation the community-based system of support for people with dual disabilities is in need of vast improvement.

Dual disabilities include people who are experiencing a mental illness together with an intellectual disability. They may also have drug and alcohol problems, housing instability, complex behavioural issues, physical disabilities and lack positive social relationships.

At Ermha we have created and implemented a specialist service model to support dual disability clients which is adaptable and resilient, and is unique in its collaborative approach to service delivery, review and revision.

To maintain the needed level of support Ermha is refining its efforts to include:

- Comprehensive, up-to-date training for dual disability support workers
- Easier system navigation for clients and carers
- Better integration between support services
- Tailored, goal-driven support

We believe that the key to change for clients with dual disabilities resides in the client/worker relationship. The relationship must be genuine with clearly articulated goals, roles and responsibilities. Ermha's support staff are skilled in reflective practice and are prepared to challenge easy assumptions about clients' abilities.

Our experience shows that to effectively deliver support services to dual disability clients, we require a staff culture of self reflection and peer support. This method means we can embrace successful strategies early and apply them more widely, which in turn means clients get better support to overcome the barriers to their goals. It also means we are constantly creating new ways to respond to our clients' changing circumstances.



A quick look-see at MadCap Cafe Fountain Gate turned in to coffee and lunch for Laura Smyth, State member for LaTrobe and Jenny Macklin, Federal minister For Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs. Both were ably served by MadCap trainee Jason Wright (more MadCap inside).

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# A note from the CEO

Welcome to Ermha's quarterly newsletter. Between clients, staff, board and volunteers, about 1,250 people keep Ermha vibrant and effective. So a simple newsletter can never capture the depth and breadth of everything we do. But we can offer snapshots and cover important events and changes that are occurring across the service.

As any management text book will tell you one of the biggest jobs in any organisation is managing growth. The growth process highlights strengths and weaknesses like no other can. This was behind our recent decision to create Ermha's Service Development Unit (SDU). This unit both creates and monitors change. As Ermha grows it becomes even more important to operate in a coordinated fashion – one that makes the best use of our resources.

Among other efforts, Ermha is currently focusing on our dual disability, social inclusion, peer support, youth and respite service elements. These areas are woven through the organisation in various ways and our SDU is charged with making this integration work better.

We hope you find this newsletter informative and invite you to visit our website where you can learn more about Ermha's work, get involved and share your feedback.

Peter Waters, CEO

## Ermha's service development

### Driving and managing growth

Following intensive planning in early 2011 Ermha's newly formed Service Development Unit (SDU) began work on its core brief, service expansion, innovation, research and accreditation. Eight months later and now under full power the SDU team has finalised Ermha's 2011 – 2013 Strategic and Operational Plans, re-vamped communications materials, rebuilt Ermha's website and is beginning to put the finishing touches that will see Ermha take the next step in the accreditation process.

Michelle Nichols, Christine Thornton-Gaylard and John Witschi



The unit unveiled its work at an event that highlighted the contribution of staff, clients and partner agencies, all of whom who played a huge part in ensuring Ermha's plans were progressive and achievable.

Now the team begins its next quest – the articulation and expansion of Ermha's service model. The goal is to use our innovative specialist service knowledge and experience to provide more tailored support for all Ermha clients.

Our specialist support work features:

- Comprehensive, up-to-date training for support workers
- Easier system navigation for clients and carers
- Better integration between support services
- Tailored, goal-driven support

While our ability to provide this kind of support more widely will depend on many factors the first step will be, as with the development of our strategic and operational plans, a thorough consultation process that will involve all Ermha stakeholders.

At the same time Ermha's SDU is undertaking a whole-of-organisation review to address service system gaps that came to light as a result of the painstaking accreditation process. One of the areas the unit will develop concerns our research capacity, a resource that can assist us as we continue to refine our Dual Disability Service Model. Ermha's growing expertise in dual disability support is well-timed considering recent state and federal budget allocations to this part of our sector.

# Supporting the future

The right support at the right time can make the difference of a lifetime

Australian communities are discovering the importance of providing young people who are experiencing a mental illness with early, age-appropriate support. We are coming to recognise the losses that can pile up over a lifetime when we ignore youth mental health needs.

Almost a decade ago Ermha created its first program devoted to young people with a mental illness. The groundswell that is occurring nation-wide will see more and more people and resources applied to youth mental health. In Ermha's ideal world, one we are working to make happen, youth mental health support will feature:

**One-to-one and group support** One-to-one support with peers and/or Ermha workers means young people can work on aspects of their recovery that are particular to them. Group support provides great opportunities for interaction and recovery-focussed activities with other young people who are overcoming mental illness.

**Quick response times** The numbers show that when support is available as soon as possible after the first onset of symptoms of mental ill health recovery is often faster and more complete.

**Peer support** A mental illness at an early age can interrupt cognitive development and create a confused sense of identity. Peers who have a lived experience of a mental illness and who are also well-advanced in their own recovery can offer a powerful sense of hope because they are the “walking, talking” embodiment of recovery. They are best placed to quickly establish bonds of trust that can kick start the support process.

**Skills development** Education and vocational training must be a core aspect of any successful youth recovery program. An independent and productive future will often require knowledge and skills that employers want.

**Personal mental health awareness** People who understand the nature of their mental illness are better prepared to act in ways that diminish the likelihood of worsening symptoms and they acquire strategies that promote mental health.

**Support to carers** It is not only the support recipient who is on the recovery journey. When carers can count on support of their own they are better able to respond to a loved one's support needs.

## Developing peer support

“Peer support” for people who are experiencing a mental illness means support that is offered by people who have a lived experience of mental illness and who have reached an advanced stage in their recovery. This means clients can be supported by people who have experienced stigma, isolation, recovery setbacks, medication problems, family disruption and many other situations and events that can accompany a mental illness.

Research shows that peer support can be particularly effective in the early stages of client engagement (0 – 12 months). This is when clients are at their most vulnerable and when peer empathy and good advice from people who have “been there” can have the most impact. Peers can encourage clients to take new approaches to problems, and to imagine a brighter future.

One of the reasons peer support workers can help clients move ahead is because they are well-placed to counter the fear and resistance to change that many clients experience. From this point of view peer support workers are role models who are living proof that the effort required

to achieve recovery goals is worth it.

At Ermha we are planning an organisational culture in which peer support is understood and valued and our goal is to integrate peers into program teams so their knowledge and experience is as widely available as possible. This will require:

- Structured and regular supervision provided by program supervisors
- Specialised initial, and then continuing, training for peer support workers
- That peer support workers are provided the same pay scale as support workers
- That peer support workers contribute to program development and not just work as program “add-ons”
- Specialised training for managers and supervisors of peer support workers

The Australian Federal Government has recently allocated funds to increase the number of peer support workers and programs. Ermha is working to ensure that peer resources become available to current and future clients.



## Sneha Arava

Like most people Sneha didn't see her mental illness coming. A brief bout of depression in her senior high school years was followed by an uneventful start at Monash Caulfield where Sneha studied computing.

Sneha studied hard but in her second year the symptoms that had receded returned with greater force. She ceased studying in order to focus on her recovery. Sneha was admitted to hospital in late 2009, an episode she says she benefited from because it allowed her time-out from her day-to-day concerns.

Sneha's experience of mental illness didn't stop her from getting back to the books, this time completing a Diploma of Library and Information. She also has plans to begin studying to qualify as an aged care worker.

In January 2010 Sneha joined Ermha's Aspirations day program where, Sneha says, "Ermha keeps me active. I get to meet new people and the workers (like Tania) look after you."

At Aspirations Sneha contributes to several groups including Small Talk, a general discussion group, and Healthy Choices, a group whose name says it all.

With the help of her family, group support at Ermha and her own desire for growth and change, Sneha says, "I am fine and getting better every day."

Sneha Arava has been an Ermha Aspirations client for about 18 months. Sneha shared some of her experiences with us while Ermha board member Chris Lawton quizzed Aspirations worker Tania Harrison about her support role.



## Tania Harrison

**Chris Lawton:** What motivated you to work in the mental health field? Chances are it wasn't the money.

**Tania Harrison:** I've had some personal experience of mental health issues in my family. I saw the support my brother received from people in the mental health field and I thought, yep, that's certainly an area I'd like to be involved in. That's the essence of my motivation.

**CL** If you didn't work in this field what would you be doing?

**TH** I'm a qualified social worker so I reckon, to be quite honest, I only ever had

the drive to go into mental health and that's the thing I was interested in.

**CL** What enables you to connect with someone who is down and out, particularly someone with a mental illness, when you can't see the illness?

**TH** I'm the kind of person who is always asking questions, trying to find out about a person's experience because I'm well aware that what they are going through is often something I've not had to contend with. I think the big thing in my role is always having that hope and belief in clients even if they don't have it themselves at a particular stage. I'm always saying, "if that's what you want to do let's go for it. Let's not say I can't do it. Let's try, even if it's just a few small steps to test it out and see if it really is something you're interested in.

**CL** What is the most satisfying thing about your job?

**TH** When I see somebody recovering it's great because you start to notice the changes they see in themselves. Having been involved with the hospitality team a lot more recently, I'm seeing people moving on to placements at MadCap. A lot of them

have not worked in quite some time or not at all. So it's quite satisfying to actually assist them to reach their goal and potentially move on to further employment.

**CL** What helps people recover from a mental illness?

**TH** A whole range of things help people recover from a mental illness. Clients having belief in themselves can help recovery. Having activities to be involved with is something clients have said is quite helpful. Having a reason to get up and get out and socialise is particularly good for individuals who are isolated.

**CL** What do you think society should really do to help people with a mental illness? And how far does society have to go to make it happen?

**TH** I think we can both agree that there is still stigma toward mental illness. We need to stand up and say mental illness is part of us and we need to have support out there and, just as important, is a wider understanding that it's tough and people need a hand sometimes. I think as a society we need to say this is happening and it doesn't have to be behind closed doors.

# MadCap Cafe opens in Geelong

Frank Costa, one of Geelong's most prominent citizens, officially opened the third MadCap Cafe at Westfield Geelong in early July.

Design, construction and fit out took a short four months during which the new franchisee, Pathways Inc., began learning what it takes to run a busy food and beverage retail operation that trains people who are experiencing a mental illness for jobs in the open market.

The MadCap model requires that each franchisee provides community based support to people with a mental illness. It's this support that, when matched with effective job training, gives trainees the best chance to succeed. Pathways has been a support provider for over 25 years.

Anthony Cheeseman, Ermha's MadCap Enterprises Manager, has been monitoring the new cafe's performance and is pleased about current trends. "Sales are extremely strong for such a young business," said Anthony. "This level of trade indicates that MadCap Geelong will be able to sustain its training role well in to the future," he said.

Public acceptance of all three Madcap stores has been phenomenal and it is just one more sign that future cafes can expect the same reception.

MadCap's modern, welcoming cafes, together with quality products and service, have taken on-the-job training for people who are experiencing a mental illness to a whole new level.



Champion Geelong footballer Cameron Ling and MadCap Geelong employee Milly Jacobs with a giant jar of coffee beans. The winner of the "Guess how many beans in the jar" competition won a coffee a day for a year at MadCap Geelong.

Diane Oudman was one of the subjects of a story about MadCap Cafe, shot on location at MadCap Cafe Fountain Gate and Gloria Jeans, Endeavour Hills by Channel Ten's 7pm Project. (The segment went to air on August 2nd.) Diane developed her service skills at Ermha's Aspirations day program, proceeded to on-the-job training at MadCap Cafe and her hard work was rewarded with a job at Gloria Jeans where she is in her second year of employment.

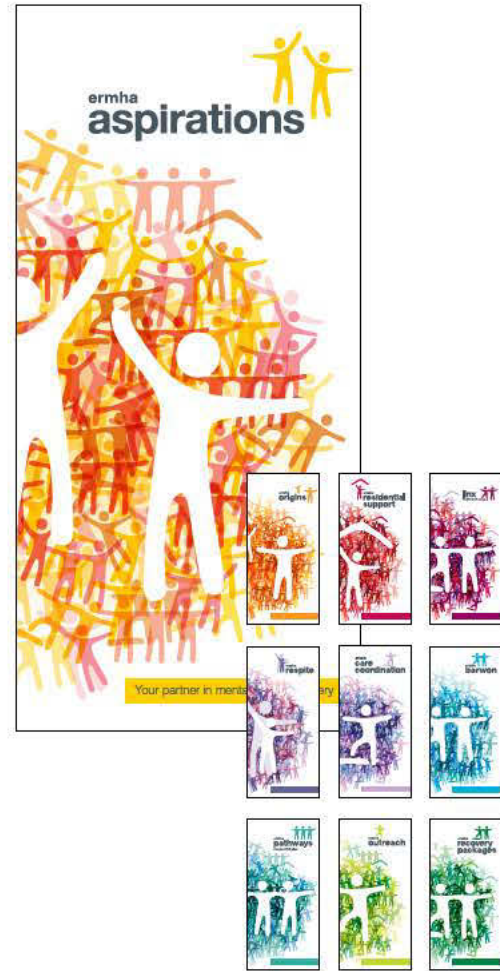


# Ermha gets a makeover

Our identity on paper and on line has required some consistency for a long time and we started the process of bringing this together before last year's AGM. The purpose was to remove any confusion about our identity by creating a consistent image for all of our communications materials. We are proud to unveil our new program and organisational brochures, websites and 1300 number.

On the new website people can sign up for our newsletter, become a friend of Ermha, make a donation and contact our op shops to donate goods. Website visitors can apply for positions at Ermha on line, give us feedback electronically about the work we are doing, find program referral information and learn much more about Ermha in general.

Newsletter readers who want to offer suggestions or feedback on anything to do with Ermha can do so by visiting the "Contact" page section of our website, [www.ermha.org](http://www.ermha.org)



## What's in a name?

When the Service Development Unit put the call out for a title for our newsletter we received many responses. Thank you to the creative people at Ermha's Pathways program and in particular Natasha Saddington (above) for the winning title "Ermha Express". Ermha client Stephen McDonald (below) was runner up. Both received gift certificates and heartfelt thank you's from the newsletter production team.



## Support Ermha

Is the mental health of our community vital to you? If so, there are several ways you can support Ermha in its work. You can:

- Stay informed and sign up for newsletters and updates,
- Donate (All donations are tax deductible),
- Become a Friend of Ermha.

See our website for more information or call 1300 376 421.

## Upcoming Events

From the 6th to 9th September, Ermha representatives will be heading to Adelaide to attend the Annual TheMHS Conference. This trip is not only to learn about advances in community mental health support, but we have also been selected to do a presentation on our innovative model of support for Dual Disability clients.

On 17th of October 2011 Ermha will be holding our AGM at the Paddy O'Donoghue Centre in Noble Park.