

## Community bridges supporting diversity

Together with our partner, St John of God Healthcare, Ermha's Origins program supports people in migrant communities who are experiencing a mental illness, and their families. And now we're taking another leap.

When the Origins program started three years ago, its goal was, and still is, to support people with a mental illness from culturally and linguistically diverse communities. The team's base, Dandenong, is home to thousands of people who have arrived from across the world, and many of them carry the physical and psychological scars of violence and upheaval.

With a full client load and a waiting list, the program's community development work, which was seen as vital from the outset, needed some support of its own. Jana Runge, the successful applicant who is now four months into her role, brought a great deal of experience to the job with her background in migrant settlement as a worker with Frankston's New Hope

Foundation. As Origins Community Development Officer, she has been called on to achieve two main things:

- To enhance the capacity of local services to work with Culturally and Linguistically Diverse communities affected by mental health issues; and
- To reduce stigma by developing Culturally and Linguistically Diverse communities understanding of mental health concepts, treatment options and/or preventative measures, as well as knowledge of the local service system.

While it sounds straightforward on paper, the degree of cultural diversity in the region makes it a different, and much bigger story. Each culture has its own views about what mental illness means so getting the Origins message across is a numbers game as well as one of cultural sensitivity and engagement.

Jana started by making contact with services that already had close ties with many migrant communities such as Foundation House, Migrant Resource Centre and neighbourhood houses. In discussions with these organisations Jana expanded on how Origins does its work and sought advice about the most appropriate ways to take her message directly to community leaders and groups.

One of Jana's first projects, in collaboration with Foundation House, WHISE, the Refugee Action Program and Southern Health's



Jana Runge, bridge builder.

Mental Health Branch, is to develop a program devoted to mental health awareness and wellbeing that will be co-designed by members of the migrant community.

Jana is quick to point out that mental health can be advanced in many ways beyond the psychosocial support Ermha offers. Housing security, a sense of belonging, education and access to other important services can all contribute to better health. To that end, Ermha, and Origins in particular, are bridging support gaps to create better health outcomes for the whole community.

Jana says, "Many migrant community members are focussed on survival to the extent that their own health comes second or is ignored altogether. I think we are in a position to help give health, and mental health in particular, a higher profile."

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# A note from the CEO

The summer season in our community is when most of us take some time to be with friends and family. If we're fortunate we will celebrate accomplishments, relationships and just being together.

For others though, opportunities to do the same will be few. Isolation, estranged families and nowhere to call home leave little room for celebration.

At Ermha we see another side to people who are often considered far outside the mainstream. One thing that stands out is how even the smallest gestures – a friendly smile, a casual conversation – in essence a warm and welcoming atmosphere, can prove to someone that they matter and that they belong.

Furthermore, when given the right support, at the right time and in the right way, people begin to experience their own internal sense of worth.

Now that's something worth celebrating.

On behalf of Ermha we would like to send our best wishes to you and your family for the 2011 festive season.

Peter Waters, CEO

## Respite's big day out

Carers and consumers celebrate.

Carers, and care recipients, don't get many chances to celebrate their work and each other – too often more immediate concerns take precedence.

During Mental Health Week, with the support of the Department of Health, Ermha's Respite program led by Kerrie-Anne Housley grabbed the opportunity to turn things around and put carers and consumers at the centre of a day of fun and relaxation.

Berwick's Akoonah Park, with its open areas and spacious indoor dining hall, was overwhelmed with people who had gathered to enjoy magicians, Harley rides, games, face painting, music and of course great food.

As well as offering people a chance to meet, relax and have fun, an equally important result was that the event introduced people, who were unaware of its existence, to the Respite program. Now more people than ever know that Ermha Respite can assist with short notice or planned in-home respite, one-to-one respite, group based activities, skill building activities and social outings.

Representatives of several local councils attended the event and were so impressed they arranged a similar celebration day and plans are underway to make it an annual occasion.

Harley rides and getting together were just many ways carers and consumers celebrated their roles and each other.

Ultimately the whole community benefits when its members are recognised and appreciated for the work they do as carers and consumers. Ermha's Respite day at Akoonah Park sent an unmistakable message: a strong community supports all its citizens.

For more information about Ermha Respite, go to our website, [www.ermha.org](http://www.ermha.org)

**Ermha would like to acknowledge the Department of Health who provided for this event, enabling us to host this memorable and well deserved day out for carers and care recipients.**



# Lighting a green spark

Ermha supports residents of 14 Supported Residential Services (SRS) including Aaron Lodge, an SRS in Dandenong. Two residents, Darryl and Lenny, are cultivating both their skills and the Aaron Lodge gardens through Ermha's Edible Garden Project.

Darryl and Lenny (pictured), two residents of Aaron Lodge, have revived the "Edible Garden Project" that was just waiting for people with the right mix of knowledge and perseverance to come along.

Ermha Pathways Support and Connect workers, Kaye McMaster and Daniela Markovic, helped pull the project together by arranging financial support which was used to purchase seedlings, hand tools and fertilisers.

Starting with a minimum of tools and materials, the pair built up the soil, rejigged the irrigation system, decided on the plants to grow and their positions according to conditions of light and shade, and they are now tending their first crops.

Lenny and Darryl both keep a protective eye on the small strawberry crop and shoo off any other residents who might take a fancy to the little red berries before they are ready to harvest. Strawberries, tomatoes, sweet corn, capsicum, carrots, rhubarb and spinach dominate with smaller beds devoted to various herbs. As some of the summer crop nears maturity the Aaron



Lodge gardeners are already planning for the autumn. More importantly, Kaye and Daniela supported Darryl and Lenny as they worked to see their ideas come to life.

Between Lenny (left) and Darryl (right) are Daniela Markovic and Kaye McMaster, workers in Ermha's Supporting Connections program.

## Kaye McMaster (pictured above, second from the right) an Ermha Pathways Supporting Connections worker, speaks to Chris Lawton, Ermha client, about her support role:

**Chris Lawton:** What motivated you to work in the mental health field?

**Kaye McMaster:** For me it's about providing support to clients so that they improve their quality of life – small changes, any changes that can improve someone's quality of life. I enjoy seeing those small changes.

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

**KM** One of the most satisfying things is enjoying the small shifts that I make with the clients. For an example, just making eye contact, or a smile, after a long period of trying to build rapport. I also like working in this organisation or community service type work because of the like minded staff. I find the organisations I have worked in, especially Ermha, the staff are very client focussed and so I enjoy working alongside those people.

**CL** What is the worst aspect of having a mental illness from your point of view?

**KM** I guess stigma, because still, even

though society is improving, it's there. Also, I'd say isolation. And I mean isolation physically and also emotionally.

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

**KM** I think things such as social inclusion, unconditional, non judgemental quality care and support – and I mean support, support, support! Also being listened to and really understood. Being heard is really important for many people we are working with. As workers we need to build up that trust and for them to feel like they are being heard and especially understood.

**CL** What do you see as the key issue facing people with a mental illness in a SRS?

**KM** From experience and my understanding, the issues are isolation, self esteem, motivation and financial hardship. Also, lack of support – that would be across the board in SRSs.

**CL** Is the garden project giving the clients hope and purpose?

**KM** Some of the clients have a past interest in gardening – they may have worked in horticulture prior to moving to the SRS or had an interest in gardening, and the Edible Garden Project has rekindled that interest. The clients have a sense of purpose and they see the rewards of the vegetables growing.

**CL** How much do the residents enjoy the physical activity of working in the garden?

**KM** From the comments I've had from the residents it appears there is a great sense of enjoyment. Much effort is taken to prepare the garden bed and planting. There have been some really positive attitudes towards a little bit more exercise, being out in the fresh air and getting involved.

**CL** Are the fruit and vegetables grown in the garden used?

**KM** Yes they are. They are used in the kitchen and they are served to residents. Some of the gardens have a supply of herbs which can be used on a daily basis.



# MadCap café rakes in awards

It's about what we can do, not what we can't.

MadCap Café staff and trainees spend most of their time providing great food, beverages and service, all three of which helped MadCap Fountain Gate win two prestigious awards.

The "Casey Business of the Year" was awarded in recognition of MadCap's new and vibrant retail business that has experienced strong sales growth while maintaining high customer satisfaction ratings.

Madcap Café Fountain Gate also won the City of Casey "Social Enterprise Award" which acknowledges the café's training function – every day MadCap trainees prove that people with a mental illness are not only capable but can excel when the right opportunities are available.

These awards signal the hard work of many people who ensure that customers and trainees alike get the best out of what MadCap has to offer. Two people, MadCap Fountain Gate Manager, Silvia Sieber, and Ally Lamb, MadCap Employment Transition Support (METS) Worker are the day-to-day mainstays who are ably backed up by Anthony Cheeseman, MadCap Enterprises Project Manager and Jen Vieyra, MadCap Dandenong Manager. Jen is also responsible for product testing and promotion. Anthony, in a fitting tribute to someone who is constantly working to create real opportunities for people who are often sidelined in the community, was also a Victorian finalist in the Australian of the Year Awards.

To round out the awards season the MadCap Dandenong team won MadCap's internal Barista Team Championships.

Newsletter readers who also know how to make great coffee can enter the Victorian Barista Championships. See the MadCap website for details, [www.madcapcafe.org](http://www.madcapcafe.org)



Angela McGhee, Finance and Marketing Manager with TBM Training, Cranbourne (left), presented awards to Ermha/MadCap staff. From second left: Dennise Rossetti, Ermha Finance Manager, Andrea Trottman, MadCap Team Leader, John Spencer, MadCap Graduate, Sylvia Sieber, MadCap Fountain Gate Manager, Wendy Beamish, MadCap Team Leader, Linda Vozzo, MadCap Team Leader, Sharon Cheeseman, Anthony Cheeseman, MadCap Enterprises Project Manager.

## MadCap achieves record sales in November.

In a first for both locations, MadCap Geelong and MadCap Fountain Gate experienced their best trading weeks ever in November. The Fountain Gate store was up 18% on the previous November and the Geelong store, which opened earlier this year, traded above its previous best week by 24%.

As MadCap redefines perceptions about what it means to have a mental illness, these strong sales show that the public is all too happy to accept the message. In order to reach yet more people, MadCap is embracing technological solutions that will both improve the customer experience and drive new business. With the use of new marketing tools MadCap Enterprises can also better understand and therefore meet changing customer expectations.

## Support Ermha

Is the mental health of our community vital to you? If so, there are several ways you can support the work Ermha does. 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 ermha1.