



## **CARERS (FAMILY) FORUM**

### **PROGRAM**

**National Convention Centre, Canberra – Tuesday, 2 September 2003**

**VENUE:** The Welcome to Land will take place in the Bradman Theatre, then Carers Forum delegates will move into the Menzies Theatrette for sessions 1 & 2.

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This forum is a day of exploration for all carers and families and a celebration of our achievements and our failings where we can provide encouragement to each other. It will offer you a positive outlet and assist you to start looking at life from a different angle. Find out how spirituality, laughter and respite can provide practical and fulfilling support for you and your family. Take an opportunity to hear a consumer and carer panel discuss common issues.

But most of all come and explore some of the complex questions that we struggle with and join other carers in an opportunity to learn how to relax and realise that life can be happy and enjoyable.

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9.30am	Welcome to Land – Eric Bell
10.00am	Session 1: Finding meaning in family experience of mental illness: Exploring the spirituality of caring.  <i>Professor Robert Bland</i>
11.00am	Morning Tea
11.30am	Session 1: continued
12.30pm	LUNCH
1.30pm	Session 2  Laughter Workshop  <i>Lyn Beaumont- Clark</i>
2.30pm	Afternoon Tea
3.00pm	Concurrent sessions:  Session 3 – in the Bradman Theatre Consumer & Carer Collaboration "What have we achieved?"  Session 4 – in the Menzies Theatrette Time For You – Video Presentation and Discussion <i>Kerry Meiers</i>
4.00pm	Carers Day's final evaluation

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## **CARER (FAMILY) DAY ABSTRACTS**

### Session 1

#### **FINDING MEANING IN FAMILY EXPERIENCE OF MENTAL ILLNESS: EXPLORING THE SPIRITUALITY OF CARING.**

*Professor Robert Bland*

Spirituality is about the way we make meaning of the big challenges and questions in our lives. My research and experience has stressed the importance of recognizing that coping with mental illness - either as a consumer or family member - creates a range of very complex questions that we will struggle with painfully as part of our unique way of coping. Why did this happen to me? Why has life been so unfair to me? People with religious beliefs might well ask "How could a loving God allow this to happen to me?" People find their strength in many different places, and I know that many family members draw deeply on their spiritual beliefs in order to cope. As a worker, I'm asking too, about my spirituality and the part it plays in how I do my work. I struggle with the meaning of compassion and courage, and how I might develop these qualities in my work with families, consumers, colleagues, and students.

This workshop will challenge participants to explore the meaning in their lives, specifically in their experience as family carers. I want this workshop to be a place where family members can safely explore some of these "hard to ask" questions, where we can encourage each other's spirituality, and celebrate our achievements and failings.

#### **Biography**

Robert is Professor of Social Work at the University of Tasmania. He has worked in the mental health field over many years in hospital and community settings and has a special interest in the experience of family carers. He has written extensively in this area and is a Life Member of ARAFMI Queensland. He represents Social Work on the Mental Health Council of Australia and is the National Convenor of the Social Work & Mental Health Network.

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### Session 2

#### **LAUGHTER WORKSHOP**

*Lyn Beaumont-Clark*

Humour is a perspective that enables one to view stress and pain with a softer edge. Though not an immediate cure for trauma, chronic illness or emotional difficulty, humour can be a therapeutic tool. It offers positive outlets for those with an illness and their carers and is a start to looking at life from a different angle. For many years it has been recognised that carers who maintain a positive mental attitude and shared laughter respond better to the stresses of caring and relax and enjoy life. Laughter has many positive effects on the body and mind and activates the release of two neuro-peptide chemicals – endorphins and enkephalons. These chemicals are the body's natural pain suppressing agent and are also responsible for helping a person feel good. Laughter stimulates the thymus gland, which helps to fight off disease. Laughing exercises the facial and neck muscles and helps the thymus gland to retain its usual size. Laughter produces muscular relaxation, and when somebody laughs his or her blood pressure rises immediately. After laughing, blood pressure has been recorded as having a lower measure than before laughing. The electrical activity that happens when we laugh affects the entire cerebral cortex of the brain (rather than just one region) and thus has wide-ranging effects on us psychologically and physiologically.

These are some of the reasons laughter is so important in everyone's lives. In being a carer for someone with a mental illness you can experience a lot of stress and anxiety. In conducting a laughter therapy workshop we will give the carers an opportunity to relax and realise that life can be happy and enjoyable.



## TheMHS 13<sup>th</sup> Annual Conference Rhetoric to Reality

### Biography

Lyn is Executive Officer of ARAFMI South Australia and is experienced at conducting 2-day laughter therapy retreats where she holds informal and comfortable workshops on the benefits of laughter. She uses humour profiles (helping the carers see where they get their laughter from), visualisations for healthier lifestyles and fun games to create an entertaining and happy atmosphere, so carers can enjoy themselves and realise that they can laugh at themselves every once in a while. Lyn says, "These workshops have been extremely well received and carers say that they feel good after them. I guess that is why the keep on booking me for more."

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### Session 4

#### TIME FOR YOU

*Kerry Meiers*

A video presentation and discussion which encourages people who look after a family member or friend who has a mental illness to use the range of respite care services available to them. It also explores the issues of what people who care for someone with a mental illness actually want and need. This session is a valuable resource for carers and families, carer support groups, trainers and health professionals.

You will learn about:

- what respite care is
- the range of respite care services available (one-on-one, residential, day programs, holiday, emergency)
- the needs of people who care for someone with a mental illness
- the benefits of using respite care

### Biography

Kerry Meiers is a resource worker in mental health with the Commonwealth Carer Respite Centre Southern Region, Victoria. Kerry's experience relates to developing respite options in the community for carers and families of people with a mental illness and in exploring the benefits of using various respite care options.

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