

HAPPINESS AND ITS CAUSES CONFERENCE REPORT

BLACK DOG INSTITUTE



Destigmatisation of mood disorders has proceeded apace in Australia with several sportsmen and politicians leading the way. Two such people are former NSW Opposition Leader, John Brogden, and Olympian, John Konrads, according to Professor Gordon Parker, Executive Director of the Black Dog Institute.

During the *Happiness & Its Causes* Conference both John Brogden and John Konrads were interviewed by Professor Parker about their personal battles with a mood disorder.

John Brogden told the audience of nearly 3,000 people, that he would have preferred to have been diagnosed with cancer than depression. %If you had been diagnosed with cancer you know what's involved. With depression it was hard for me to understand. It's a very challenging thing to have,+he said.

Professor Parker said that in the book *Journeys of the Black Dog* many people said if they had to lead their life again and they had the option of having a mood disorder, they would choose to press the switch to have it as they have learned how to prioritise life issues better, cut out the negatives and the negative people.

In response, John Brogden said he would have preferred not to have been diagnosed with depression. %I have not finished this journey yet. I am much more self aware now. This is a life long journey.+

John Brogden said if he did not have such a supportive wife and family he would literally not be standing upright today. He said it had been three years since he had attempted to commit suicide. %I came out of hospital far too early. I tried to restore normalcy but got worse and went back into hospital. I was not diagnosed with depression for some six months. If you asked me a week after I came out of hospital if I suffered depression I would have said no. I was the last one to come to terms with this diagnosis. People's reaction was supportive. Other people said I was the last person they thought would suffer from depression. Depression allows you to have a front while you struggle quietly behind it.+he said.

John Brogden said he felt emotionally and physically exhausted after talking about his depression at public gatherings. He said that not a single person in the audience has not been touched by mental illness. %If we depart greater understanding and send a message to those quietly suffering we have achieved something worthwhile. You would not be ashamed if you had cancer why would you be ashamed if you had depression,+he said.

John Konrads told the audience he had been diagnosed with Bipolar II. %The fact that it was biological and not something I had done wrong was a relief,+he told the audience.

He said that while he didn't like taking an aspirin for a headache he was appreciative of young children who suffer diabetes who need to inject their medication. John said medication had worked extremely well for him, after Professor Parker had remarked to him during a social gathering that the light had gone out of my eyes.

John said that when he told his story in the *Good Weekend Magazine* of the *Sydney Morning Herald* in 2004 it occurred at a time when destigmatisation was in its infancy. I was concerned about getting my family involved but there has not been one negative comment and thousands of letters and comments that would make you cry.

He said his life had a lot of things wrong but there were also a lot of positives. He said today he felt contentment and appreciated sitting out on the deck at seven o'clock in the morning and watching the sunrise.