



EVENT REPORT

2009 UNSW Mental Health Education Forum

**Thursday 26h November 2009 - From 6.00 PM
Central Lecture Block 7, University of NSW**

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Professor Peter Lovibond, (Senior Associate Dean, Faculty of Science) and Chair for this event, welcomed close to 100 people participating in the 4th 2009 TF4E Mental Health Education Forum held at the University of NSW, Kensington.

Prof. Lovibond started by explaining the many connections between disciplines and units at UNSW that are involved with community mental health. Furthermore, he stressed the importance of combining clinical and research knowledge with real life experiences expressed by Consumer Advocates in forums such as this one.

The first speaker introduced by Prof. Lovibond was the NSW Shadow Minister for Mental Health, Health Lifestyles, Preventative Health, Sports and Recreation, Aboriginal Affairs and State Member for Barwon, **Kevin Humphries MP**

The Member for Barwon went on to explain some of the future plans and preparation for future challenges in Mental Health in particular. He also talked about the importance of government to embracing "community initiatives" such as public forums where sufferers and families can provide their views and share their valuable knowledge creating a good healthy communication flow with all stakeholders.

The second speaker introduced was **Scott Specjal**, a certified Builder and Tiller who has experienced 25 years of Depression, Anxiety, Addiction and Alcoholism. Scott's story was gripping, hard yakka, up and down in moods, in and out of institutions for many years. Yet, his resilience made him turn his boat around and for the last 8 years has been living with stability, relatively out of trouble. For the last 6 years, Scott has been helping a lot of people with problems similar to what he experienced e.g. Alcoholics' Anonymous and Narcotic Anonymous through their Help-Line. Through Scott's story you can feel an unrelenting power of survival!

Prof. Lovibond went on to introduce multi-award winning national motivational speaker, educator, advocate and voice for mental health **Fay Jackson**, also a Bipolar Disorder sufferer. Fay entertained those in attendance with very humorous and colourful recounts of some of her extreme behaviours. Fay emphasized the importance of humour, passion and compassion. Fay also stressed a very important point that many sufferers of mental illness also carry a serious of physical illness as well, and multiple pills are necessary to make life more bearable. Hence, the early attention and diagnosis should be a serious priority for every person before deterioration sets in.



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Last speaker was Triple Rugby Union International, **Enrique “Topo” Rodriguez**, one of the founders and current CEO of the Topo Foundation for EDUCATION. Now a dedicated “Consumer Advocate”, sharing his knowledge and experiences with mental illness with the community, Topo also trained at the Black Dog Institute as an “Informed Supporter” within its online Bipolar Education Program. In the last 3 years Topo has to date conducted more than 60 presentations and public forums with the community, reaching in excess of 22,000 people. Amongst other messages, Topo pointed out that Bipolar Disorder “does not discriminate”, indicating also that life travels like a rollercoaster: “up and down”. Therefore, we need to be prepared by taking control and responsibility for our own lifestyles and actions. Mental Health management has to be the sufferers’ initiative but in full collaboration with the professionals, families and friends.

Find below some comments received from the attendees

I felt there was a good ambience and the audience seemed engaged and very responsive. Each presentation was excellent and very interesting to listen to. I felt your speech was very good, much more personal this time which I thought was very important, as you are such a role model for people. I think that Scott’s mention that not-once in his childhood and upbringing, not one person had asked him whether he “needed someone to talk to”, that conveyed an important message to me. Fay had a very personal and funny presentation with many brave anecdotes, which was appreciated by the audience. Overall it was a fantastic combination of speakers. Furthermore, the mention at the end on TF4E’s Not-for-profit organisation activities was timely and very important. Thank you for organising it and all the best. (KS)

Just a quick note to say thank you for giving us the opportunity to help out with last night’s forum. The speakers were all interesting and had unique stories to tell. As students of psychology, it was great to hear the ‘consumer perspective’ to enhance our theoretical knowledge of mental illness. Kind regards, (MB)

Dear Peter, thank you for your contribution. You chaired the evening so well and combined the information with a thoughtful and respectful summary of each speaker’s experience and perspective. And I can’t thank you enough for all of the work that you did behind the scenes. That was fabulous. Kind regards (MM & TR)



Thanks for the opportunity to attend last night's Forum. You had a great combination of entertaining speakers. I learnt a great deal. The presentations were very educational and also very moving. Best regards, (GW)

Thanks for doing such a great job last night with the Forum. I thought the Forum went really well. Everyone I've spoken to has commented on how inspiring they found hearing the personal stories of the presenters. From the feedback forms that I glanced at, this was certainly reflected in people's comments. Topo, it was great to hear your story again – you are truly inspiring. It was a real pleasure to be part of the organising team. Fantastic experience! With kindest regards (MM)

Dear Melissa, thank you for your tremendous, tireless work last night. Thanks for getting all of the volunteers together and coordinating their efforts. A number of people commented to me on how helpful and polite you all were, particularly with giving directions to people on arrival. We are very fortunate to have such great support from students like you - our psychologists of the future. Your involvement in this event reflects so well on the School and the university. It would be great to work with you again in the future. Our sincere thanks again to you and your team. (MM, PL & TR)

Many thanks to you and some very inspirational speakers who were able to offer both personal and professional viewpoints on this very important area. I feel that all the speakers were able to approach this complex topic, in the words of Fay Jackson, with "humour, hope and ability." Hope and acceptance seemed to be the pervading thread that ran through the evening and for those individuals whose life journey takes some very difficult turns, this hope is essential. Essential too, are forums such as this that provide the education to help all who are on this journey or who walk side by side with those whose journey sometimes has a mind of its own. Thank you for all your very important work. Kind regards, (JP)

Our message to the community is: there is hope but we need to collectively work on the recovery. Any person with mental illness can be creative, active and positive with his/her life. However, it can't be done alone. Our path is: EDUCATION, EDUCATION and more EDUCATION.

TF4E's mantra is:

- 1) Share the pain with a close friend or family;
- 2) Seek Professional Help;
- 3) Nurture a network of trusted friends and carers;
- 4) Develop a "Wellbeing Plan" or Self-Management Plan;
- 5) Learn everything about your illness AND SHARE IT AROUND;
- 6) On-going monitoring of mental health;
- 7) Action it now!