



Belonging

A PLACE TO BELONG NEWSLETTER NO 23

August 2005

Go The Journey Together

A team of cyclists is taking to the road during Disability Action Week to raise awareness about mental health and psychiatric disability.

It won't be all about bike shorts and tyre changes for a dedicated group of cyclists who are pedalling from Brisbane to Cairns during Disability Action Week 2005.

The team of 9 riders and four support people will stop in towns along the way to spread a positive message about psychiatric disability.

Event organiser Neil Barringham said the theme of the ride – *Go The Journey Together* – summed up the message that riders and promoters want to convey.

“It links the idea of the gruelling 1800 kilometre ride to the challenges we all face on life's journey and the support we need from each other to overcome these,” he said.

“Mental health is an enormous issue in our communities.

“We can all play a part in facilitating people's recovery by offering respect, acceptance and friendship, and spending time doing simple, ordinary things with people,” he said.

Neil said the bike ride was a way of highlighting the importance of community inclusion and support.

“When we leave each town, we hope people will feel more comfortable about involving people with a psychiatric disability in their lives and that their level of consciousness will be raised,” he said.

Neil has been impressed with the level of support people are giving to the ride and willingness to be involved.

“It's really captured their imagination,” he said. “Two of our riders have ridden the entire trip before and one is an elite athlete who is obviously super-fit, but most of the others are just giving it a go for a good cause,” he said.

“Community interest has also been amazing with local mayors and groups of cyclists planning to join us along the way. Schools along the highway will meet us for drink stops, and clubs, organizations and mental health support groups have invited us to talk at forums and events.”

“We can all play a part in facilitating people's recovery by offering respect, acceptance and friendship...” Neil Barringham

Reprinted from *Connect Magazine Issue 5* by courtesy of Disability Services Queensland



Anne Garton and Neil Barringham, two of the team travelling to Cairns to raise awareness of mental health and psychiatric disability.

Go The Journey Together Snapshots:

- Arrived safely in Cairns after 2000 km with no accidents. Only 7 flat tyres and 3 broken spokes.
- 25 awareness raising events were held up the coast, attended by a wide cross-section of the community including state and local politicians, police, health workers, consumers, carers, community members, school principals and students and more.
- Kathy McLeish presented two very positive segments on Stateline.
- Collette: *...I was greatly moved by the concept of the bike ride as it was shown on Stateline. It was tremendously accessible and open...Thank you.*
- Daily media exposure, including local radio and tv as well as print media successfully communicated the message of community inclusion and recovery.
- Great interest for the event to happen again next year.
- Michael Marshall, one of the bike riders, rode 1,935 km in 56 hours and 10 minutes, did an average of 34 km/hr, expended 41,900 kilo calories of energy and his heart beat 446,697 times while riding.

The key message of *Go The Journey Together*:

Mental illness will happen to people you know.

Mental health is a huge issue in our community. One in five Australians experience a mental illness at some point in their lifetime. Many people facing mental health challenges are unsung heroes, facing challenges many of us never even consider. Imagine if you had an illness that directly affected your focus, thoughts, sleep patterns, diet, relationships, employment, personal care and freedom.

Recovery from mental illness is possible.

Many people are discovering ways to re-craft a new life, new hopes and new directions. A recovery process is a reality for many. People deserve support for new ways of living, handling stress, healthier patterns of life, and more. Each person's recovery path is different and is often very personal. People have different experiences of the mental health systems that are there to help

them – some find their medication and/or their health professional incredibly helpful and some do not. Some people with mental illness claim that family support, peer support and community engagement are just as important as 'treatment'.

Community inclusion is good for mental health.

We can each play a role. Peoples' stories of recovery often include accounts of what it meant for them to be treated with respect by others. We ought not to leave mental health to the professionals only as community relationships are often just as important for recovery. This doesn't mean that we don't set boundaries or challenge people – these things are important for all of us – but if we know someone in our family or community who is struggling or recovering we can play a strategic role by extending friendship or simple acceptance.

One Team Member's Story

Tri-athlete Anne Garton, who is part of the *Go The Journey Together* team, has been chosen to be part of the Australian team at the World Age Championships in Hawaii this year where she will compete in the 30 –34 age group.

Anne constantly battles depression and mental illness and spends many months each year in hospital. She is a university graduate and ex-police force member where she was dux of her squad. Her illness has forced her to give up her career and lose her home and her car. It was during one particularly bad time that she wrote a list of what she would be doing with her life if she were well. *To compete in a triathlon* was at the top of the list. Anne joined a beginners squad and learnt how to swim, bike and run. "It is very hard," Anne says, "before I can even begin to swim even a lap of the pool or turn the pedal of the bike, I have to fight my mind, push past the loud voices in my head, push past the paranoia, confusion, overwhelming apathy, terror, zero self-esteem and crippling depression."

Being in hospital does not stop Anne from training and competing. With the permission of hospital staff Anne attends training sessions and races at weekends even when hospitalised. As well as being a world class tri-athlete Anne is now actively involved in the public health system and other mental health organizations as an advocate and speaker. She says, "I want to be an ambassador for mental illness – to stand up and demonstrate that mentally ill people have a right to belong in the community and participate in society. I speak out about my triathlon achievements because I refuse to accept and be forced to live a life of shame due to my mental illness. My goal is to break down barriers, discrimination and the stigma attached to mental illness. **We have the right to belong and participate.**"

Bike Ride Update Bike Ride

The *Go The Journey Together* team attended a community breakfast on Monday 25th July at the Reef Gateway Hotel. The breakfast was hosted by the Airlie Beach Rotary Club. Robert Lloyd-Lewis, of the Airlie Beach Rotary Club, said the presentation by Neil and Anne Garton was outstanding and there was not "a dry eye in the place". Robert said, "It certainly brought home the message that the *Go The Journey Together* event ever hoped to achieve. The print media locally and from as far as Proserpine were present and will be reporting the event with good coverage.

"If the Bike Ride is repeated again next year Rotary wants to be fully involved from the planning stage and will be happy to put their weight behind the organizers. Club council will certainly be debating a worthwhile donation to *A Place To Belong* at their next meeting in a fortnight. Congratulations to the organizers on a job very well done!"



Going Part of the Journey Together

... Joan Lethlean—A Place To Belong's Roving Reporter



Kevin and I had the pleasure of meeting up with the *Go The Journey Together*, Brisbane to Cairns Bike Ride in Maryborough and Bundaberg. We joined some of the local mental health support groups at a meeting at the Maryborough Hospital attended by about forty people and were impressed by the enthusiasm and hospitality of the ARAFMI (Association for the Relatives And Friends of people with Mental Illness) and GEMS (A support group for sufferers of emotional and mental illness) groups. They reminded us that we are all "gems". The Director of Mental Health Services was present and pointed out that he was delighted to be in the **audience** at a function organized by non-professionals, something that would have been unheard of when he began in the profession in the 70's. Also present were the Superintendent of Police and a colleague, who were able to share their desire to learn more about mental illness in order to better serve the community. Student representatives from the Maryborough High School were accompanied by a chaplain and teacher. The afternoon's programme, presented by Neil Barringham, Kim Chidgey, Anne Garton and Bill Webb, was very well received and gave rise to good discussion. At St Paul's Anglican Church hall in the evening the group was much smaller and allowed for more personal

sharing of stories. The local State Member of Parliament, Chris Foley, shared his personal reasons for his support of mental health groups. Once again our Place to Belong team shared their inspiring stories, with Steve Heap joining Anne and Kim in sharing their stories, ably supported by Neil and Bill. Junior member of the ride, Jonathan Barringham, was commended by those present for his patience in sitting quietly in the background after a very long, tiring day! We were happy to drive to Bundaberg the following day to meet up with the team as they were welcomed to the city by the Mayor. The Sunshine Rotary Club hosted a Mental Health Forum at Shalom College in the evening, attended by about 70 people. This time there were some different issues raised in response to the sharing of stories, particularly from family members needing more support from the public mental health services in caring for their relatives. It appears that many people do not know where to get help in the community and Neil was able to point out that part of the aim of the team's visit was to enable people to make connections as they met together in public meetings. Kevin and I headed home from Bundaberg, happy that we were not riding bicycles! As we drove the kilometers back to Brisbane we continued to be filled with admiration for the team who were continuing to *Go The Journey Together*.

Tour of The Park Mental Health Hospital

In August A Place To Belong, in partnership with residents and staff at The Park Mental Health Hospital, will be staging a tour of the hospital's facilities. The tour provides an opportunity for residents and those who are interested in mental health to come together. Residents at "The Park" have few opportunities to display their knowledge and gifts that are of value to others outside of the hospital community. The tour provides such an opportunity.

On the tour you can expect rich story sharing by residents about the hospital's facilities, learn about low, medium and high security and how mental health issues have impacted the lives of residents and their families. The walking tour of the facilities will also have a historical flavour, as some of the buildings are rich in historical significance.

It is hoped that the coming together of people will create new relationships that may last a lot longer than a Sunday afternoon. See enclosed brochure for details.



Update and invitation to the "Exploring Social Skills" group

During the past year on the 4th Wednesday of every month, a small group of people have been meeting to explore the social skills that are needed when interacting with others. We have rich and at times funny discussions as we share stories and personal wisdom, while pondering topics that guest speakers have provoked thought on. Some of the topics we have discussed include:

Interrupting Conversation When to and when not to? *How do you interrupt without offending the person who likes to talk?* **The Art of Small Talk:** *How do you enter small group conversation?* **Self Confidence:** *What factors have influenced us so that we lack self-confidence in groups?*

If you are interested in coming along or being a guest speaker mark down the 4th Wednesday of each month, 6.00 – 7.30 pm, bring a plate for supper and call Karen or Darren on 3217 2522 so we can welcome you. The next guest speaker will have some experience in relation to "when anger takes control".

