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# Embracing change through lived experience

A report on the TheMHS Conference 2017 by Ailsa Rayner for the Queensland Mental Health Commission.



## TheMHS Conference 2017

In 2017, the TheMHS Conference's theme was *Embracing change through innovation and lived experience*, which enables new directions and approaches to collectively improve and drive reform across the mental health system.

The opening ceremony was a star studded affair following the haunting playing of a didgeridoo by a young Aboriginal man and the warm Welcome to Country by Uncle Allen Madden from the Garigal people of the Eora Nation. The organising committee, which included Vivien Miller (her 37th TheMHS) explained the logistics and thanked the assembled audience.

The Honourable Tanya Davies, New South Wales's Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Women and Minister for Ageing spoke of her understanding and the investment in mental health and particularly community services in the wake of the NDIS investment.

## Mental Health Service Awards of Australia and New Zealand

The Honourable Dame Marie Bashir spoke eloquently of her long history in mental health and of her understanding of the lessening in discrimination towards those with a diagnosis.

Dame Bashir was followed soon after by the Honourable Greg Hunt, the Minister for Health and Minister for Sports, who emphasised his understanding and quarantining of funds for specific psychosocial support in the community and the increase in spending. Minister Hunt also used his personal experience to express his understanding of the caring issues in mental health service use.

Following the Minister's introduction the Mental Health Service Awards of Australia and New Zealand were underway. Most services to receive awards are the ones we are aware of and are known for their long standing investment in effective research and innovative approaches to mental health service delivery. The Individual Award was shared by two long time service providers.

## Keynote presentation

Mike Slade followed the awards as the keynote presentation, where he presented information which was an extension to his ideas published in 2009. Mike Slade used various publications to support his ideas that he was presenting regarding the effectiveness of services driven by peer and lived experience in reducing cost and increasing effectiveness.

The combination of publications can be used by services to justify an investment into peer work and the shift of thinking from a service driven environment to a user defined service. Mike Slade's slides could be used as a tool for petitioning for these changes.

The networking as always is a time to find old friends and new, see what is on offer in terms NSW initiatives and even a couple of interstate service information booths.

## Featured Symposium – Trauma informed care and practices: Organisational change and implementation

My choice of break out rooms was specifically those delivering talks on trauma and the new ways we understand service change, trauma informed care, lived experience speakers, and discussions of what that was like for members of the audience.

The first session was a panel sessions with four speakers, one from the US Kathleen Guarino, who has brought trauma informed practices through education and organisational change mechanisms to a variety of organisations and most notably with the backing and support of SAMHSA. The advice overall for Australia for the reason of expediency is to train organisations to be trauma informed and ensure measures are taken to show the level of change that is occurring. She laments also the speed at which this change is taking place although sounds more hopeful and is very adept at operating within the existing structures to deliver what is only rejected by toxic cultures.

Anglicare WA was up next and they had through the will of a senior staff member, developed a position which was supported by a Service Development Manager role

to incorporate a trauma informed approach through the value based driven organisation. The types of tools used were developed by the Mental Health Coordinating Council and it was obvious the drive and energy, the expectation and guidance of the Bunbury branch brought about significant change despite an initial shock in that they were so very far from their goals.

Cathy Kezelman from the Blue Knot Foundation has been looking at what is required by the legal profession to increase their efficacy in supporting clients with trauma backgrounds and how to ensure the legal fraternities' needs are also supported, especially around vicarious trauma. Another presentation that would be great to obtain the slides from.

Indigo Daya brought the reality and immediacy required to the stage. Her thinking about how to negotiate potential and expressed barriers to a trauma informed, lived experience led approach were humorous and at times cuttingly obviously negotiable and almost nonsensical. All in all this was a highly informative and thought provoking session.

### One hour workshop – Talking about trauma

After lunch I attended Cathy Kezelman's talk about practice and what trauma informed looks like and how the Royal Commission into Sexual Abuse has influenced knowledge and practice. The numbers and damage to previously traumatised people by services was highlighted, lamented, cautioned against. Her appeal to people's best intent was obviously appreciated by the audience.

### Paper discussion – We are family

Following the afternoon tea and further networking I kept with the theme and attended trauma informed talks, this time from Anne Honey, a researcher who has brought anecdotal evidence of mother's experience of department of families' child removal and mental health services. It was moving and very obvious the lack of consideration for the development of the relationship and the assumption of incapacity through those stories, and was reflected later in comment from the audience and brought home very clearly when the removal of high numbers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children is so prevalent today. *Living under the rule of Greek gods: Being a mother after child removal* paper by Anne Honey was presented.

Then Indigo Daya dealt with the difficult and contentious issue of safety for interfamilial trauma survivors and carer involvement. It is quite clear the assumptions must be overcome and the curious questions and hashing out of the issues be a priority in all dealings to avoid the risk to all parties. The paper '*The uncomfortable intersection between trauma-informed practice and family-inclusive practice: Family blaming, truth-telling or ... ?*' by Indigo Daya was presented.

### Final thoughts

Overall it was a wonderful day and the canapes and drinks at the end did not entice me to miss my train all the way to Blacktown where I stayed with a friend.

Thank you for the opportunity.