



“Korero Mai” **WHAT'S ON** **Whakaaro Pai**

for those interested in the provision of mental health services

providing educational and recreational activities for \$5.00 and under

for Service Users/Tangata Whaiora by Service Users/Tangata Whaiora

Issue 56 December 2014

Kia ora, Talofa lava, Kia orana, Malo e lelei, Fakalofa lahi atu, Talohani, Bula vinaka, Ni Hao, Namaste, Greetings...

Season's Greetings from Like Minds Taranaki

Like Minds Taranaki partners with WITT Bachelor of Nursing to change the way that student nurses learn

The beliefs and attitudes we learn from the society we are raised in profoundly affect the way we behave towards people that we see as different to ourselves, whether that difference is age, gender, race, religion, mental state, or anything else for that matter. When we focus on difference to such an extent that our behaviour manifests itself as treating people badly, we call the behaviour *discrimination* and the whole of society is poorer for it. Stigma and discrimination towards people with experience of mental distress has long been known to put people off seeking help. Research indicates that 46% of the NZ population will experience at least one period of mental distress during their lifetime – of those people, 1 in 3 would rather keep their experience to themselves and struggle on alone, for fear of what others would think if they

knew the truth. This information isn't new – the whole Like Minds, Like Mine programme is based on this premise and the work of LMLM nationally and Like Minds Taranaki locally has focused on trying to address this. One area where Like Minds Taranaki has worked hard over the life of our current Ministry of Health contract has been in the Department of Humanities at WITT, and in particular with the Bachelor of Nursing (Level 7) course.

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Pathways people passionate...

Last month Pathways celebrated the annual Trish Glen Achievement Award, the award honors the memory of Trish Glen, a dedicated and passionate Pathways support worker from Taranaki who tragically died of cancer in 2005. Those who knew Trish speak of her unique contribution, her commitment, her sense of team, her encouragement of others and her personal courage. This year, for the first time, we are awarded a winner of the Trish Glen Achievement Award from each Pathways region. Taranaki being part of the Midland region had two nominees. The winner for the Midland region was Mike Ward from the Waikato.

It was a heart-warming exercise to see the nominations of the special individuals we have within Pathways

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Coming Events: DECEMBER 2014

Every Wed: *Real Arts* at Real TArt, NP, 1-4pm
 Every Thur: *"Mental Health Matters"* Access Radio 104.4FM, 9.30am
 Wed 3 & 17: Post Natal Support Group at NP Women's Centre, 10am-12 noon
 Thur 11: Peer Support Group at Stratford 10am
 Mon 8 & 22: Peer Support Group at Hawera 10am-12pm
 Thur 18: South Taranaki Post Natal Support Group, 56 Disraeli Street, Hawera - 10am-12pm
 Thur 25: Mates Men's Meeting, 15 Dawson St, NP 2-4pm

Like Minds office closes for Christmas break from 19th December until Jan 12

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Clinical placements are central to learning in an undergraduate nursing programme, but time restrictions make optimising learning opportunities paramount. Current literature shows that undergraduate nurses often experience fear and anxiety before clinical practice in a mental health setting, driven by stigma and discrimination that stems from lack of knowledge or contact with those experiencing mental health issues. Research shows that engaging with people who have had experience of mental distress decreases stigma and discrimination amongst nursing students and facilitates learning.

The relationship between Like Minds Taranaki and the WITT nursing tutors has matured over the years to the extent that we now spend 6 sessions with the Year 2 students, facilitating opportunities for the students to hold small group conversations with individual service users and family/whanau members to learn about their personal experience of particular aspects of mental distress.

From WITT's perspective, the programme aims to maximise learning for Year 2 student nurses and the tutors' experience during this year has borne this out. Like Minds Taranaki has been more interested in the effect on service users and we are quietly excited about the results. Generally, service user participants report feeling heard, respected and valued for their contributions which is not surprising given that the students are trained to be non-judgemental and understanding. Most significant, however, is the effect that participation has on internalised stigma – the phenomenon of applying society's stigmatising attitudes to oneself, creating feelings of worthlessness, hopelessness and despair.

Questionnaires completed by the majority of participants, followed by interviews of 2 service users who volunteered to provide more information, clearly indicated that participation had an effect on recovery, depending on where on the recovery path the individual was at the time.

For service users firmly on the recovery path, participation had a distinct advantage, empowering them and inspiring them to continue to seek wellness. Conversely, for individuals too early in recovery, the repeated re-telling of their story, even in a supportive environment, could potentially trigger them to relapse. This latter information is already well known, such that clinicians within the MH system try to limit the number of times a service user is required to re-tell their story.

Our research has confirmed our intuition that service users involved in a programme such as this should be both well prepared before and well supported after the sessions. As a result of our research,

we now believe that they should also practice telling their story to the facilitator ahead of the classroom session, just to see how it feels. If the effect is disempowering, it would be better for the service user to wait until they are further into recovery before embarking on something like this. Also, debriefing with a facilitator is needed immediately after the session, to ensure that any negative feelings are processed using the service user's established recovery tools.

Like Minds Taranaki sincerely hopes that we will be able to attract funding to expand this research during 2015 by developing a workshop to prepare service users to tell their story safely. We believe that this would facilitate a body of service users able to discuss their experience of mental distress while feeling good about themselves and the journey that they have taken. The potential for our community is huge – instead of keeping silent about their journeys, these individuals might be more inclined to speak their truth in a way that quietly challenges the collective beliefs about mental distress. If you would like to be part of this project, either as a contributing service user, or an advocating service provider, please contact Cecily at Like Minds Taranaki 06-7590966 or mental.health@xtra.co.nz



Contd. from front page

who are doing whatever it takes in their unique way each day, Its a great testament to these individuals to be nominated by their peers.

I am delighted to share with you the two Taranaki nominations who have been recognised as making an exceptional contribution to Pathways and the people we support, and who clearly embody the values of Pathways and the spirit of Trish Glen.



Shane Smith
Pathways

PATHWAYS



Stephanie Fowler
Health Lifestyle Coach



Tui Poa
Support Worker



Christmas can be a time of great stress so do try to take steps to look after yourself to reduce stress and remember, that when it comes to gift giving, time can be the most precious gift of all. If you or someone you know is experiencing stress or depression, have a chat with someone about what you are feeling.

Depression Supportline
0800-111-757
Lifeline
0800-543-354
Youthline
0800-376-633
Crisis Team
06-753-6139

Proudly sponsored by:



Co-hosted by:



Community Café counts...



Some of the team at the Community Café - their 'service with a smile' attitude creates a delightful atmosphere and paired up with the yummy crepes adds up to a very enjoyable experience. Service is quick and efficient and breakfast is dished up with a side order of friendliness, smiles and a chat if you fancy it...

Letter from Dean Jamie Allen:

Tēnā koutou katoa Warmest greetings to you.

Thanks for the opportunity to share the news of the community cafe which is based at St Mary's on Vivian Street on Tuesdays, 7.30am—10am. At the cafe, you can get a delicious hot crepe with a range of scrumptious toppings, and a hot drink, all in for a dollar (or free, if times are hard.) Toast with our famous marmalade, or porridge are also on the menu (glutenfree alternatives too). Every item is just 50c. All the food and all the time is donated, which enables us to offer this to our community. Every dollar raised will go to charities working against ebola in the developing world.

Since it started on 4th November, the cafe has served several hundred breakfasts and even in just two weeks of serving, had raised over \$600 for Doctors without Borders. Funds which otherwise would never



A couple of very happy customers at the Café—and why wouldn't they be happy at .50 cents per item for a filling and delicious brekky!

have been committed to this critical cause. In the midst of the World's deepest poverty, lives **will** be saved, mysteriously and wonderfully, by the convivial enjoyment of good food, and the work of a caring team of cooks, waiters, cleaners and donors. It's all enough to make you smile and give a prayer of thanksgiving. That team who have just come forward in their own way, in ones and twos, to say, "How can I help?" (and there's always room for more!) have surely received as they have given by:

A. Being part of a friendly group (ranging in age from 7 to 70+) where there is much laughter and new friendships, and....

B. Serving such a diverse and lovely clientele, breakfast can always be on the house for those who are finding times hard, moneywise; visitors to our city from overseas; parents treating their children to a breakfast on the way to school; little ones in the arms of grandfolks; people taking a bit of respite from care at home; often people on their way to work; sometimes people just welcoming the chance for a yarn with someone else, over a coffee and a crepe.

The cathedral is such a lovely space for cafestyle mingling to happen.

Haven't been to the cafe yet? Why not make this Tuesday the day... Poetically : Some folks come for breakfast, some for morning tea others for some korero, but most enjoy all three!

Arohanui
Jamie Allen
Dean



Community
Cafe

*At Taranaki Cathedral, 37 Vivian St.
Everyone is Welcome, Everyone!*

Every Tuesday 7:30-10am.

*Crepes with delicious fillings,
Fresh filter coffee, tea or milo,
Hot toast & famous marmalade*

*Just 50c each! Best price in town, eh!
Students—bring a friend, they eat for free. All proceeds to Doctors without Borders, against Ebola in West Africa. 06 758 3111*

www.taranakicathedral.org.nz

Employment wanted

At Like Minds Taranaki we are currently availing ourselves of the voluntary services of a wonderful BA Applied Psychology graduate who is planning to continue to a Masters in clinical psychology. Well versed in all aspects of mental health, she has excellent communication and computer skills – she has been invaluable to us as a research assistant for our Service User Academia project (see front page for more details). She is looking for any employment in the mental health sector that would complement her studies.

Please contact Ashnita Ram through Cecily Bull, Like Minds Taranaki for more information. 06-759-0966



No review is good news...

By a vote of 9 - 3, the NPDC opted to withdraw their review of Housing for the Elderly.

This was an easier decision as the whole process, had been poorly handled. Still, the door has been left open for further 'tweaking' and incentive is there for increased efficiency.

The Council were able to make it clear at the various meetings that it was never their intention to 'boot their residents out' and that they were simply seeking a better way of managing their investment in housing for the elderly.

They would have been better off investing more care in the process and saved tenants so much stress by doing so.

Like Minds Taranaki joined many other submitters on the Council's proposal and, of course, were very pleased with the outcome. Mayor Andrew Judd led the charge and deserves much of the credit. It was very interesting to see which other Councillors supported him.



After Silver Linings...



A letter from Brenda Cash:

Earlier this year I had the pleasure of meeting some of the

wonderful team at Like Minds Taranaki. For the last three years I have had a solo exhibition at Real Tart gallery with all money (less gallery commission) going to a charity close to my heart. Funds from my 2014 Silver Linings exhibition went to assist the Like Minds team with the wonderful work they do.

Next year for my fourth show I will be supporting Forever Present - a gift from Isla and Pema. Two wonderful parents started this charity to provide care packages for families who like their own are sadly dealing with the loss of their babies.

I became involved by painting and decorating some of the boxes that are sent out. I was so touched by

Set up by two bereaved mothers, Forever Present puts together care packages for the other approximately 80 families affected by sudden infant death in Aotearoa each year in the hope that living with the loss of a baby may be made even slightly easier for others.

<http://islaandpema.webs.com>



these boxes that I wanted to do more so Forever Present became the obvious choice for the 2015 exhibition. Currently as well as working on pieces for the show I have opened my studio to the public as part of the Oakura Arts Trail. Prior to this year I never had a studio to open as all work was done on the kitchen

table. While it was rather daunting the two weekends of the trail proved to be great fun although exhausting. I had over 300 visitors in four days. A completely new experience for me as I can be a bit of a hermit painting in solitude.

I also started the 100 days project earlier in the year. I decided to draw a caravan a day. All was going well



Brenda's cat, Mr Mittens, "helping" out Brenda preparing to opening up her studio space as part of the Oakura Arts Trail that was held at the beginning of November.

until day 30 and the flu hit. Rather than beat myself up about not finishing I decided to salvage what I had done and some of my sketches have been the basis for some large paintings. In a small way I found my own silver lining.

People often remark that I am very kind to do my charity shows. I'll be perfectly honest the shows are a great tool for me. I find it so easy to get distracted by life as we all do. Work, family, even my pets and television can take time away from painting. By having a show to work towards I am motivated to make my art a regular part of my life.

I feel much happier and function much better when I nourish my soul with a bit of painting. Others feel the same about the gym or sport or any activity that is their 'thing'. If you want to see the latest 'thing' I am working on I have a Facebook page - Green Morris Studio:

<https://www.facebook.com/pages/Green-Morris-Studio-Brenda-Cash/621029207945072>

Thanks again to the Like Minds team for their positive support of my work, I hope to return the gesture to them in the future. Wishing you all a happy holiday season.

Brenda

Dementia facts

Here is the list of facts discussed this morning from Professor Graham Stokes, who is Director of Dementia Care for Bupa in the United Kingdom. Professor Stokes has over 20 years dementia specialist experience, and visits New Zealand regularly to provide our staff with the latest research results and care advice:

- * Age is the greatest risk factor for dementia, globally.
- * The disease is active in the brain for up to 20 years before any early signs are noticed.
- * Because of this, the average age for symptoms to be apparent is 78, which means that:
- * Dementia usually occurs at the same time as the body ages, which is why it can be seen as a disease of old age.
- * There is usually a period of about 4 years between early signs of the disease and formal diagnosis.
- * If you are living well with dementia by the time you reach 70, you should live until you are 90.
- * Life expectancy after diagnosis averages about 11 years. 50 – 60% of people with dementia are living at home, half of them by themselves.
- * Twice as many women have dementia as men.
- * The ageing population is getting healthier, but the prevalence of the disease will not decrease.
- * The known risk factors for dementia are: diabetes, smoking, hypertension, obesity, depression and underactivity.
- * The end stage of dementia where full physical care is required usually lasts 4 years.

These statements do not include young people with dementia, who run a different course as Ruth Thomas said, with reasonably rapid deterioration and death.

Jill Baker Care Home Manager, NP



New Direction

A Hawera woman spent years fighting depression, but is now aiming to help others with the same mental illness. WITT journalism student David Burroughs meets a woman who started on the dole, but is now opening her own counselling business.

For Sandra Muggeridge, life has taken on a new meaning.

The Hawera solo mum suffered with depression from her teenage years right up to about three years ago, but has now turned her life around.

"It's like living in a dark tunnel or a dark hole, and you feel damp and cold and miserable," she says.

"You don't like connecting or contacting people and you hide yourself away, but when I came on to this side it was like big glares of happy light." Originally from Kaponga, Muggeridge said she went on to the sickness benefit at the age of 16, the minimum age back then.

Her family moved around a lot, but always stayed in Taranaki, before returning to Kaponga when she was 13, where her mother still lives.

She said her step-father was originally from the army, and although he was tough, she says she learnt from it.

"In some ways my stepdad bringing me up army taught me to be hard and stand my ground with people," she says.

In the last two years she has studied for two certificates, one in psychology and counselling and one in fundamental counselling skills, and is now studying towards her diploma in psychology, which she is aiming to finish by Christmas.

She says the diploma is set up to allow students to study at their own speed, but that isn't her way of doing it.

"I'm a real determined person to do things. I always finish before my due date."

Muggeridge paid the \$4000 for her certificates by taking \$25 out of her benefit each week, and is now paying \$50 a week to pay the \$15000 for her diploma.

After finishing her diploma, she aims to get a job as a councillor, to enable her to help people but also get direction from an experienced councillor before completing her goal of starting her own business.

The dream of being a councillor has

always been something Muggeridge has thought about, but it wasn't until about two years ago when she decided to turn her life around.

She says she woke up one morning and decided to give counselling a go, so googled courses around New Zealand and found the right one "bang right there waiting for me".

That course was run by Courses Direct in Christchurch, which allows Muggeridge to study online.

Through studying for the certificates and diploma Muggeridge says her eyes have been opened to how those around her are feeling.

"This other day this lady looked really sad, and I felt like crying for her because I felt so bad for her, and I asked her 'are you having a bad day love', and she goes 'just one of those days' and I thought it must be a blue day for her today."

Muggeridge's experiences have also



Sandra Muggeridge is now focused on helping others and has the qualifications to do so. Photo: David Burroughs

helped her with her two children, Renee, 17, and Jade, 15.

The mood of her house is one thing Muggeridge keeps an eye on, and negativity is not allowed.

"Sometimes when my kids are naughty I'm like 'right, get out that gate and come back in better'." She says that while she has beaten depression, it doesn't mean her children don't suffer from it, but it has helped her show them how to deal with it.

Jade is attending counselling after his dad was killed in a trucking accident, and Renee takes everything to heart, she says.

"I've helped my kids to try and not get so low."

She says Renee's goal is to be an accountant, and has been since she was eight or nine.

"People used to ask her what she wanted to do when she would say 'I want to be an accountant'. I thought it was just one of those kid things."

She is now undertaking work experience one day a week at Fonterra.

Muggeridge says Jade had been interested in truck driving before his father's death, but is now looking at farming or becoming a chef.

She said he is in the top of his class for cooking, sewing, and horticulture. While Jade has moved on from driving trucks, Muggeridge says she herself is looking at gaining her truck licence, which would open up more options for her in the work place.

"I just like truck driving, I just love it. So I would do that for a while then go back to that (counselling)."

She was initially put off the idea after the accident, but then decided it was worth a go.

But she is happy that she has chosen the right path.

"Now that I've got my life on track, I'm out to enjoy life. Since I've seen the light at the end of the tunnel, life's so awesome to be on this side," she says.

"I've seen so many psychiatrists and councillors, I'm telling you, I'm not sure if it's done good or not."

But she says she is still in contact with last councillor she saw, who has now become a friend.

"I remember her telling me you can do it, and the more I sat down with her the more I could see it."

She said her life motto was that if people wanted to get out of depression, there is always an ear.

"I was like that for a while to be honest, nobody wants me, nobody wants to help me and I might as well die, and once life hit me it's like the other side of light."

"It's like woohoo lets go."

According to the Ministry of Health, depression is more than a bad mood. It is classed as a serious illness which affects 16 per cent of New Zealanders at some point in their lifetime.

Former All Black Sir John Kirwan was one celebrity who has spoken out about his depression recently.

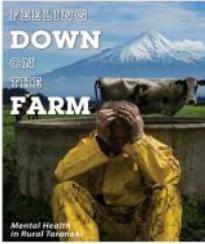
"It's important to hold on to what's precious in your life, the people you care about and the activities you enjoy," he said.

"Even if you can't see the light at the end of the tunnel right now, there is a way through. Like any illness, the sooner you get help, the sooner you'll get back your enjoyment of life."

If you are having problems with depression, call 0800 111 757.

David Burroughs is a Witt journalism student.

Stress in Rural Communities...



...No problem says the Minister of Primary Industries ... With farmers being the occupation with the highest suicide rate of any occupation in NZ, I was astounded to hear that Nathan Guy, Minister for Primary Industries stating recently on TV that 'farmers were resilient, were used to adverse weather conditions, uncertain financial returns, changing demands for products and long, unsocial hours on the farm'. This would be a rather heartless viewpoint even in great farming times but with dairying returns expected to be just half of last year's returns and the type of weather conditions that have devastated citrus fruit and other pip fruit in the South, it seems an even harsher viewpoint for the Minister to take. There is plenty of evidence to show that there needs to be a big shake up in how mental health resources are delivered in rural communities – not

just by rural GPs and their nursing teams but also for greater access to other disciplines within the mental health and addiction teams. Parity of services to rural areas requires fresh thinking as to how current inequities of access can be eliminated. This is a problem every Government funding authority in every rural region has. Taranaki DHB has established a mental and physical health advisory group to tackle these sorts of problems – and we can only hope that something innovative and positive will eventuate from these deliberations. In the interim, unless the Ministry of Health has some special interest in rural mental health, and there is no indication they have, then we can all expect that many farmers in Taranaki and elsewhere in NZ will have some severe financial issues to cope with along with their normal, at times, extremely difficult, all encompassing, life on the farm.

Gordon Hudson.

Ashley's journey

My name is Ashley Robert Snowden, born in Auckland 1955, raised and grew up in Waitara. I have travelled to England/Europe and California for 3 months in 1976 and briefly to Switzerland in 1982. I now live in New Plymouth.

I have been a mental health client since 1978. In the early years after my diagnoses of schizophrenia I had trouble with my motivation but these days due to good time management and medication I live in better mental health and am highly motivated in my art practice.



I have always showed an interest in art, drawing in particular. My most recent style is not unlike a certain cartooning style, mostly pencil and felt pen drawing. My art is mostly a sincere attempt at reinventing landscape. Occasionally I find myself inventing sculptures of sorts especially interested in wind and environment disposed pieces' am largely self taught but had some training throughout the years. My hope for the future artistic practice is to learn something new everyday and continue to practice more until it becomes part of my nature. To achieve a certain excellence will take a life-time of passive pursuit and relying on the Holy Spirit of God for inspiration and creativity. October's been a big month in terms of my art. For the month of October I had an exhibition of 35 drawings at the Real Tart Art Gallery. Also my design for a Wind Balloon Sculpture was accepted as part of the Kinetika exhibition at Puke Ariki.

Ashley

Riding for mental health



A call for support from Taranaki Rural Support Trust Newsletter :

25 dedicated and committed people are cycling 1125km from Picton to Bluff via the rugged West Coast over 9 days in February 2015. Their goal is to raise public awareness, at each stopover along the way, about the impact that mental illness and/or suicide has had on them, their family and friends. Their financial goal is to raise \$50,000 for the Trust so we can continue supporting farmers and the good work currently being done by others in this area. All of the cyclists have been affected in some way with mental issues and/or suicide and you can read their profiles on the face book page set up for the event.

The Trust is humbled by their determination and efforts already witnessed in their weekly training runs...*In all kinds of weather*....and if you would like to support the team you can make donations through:

www.givealittle.co.nz/cause/southislandcharityride



We encourage you to support the Sponsors who have donated generously to make this event a comfortable one for the cyclists and a successful one for the Trust. Every dollar counts and every contribution is greatly appreciated.

www.facebook.com/pages/Central-Finance-South-Island-Charity-Cycle-Ride/1496716207237708



South Taranaki Post-Natal Support Group

3rd Thursday of the month For women in South Taranaki experiencing post natal distress. Babies and children are welcome.

This month: Dec 18
10-12noon

South Taranaki Women's Centre
56 Disraeli Street, Hawera
06 278 3260

Forget the bling do the whanau thing

encourages communities to stay away from high debt and commercially driven ideas at Christmas and offers ideas like spending time with our families, whanau and friends, spending less money and reducing stress. Check out their facebook page for ideas for inexpensive gifts and vouchers to download to gift your time and talents.

www.facebook.com/pages/Forget-the-bling-bling-do-the-whanau-thing/171172189632197

These ideas remind us that time is the most precious gift of all.

Day Activity Programme



For older people offering opportunities for creativity and other interests.

Sessions include, shared meals, music and movement, art & craft work, puzzles and board games, physical activities and others. Thursdays 11am-2pm at the Brooklands Church, 21 Bideford St., NP. Referrals are made through the Mental Health Service for Older People (MHSOP) at the TDHB. Programme Co-ordinators: 0272772327; 0277027365

Coming Soon on Access Radio...



"Mental Health Matters"
DECEMBER
Service User
Symposium

9.30am
every Thursday of each month

Hawera support group:

The venue for this group is at Tui Ora Ltd: 164 Princes Street, Hawera
Held alternate Mondays 10-12 noon
Next Meetings—Dec 8
Contact Mihi 06-278-6603
or Kevin 06-759-4064.

Stratford support group:

For people and families/whanau with mental health and/or addiction problems. Usually held at the Stratford Community House, 52 Juliet St.

Every 2nd Thursday, 10am-12pm.
Contact Mihi 06-278-6603 or Kevin 06-759-4064 to check the venue.
This month's meeting: Dec 11

Support, networking and advocacy for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender youth in Taranaki.

For more information go to New WAVES, 74 Powderham Street
rainbowtaranaki@gmail.com
Ph: 06 757 9901



Employment:

Taking the first step...



A 64-page guidebook for jobseekers with health issues.

Free copies available from Like Minds Taranaki.
06-759-0966



LifeLine
THE PROGRAMME TO LIVE WITH IT

Taranaki
0800 543 354
www.lifeline.co.nz

Mental Wellness Groups

Like Minds Taranaki hosts regular support and discussion groups, where you can share your stories and experiences with others who are also on the journey to recovery.

Enjoy a friendly, relaxed atmosphere and speak with complete confidentiality.

You can also benefit from an arts groups that allows you to tap into your creative side.

The post-natal group is a non-clinical group offering support with child care available.

NEW PLYMOUTH GROUP TIMES AND LOCATIONS

Discussion Group:

2nd & 4th Wednesday each month
10.30am—12 noon

Like Minds Taranaki Office
3rd Floor Brougham House
50 Devon Street West
(currently in recess)

Real Arts Group:

Every Wednesday
1—4pm

Real TArt Community Gallery
19 Egmont Street, NP

Post-natal Support Group:

1st and 3rd Wednesdays
10am-12noon
of each month
NP Women's Centre

For more information contact:

Like Minds Taranaki 06-759-0966
NP Women's Centre 06-758-4957
TDHB Peri Natal Team

Thought for the issue:

*"I will honor
Christmas in my
heart, and try to
keep it all the year"*

- Charles Dickens

Looking Ahead, Looking Up

Medical science changes and improves countless lives every day. Thanks to advances made throughout history, many conditions which would once have been untreatable are now manageable.

Where once some would have been shamed and isolated because of their lived experience of mental illness, we are now moving towards a climate of inclusiveness.

New medications and therapies continue to be developed at a steady pace, each fresh discovery promising to improve the quality of life for countless people throughout the world.

Depression is one of the most common mental illnesses today, and yet it is also one of the most insidious. It can be difficult to diagnose, and many people who experience depression may not seek help due to the fact they don't recognise its symptoms.

The first port of call for many who are concerned about their wellbeing is their GP, who does not commonly specialise in mental health treatment.

GPs are reliant on asking the right questions of their patients to assess their condition, as well as listening to their description of symptoms, and some cases of depression may not be recognised.

However, science is working to address this problem with some novel approaches that may become commonplace in the future.



If you're anything like me, you hate the idea of talking to a machine. The beep after a recording on an answerphone asks you to leave a message is invariably the cue to hang up, and ring back later when there is likely to be a human being on the other end of the line.

What if, however, the machine you were talking to could help diagnose your depression through a brief "conversation" and potentially change your life?

That's the aim of one talented group of computer scientists at the University of Southern California in the US, and their creation of the computer program known as SimSensei.

Using a Microsoft Kinect camera, SimSensei monitors your physical responses as you answer a number of leading questions.

It collects data on such things as your body language, how much you smile, where your gaze is in relation to the camera, and collates all this information to give a diagnosis of whether or not you're experiencing depression.

Amazingly, in a trial involving 60 participants, half of whom had previously been diagnosed with depression, the software was capable of correctly determining 90% of these cases.

Another development that is on the bleeding edge of medical science is a blood test to diagnose major depression in adults.

The test measures the levels of nine different RNA markers in the blood, which interpret the DNA's genetic code and carry out instructions.

This discovery marks the fulfilment of a decades-long search for a biological test for depression, and is significant because it will in the future enable medical practitioners to make a concrete diagnosis.

Moreover, the test will also be able to determine which patients may be at risk of depression in the future, even if they are not currently experiencing symptoms.

Not only can this procedure be used to diagnose depression, but it can assist in tracking the progress made in its treatment, and help predict what sort of therapies will best be suited to each individual patient.

These are just two of the many initiatives currently underway to help diagnose and treat depression.

It is safe to say that the future is looking brighter thanks to medical science.

Tony Spencer

This month's "Korero Mai" and "What's On" are edited by Stephanie Mapley and "Whakaaro Pai" by Tony Spencer— from Like Minds Taranaki. Your news and views are eagerly sought. Like Minds Taranaki, PO Box 5015, New Plymouth, 3rd Floor, Brougham House, 50 Devon Street West, NP, ph. 06-759-0966 mental.health@xtra.co.nz. www.likemindstaranaki.org.nz

January 2014 issue will be distributed in late December Contributions by Wed, December 10th please.

