

SKILLS TO ENABLE PEOPLE & COMMUNITIES

STEPS NEWSLETTER

From the Manager....

As we are all aware, the start to 2011 has indeed been a difficult one for Queensland. Just as the year began, thousands of people were affected by the worst flooding Queensland has seen in many years. This was followed by a ferocious cyclone that cut a path of destruction in the far north of the state. To those of you who have been directly affected, most notably members of our Ipswich and Innisfail STEPS Network Groups, we hope you are slowly stepping out of the turmoil and back into your homes and your lives. Of course, amidst the many stories of tragedy and heartbreak, we have seen magnificent generosity of spirit and heart-warming stories of people putting their heart and soul into reconstruction, rebuilding, and restoring their own lives and the lives of others....themes that I'm sure resonate for many of you from your other life experiences already, including your experience of brain injury.

From this rollercoaster start, read on to see what's planned for the STEPS Program for 2011, as well as reflections on some of our 2010 Christmas celebrations around the state.

We are very excited by 2011. We invite you to join our exuberance for another brilliant year with us.

As promised in our last newsletter, read the poignant story of our wonderful Bundaberg leader, Leanne, as she tells her story of her husband's brain injury and how that experience led her to STEPS.

ARETI

Upcoming STEPS Skills Programs in 2011

The STEPS Skills Program has already started in Bundaberg and Logan north this year. Next on the list to start are the following sites:

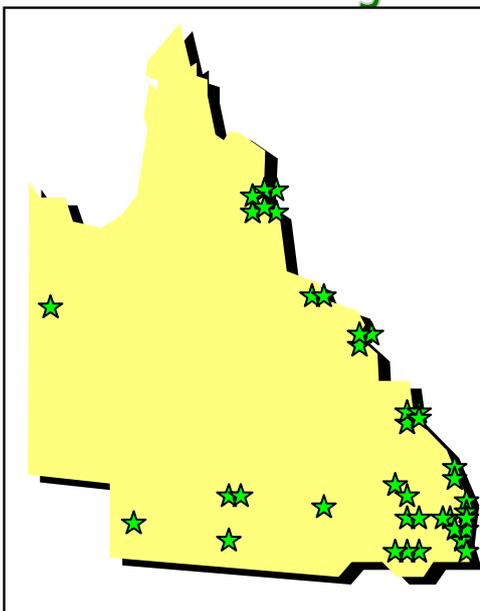
Ipswich- starting Tuesday 15 March at the Ipswich Humanities Centre. This is now FULL.

Gold Coast (Elanora)- starting Saturday 30 April at Elanora Library.

Forest Lake- starting Tuesday 3 May at Salvation Army Lake Community Church hall.

Capalaba- starting Tuesday 3 May at Redland Community Centre.

STEPS Skills Programs in QLD Map



2006 - Maroochydore, Caloundra, Buranda, Cleveland, Gold Coast, Mackay, Bundaberg, Capalaba, Annerley

2007 - Gold Coast, Bracken Ridge (2), Rockhampton (2), Bundaberg, Charleville (2), Innisfail, Kingston, Wooloowin, Roma, Cairns (2), Mitchelton, Carina

2008 - Logan central, Chermside, Bracken Ridge, Rockhampton, Far South West Qld (telegroup), Cunnamulla, New Farm, Warwick, Maroochydore

2009 - Logan north(x3), Pine Rivers, Red Hill, Townsville, Mt Gravatt, Warwick, Stratford (Cairns), Rockhampton, Gordonvale, Riverview, Buranda, Nundah, Redcliffe, Cleveland, Mackay, Hillcrest, Acacia Ridge

2010 - Warwick, Buranda, Rockhampton, Brinsmead (Cairns), Mt Gravatt (2), Ipswich, New Farm, Logan north(2), Beaudesert, Pine Rivers, Mackay, Bulimba, Arundel (Gold Coast), Smithfield (Cairns), Toowoomba (2), Townsville, Kingaroy, Yarraman, Elanora (Gold Coast), Wynnum, Ipswich, Zillmere, Mt Isa, Stafford

STEPS

Issue 21

March 2011

Special Points of Interest:

- ☉ STEPS Christmas Party news
- ☉ STEPS Program Activity
- ☉ Story from the Bundaberg STEPS Leader: [Leanne's Story](#)

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STEPS Leader Training

STEPS Leader Training has already been scheduled for 2011 in a number of sites. Check out the website www.health.qld.gov.au/abios, or contact Areti or Ben at STEPS for further details :

Townsville– Kirwan Health Campus, Kirwan, Thurs/Fri 24/25 March.

Brisbane - ABIOS offices, Buranda, Wed/Thurs 13/14 April .

Gold Coast- Headway Gold Coast, Arundel Wed/Thur 6/7 April.

Maroochydore- Millwell Rd Community Centre, Wed/ Thurs 11/12 May.

If you are interested in the free, 2-day STEPS Leader Training for your local community in Queensland, just contact us to discuss this further. STEPS Program leaders must do this training in order to lead the STEPS Skills Program in their local communities.

STEPS Skills Program Reports

STEPS Stafford



The Stafford STEPS Skills Program commenced on the 26th of October 2010. The program leaders were Sandy Book and Jacinta Nelson. Sue Wright from ABIOS also assisted with leading the group. While the venue was not perfect and there were a few issues with the alarm system (all a little fun in the end!), the group valued the opportunity

to share their experiences with each other. New friendships were formed, which have continued since the group finished. The group's week 6 activity was held at the Coffee Club. The group has been invited to join with the Buranda/Brisbane STEPS Network Group.

STEPS Network Groups

STEPS Innisfail

The Innisfail members were high and dry late last year in this photo. But early 2011 has been a different story. The group's first meeting for the year was scheduled for the day Cyclone Yasi tore through the region! Some of our group members' homes were moderately damaged, especially those near Tully, and unfortunately damaged further by recent heavy rain-

fall. However, they have all been able to remaining living in their homes, with power and phone lines restored now. The first meeting for the year was eventually held in early March, when everyone had a chance to share their experiences of the cyclone and its devastating effects.



STEPS Brisbane Central

The first meeting of the Brisbane STEPS Network Group for 2011 was held at the ABIOS offices on Wednesday the 2nd of February. There was a big turn out with participants combining from several inner city groups including the Buranda, New Farm, Bulimba, and Stafford STEPS Groups. The meeting was quite relaxed – everyone caught up about what had happened over the Christmas/New Year period. Fortunately, no one in the Brisbane STEPS Group was directly affected by

the recent flooding; however, pretty much everyone had a story or two to tell about the floods and the clean-up efforts. In March, the group enjoyed catching up at a café in the Roma Street Parklands. Once everyone found the right place, the atmosphere and food were fantastic (although a little on the expensive

side). In making plans for 2011, the group has decided to broaden its horizons by trying out things like music and art. One of the group members (Shannon) finished a degree in music last year. She has kindly offered to organise a music ensemble in the park for the group in April. The group has put in some requests for different styles of music, and Shannon plans to ask a few of her uni friends to help on the day. We'll be sure to let you know how it all goes in the next newsletter.



STEPS Gold Coast

The Gold Coast STEPS Network Group kicked off 2011 with a relaxed Saturday morning meeting at a local coffee shop. The group enjoyed catching up about everyone's adventures over the Christmas/New Year period. Plans were also made for future meetings and another STEPS Skills Program in the Gold Coast area during 2011. The major goal of the group in 2011 is to 'grow the group' so that more people who have been influenced by brain injury



can join in and be apart of the fun (and support). In February, the group got together for a few games of barefoot bowls at the Burleigh Lawn Bowls Club. While the weather was hot, the group didn't dare complain – a few of the group's planned activities in 2010 were washed out with rain, so the sunshine was very much welcomed by all. The plan for next months meeting is a group BBQ!

STEPS Ipswich

With the impact of the January floods, the New Year has certainly been an interesting one for the Ipswich STEPS Network Group. One of the members of our group was directly impacted by the flooding, causing him to be displaced from his home. While it was fortunate that the other group members were not directly affected, the widespread nature of the flooding touched everyone in the group. Many of our group members were very active in the

flood recovery efforts, which are ongoing.

Despite the floods, we have continued with our monthly STEPS meetings. In February, the group welcomed staff from Lifeline's Standby Response Service for a discussion about mental health and suicide. In early March, a great time was had by all over lunch at the Ipswich RSL. As a group, we are hoping to give hydrotherapy a go in April and we're also excited by the prospect of sharing our stories about

brain injury on a local radio program. Our aim is to increase community awareness of brain injury in order to help others better understand what a brain injury is and how it can affect a person's life.



Spotlight on.. Bundaberg

The local Aboriginal group is the Gurang Gurang (goo-rang goo-rang) people.

Bundaberg as a European township was founded by timbergetters Bob and George Stewart and Lachlan Tripp in 1867. The first farmers in the area arrived soon after.

Timber was the first established industry in Bundaberg. In 1868 a sawmill was erected on the Burnett River downstream from the Steuart and Watson holdings. The Burnett Sawmill operated for over 100 years at its East Bundaberg location. It was the oldest operating sawmill in the Bundaberg area until it ceased operating on 26 May 2010.

Bundaberg is known as the 'Southern Gateway to the Great Barrier Reef and lies near the southern end of the reef. During whale season, large numbers of these majestic sea giants can be seen, creating quite a tourist attraction.

Bundaberg has a lot of parks and sporting facilities, including the Salter Oval which has a Sheffield Shield rated cricket pitch, and Kendall's Flat Junior Cricket complex is the largest and highest rated of its kind outside Brisbane. This is a city fascinated by sport and recreation, and the parks and gardens enable a great outdoor lifestyle.

Bundaberg is known as the 'Southern Gateway to the Great Barrier Reef



Bundaberg is the perfect recreational city as it boasts the most equable climate of any Australian town or city. In this capacity the city is ranked fifth in the world!

STEPS Christmas Party

STEPS Bundaberg



For 2010, Brain Injury Friends (STEPS network Group) met for lunch in a delightful garden setting at the Tom Quinn Community Centre. A private dining 'gazebo' was set up for the group, so they sat right amongst the greenery in this oasis in the middle of Bundaberg. The traditional Secret Santa exchanging of gifts, combined with delicious, affordable food in a relaxing setting was the perfect way to celebrate another year together in Bundaberg!

STEPS Toowoomba

We had a wonderful day last Wednesday (1st December) at our STEPS Christmas Party. 14 people enjoyed lunch at Club Glenvale getting into the festive spirit by popping out Bonbons, wearing out Christmas hats and telling jokes. We each took a \$5 Secret Santa gift and Jenny and Dave handed out these gifts with much HOHOHO. We raised glasses to wish all other STEPS groups a Merry Christmas and enjoyed lots of chatter, laughs and topped it off with some chocolates.

Greater Brisbane STEPS Christmas Party

The greater Brisbane STEPS Christmas Party was again held at Roma St Parkland on 1 December 2010. For the second year in a row, we battled with the weather- lots of rain in the days beforehand, some on the day, but nothing in comparison with what was to come during the rest of December/January! On the positive side, it wasn't too hot for the 60 or so people who all gathered in the lush Frangipani Court area to share another year of STEPS, with a sausage sizzle and morning tea, including another fabulous "STEPS" cake made by one of our leaders, Maria. We had people from Pine Rivers, New Farm, Logan, Cleveland, Wynnum, Zillmere, Nundah, Stafford, Buranda, Ipswich and Beaudesert- when we eventually found them at the train station and guided them to the party area! Excitingly, the statewide reach of STEPS was confirmed by Christmas parties held on the same day in Mt Isa, Toowoomba, Cairns, and Kingaroy. Have a look at the photos on the next page to see the fun and frivolity had by all.

STEPS Far North Queensland

It was stinking hot day, possibly the last dry day since then up here, that we all gathered for our end-of-year/Christmas celebration. We had our party at Centenary Lakes in Cairns on 1 December, to coincide with the Brisbane STEPS party on the same day. The portable fan we brought along was a life-saver in the heat...so was the insect repellent! Brett did a great job on the BBQ sizzling our sausages and there was lots of other food and Christmas nibblies enjoyed by all. We enjoyed some new acquaintances, as well as renewing some old friendships with people from around the Far North Queensland region.

Big thanks to Cairns Regional Council, who made sure the wheelchair access was much better than in 2010, with a smooth concrete path replacing the jagged concrete/crusher dust path which was filled with potholes. We avoided a repeat of the wheelchair getting "stuck in the mud" again, which allowed everyone to really enjoy the

day. We're looking forward to next year's party already.

Jenny

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Snap Shots



Open Network Groups

Here is the list of Network Groups are open to new members, places where they meet and the contact person for each of the groups.

Acacia Ridge– David Firth: Ph 0411 501 641

Weekly meetings, Mondays 10am-12pm, Acacia Ridge Community Centre, Hanify St, Acacia Ridge

Bayside– Denice Rundle: Ph 3823 4851 & Ben Turner: Ph 3406 2311

Monthly meetings, 2nd Thursday of each month at various local venues

Beaudesert– Tina Jarvis, Denise Kelly & Annie Kydd: Ph 5541 1653

3rd Wednesday of month 10:00am-12pm at St Mary's Community Services, 6-12 Petersen St, Beaudesert

Brisbane Central– Ben Turner: Ph 3406 2311

Monthly meetings, 1st Wednesday of month, 10am-12pm- venue alternates between ABIOS & a community setting.

Bundaberg– Leanne Curtis: Ph 4155 2303

Monthly meetings, 4th Wednesday of month, 10am– 12pm at various community locations.

Cairns– Jenny Sweeney: Ph 4055 0015

Monthly meetings, 1st Thursday of month 10am-12pm at McCafe, Smithfield McDonalds, Milman Dve, Smithfield

Gold Coast– Ben Turner: 3406 2311

Monthly meetings, last Saturday of month (daytime), various community locations

Innisfail– Raylene McSwan: Ph 4063 3742 & Stephen Wilkie: Ph 4068 0638

Monthly meetings, 1st Thursday of month 10am– 12pm at Healthier Great Green Way, 180 Edith St

Ipswich– Ben Turner: Ph 3406 2311

Monthly meetings, 2nd Tuesday of month, 10am-12pm at various community locations

Kingaroy– Bobbie D'Arcy: Ph 4162 9220

Monthly meetings– exact details TBA

Logan Drop-in Chat Group- John Enright: Ph 3342 5820

3rd Monday of month 10am-12pm at Logan North Library cnr Sports Drive and Springwood Rd, Underwood

Logan North– John Enright: Ph 3342 5820

Monthly meetings, 1st Monday of month, at various community locations

Mackay– Anne Jennings: Ph 4968 3823

2-monthly meetings at various local venues

Mt Gravatt– Ty Hill: Ph 3841 2842 & Areti Kennedy: Ph 3406 2311

Fortnightly meetings, Wednesdays, 10am -12pm at Perks Café, Garden City shopping centre or various community locations

Pine Rivers- Sue Wright: Ph 3406 2311

Monthly meetings, 3rd Wednesday of month, 10am-12pm at Pine Rivers Neighbourhood Centre

Redcliffe– Cherie Carter: Ph 3284 6839

Monthly meetings, 2nd Wednesday of month, 10am-12pm at Redcliffe Leagues Club, cnr Klingner and Ashmore Rds, Redcliffe, or various community locations

Sandgate– Areti Kennedy: Ph 3406 2311

2—monthly meetings, 1st Thursday of every second month (daytime), various community locations.

Toowoomba– Mary-Ann Garrahy: Ph 4630 1709

Fortnightly meetings, 1st Monday of month at various community locations; 3rd Monday of month at Sunset Super-bowl, Green Wattle St, 10am-12pm

Yarraman– Peter McLean: Ph 4163 8780

Monthly meetings– exact details TBA

STEPS Leader Network

At the first STEPS Leader Network teleconference, the schedule for 2011 was finalised. See details below:

10am, Thursday 27 January	Business Planning	STEPS program review- 2010 activity, 2011 plans- see below 2011 Leader Network teleconference schedule STEPS resource library update
10am, Thursday 17 March	Educational Topic	STEPS Network Group Leader Training manual Adjustment following Acquired Brain Injury- Melissa Kendall, ABIOS research officer
10am, Thursday 19 May	Meet the Leaders	Leader reflections from Network Group leaders
10am, Thursday 21 July	Business Planning	TBA
10am, Thursday 22 September	Educational Topic	Post-traumatic growth following Acquired Brain Injury- Melissa Kendall, ABIOS research officer
10am, Thursday 17	Meet the Leaders	Leader reflections

We are also interested in your experience of the STEPS Program Leader Network overall- the newsletter, teleconferences, phone/email contact with STEPS Program staff. We have a short, one-page survey that we have sent to our leaders by email. If you would like us to post you a copy directly, please let us know. Your opinion is important to us.

STEPS Program Activity

We know the STEPS Program has been busy over the past couple of years, but when we collated the data about STEPS Skills Programs, it really showed how much we have grown, especially in regional areas of Queensland. It also shows how important our local leaders are for the program to work in local communities.

STEPS Skills Programs

STEPS Skills Program: <i>Participants</i>	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	TOTAL
Total No. Attendees – all Qld	91	132	52	139	202	616
New STEPS Skills Program Sites	10	16	11	20	28	85
No of Attendees:						
Greater Brisbane/SEQ	66	54	32	101	110	363
Regional Centres	25	49	11	34	78	197
Rural Centres	-	29	9	4	14	56

Greater Brisbane/SEQ includes sites within 200km radius Brisbane (e.g., Ipswich, Logan, Gold Coast, Sunshine Coast)

Regional centres includes Toowoomba, Kingaroy, Beaudesert, Warwick, Bundaberg, Rockhampton, Mackay, Townsville

Rural centres include Roma, Charleville, Innisfail, Cunnamulla, Far South West Queensland, Mt Isa and Yarraman

STEPS Leaders

STEPS Skills Program: <i>Participants</i>	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	TOTAL
No. of Leaders – all Qld	16	33	15	38	53	155
No. of Leaders:						
Service Provider	9	22	10	19	30	90
Peer	5	8	5	18	21	57
Lay	2	3	-	1	2	8

Leanne's Story

LEANNE CURTIS (Previously WILLIAMS), BUNDABERG BRAIN INJURY FRIENDS SUPPORT GROUP (STEPS) LEADER

It was the June long week-end, 2000. My dear husband was 39 at the time. We had a special relationship and 3 lovely children aged 3, 7 & 9. He was a linesman for the local electricity company in Bundaberg (coming up to 21 years of service) when he had a work accident due to equipment failure. He came home with a severe headache and vomiting. I raced him to the Doctors where he had a grand mal seizure. He was rushed unconscious to hospital in an ambulance. A CT scan revealed that he had a massive brain bleed from a pre-existing AVM (arterial venous malformation) which had been triggered by the fall. Soon, he was on his way to RBH in a CAREFLIGHT helicopter. When we arrived 6 hours later we were told he most likely wouldn't survive. They gave him only 1% chance of survival.

It was touch and go in ICU for 2 weeks. He was in a coma. The only way I knew he was 'there' was that he ever so slightly rubbed my thumb with his finger as I held his hand. He finally 'woke up' and began 4 long months of intensive therapy at RBH and PAH. He had to learn to talk, walk, eat and write all over again. It seemed like 2 steps forward and 1 step back and sometimes 2 steps back, but we are forever grateful to the staff who cared for him then. It was the longest and most difficult time in the life of our family. Our children were cared for by relatives and close friends. For 6 months, I spent all my time with him with the wonderful help of his mum and dad. I lost all sense of reality during that time, leaving friends at home to get the mail, pay the bills, and mow our property. Finally Ken came home for Christmas, although he went back for a further few weeks to complete rehab.

It was very hard as Ken realised he could not return to work or drive for now. For a man who had been very active all his life, working 2 jobs to try to get us ahead, motorbike and pushbike riding (riding his bike 30,000km over a few years to raise money for various charity groups, windsurfing, camping, 4wd driving) this came as a huge blow, now totally dependant on Centrelink for a disability pension and his wife to drive him around. We did physio and OT at the hospital, went to the pool, and volunteered at Meals on Wheels to help strengthen his physical and mental state; then on to CRS to work through psychological problems (loss of job and sense of worth) and trying to get back into the work force in some form. He also had driving lessons and got his license back after 3 years. A friend in business let him come in and work for him, helping with paperwork and other things. He mostly enjoyed the social interaction of customers coming in- he would sit down and talk to them. Another mate took him to the gym regularly and others on outings. He spent a lot of precious time with his mum and dad. We joined the Brain Injury Support Group and began to enjoy the company of others who had been through similar experiences. We shared stories, laughed, cried; they became a special part of our lives, some very close friends to this day. Ken had a great outlook on life and made the most of every day.

At the end of 2004, we went on a wonderful family holiday together with my parents, and my sister and her family. What a fantastic time we had travelling around Central Queensland, sitting around campfires at night, sharing, singing and laughing. They are precious memories now, as early in 2005, just a few days after Ken celebrated his 44th birthday, he suffered a second brain bleed, and was unconscious as the ambulance came and took him to hospital. It was all so similar to the first occasion as this time he was flown to RBH by the Flying Doctors while we followed in the car. This time was worst than the first. A massive brain hemorrhage had left him brain dead with no response and his life support was turned off 3 days later.

The harshest memories are watching my children (by now 7, 11 & 13) say their goodbyes to their dad in hospital. Life is cruel at times and so very unfair. He was such a wonderful dad, loved life and playing with his children. He would use his RDO's to do reading at their school. He had answers to every question they asked and a knowledge of so many things that left me speechless at times. He had a love for creation and its Creator. We lost so much that day.

For a year I went through grief, incredible anger, bitterness, blame, and solicitors' appointments to find justice (we had failed to win a Workers Compensation case as the medical assessment tribunal determined that he had a pre-existing ailment which could have ruptured at any time in his life.) Our children (mainly the two eldest) also went through long states of tears and anger and eventually we all sought counselling to help us through.

After losing Ken, I cut myself off from our support group and didn't want anymore to do with it, but after a time of healing I realized that I didn't want what Ken had gone through and the experiences and knowledge we had gained to be wasted. I returned to our support group to help and encourage them because 'I had been there too'. Today, now 6 years later, I having been running the support group for 4 years and we have run two STEPS programs for people with an ABI. I am very grateful to Areti at STEPS and our previous co-ordinator Nene who have stood by me through all of this. We have a wonderful bunch of people who meet monthly for social and informative days. I have since remarried and am happy and now work fulltime in our tyre business. My eldest son recently married and both sons work for us. (As they grow up I see so much of their dad in them physically and their mannerisms). I have a beautiful 13 year old daughter who reminds me so regularly how much she loves me. All these things have helped lead to healing. Not a day passes though, without memories and sometimes tears as I remember, but I am getting there because of the strength and support of a wonderful network of family and friends, my church and a faith in God.

