

STEPS PROGRAM NEWSLETTER



From the Manager,

It's almost halfway through the year and we have already had many new STEPS Skills Program for the year. Some of our longer-term Network Groups have also been exploring new activities, both in their local communities and sometimes further afield.

In May, Areti presented some of the research findings from the STEPS Program Leader Network Training Forum held in 2011 at the Australian Society for the Study of Brain Impairment Conference in Hobart. Some of these research findings have been accepted for publication as an article 'Supporting the growth of peer-professional workforces in health care settings: an evaluation of a targeted training approach for volunteer leaders of the STEPS Program' in 'Disability and Rehabilitation' journal.

Best wishes for our admin assistant Kelsey as she leaves on 12 month's maternity leave. We will certainly miss her!

Areti



Queensland
Government

Princess Alexandra Hospital
Metro South Health



Volume 30, Issue 1

June 2013

Special points of interest:

- ☺ National Volunteer Week
- ☺ Newspaper article written about a Network Group
- ☺ Feature article in "In Motion" Magazine about a STEPS Program Peer Leader

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National Volunteer Week

This year, National Volunteer Week was celebrated between 13-19 May, with the national theme, "Volunteers-Thanks A Million". The STEPS Program thanked its volunteer leaders by sending Certificates of Appreciation to all of our volunteer leaders around Queensland. We also hosted a Morning Tea of Appreciation at our Brisbane office on Friday 17 May. Even during this morning tea, our volunteer leaders were put to work, being involved in a semi-structured discussion about their volunteer experience with the STEPS Program. More about that on page 8.

National Volunteer Week is the largest celebration of volunteers and volunteerism in Australia, and provides an opportunity to highlight the role of volunteers in our communities. The STEPS Program values the contribution that volunteers make to our program, both during STEPS Skills Programs and in STEPS Network Groups. We are also proud of the many peer-professional partnerships that exist, as these bring benefits to both the STEPS Program overall and to the co-leaders within these partnerships, showcasing a new

way in which services can operate by embedding valued roles for volunteers in their local service delivery.

To our volunteer leaders throughout Queensland, we say "Thanks a Million". You inspire many people in their journey towards recovery following brain injury, and are a valued part of our program. Thank-you for the efforts you make to help others!



STEPS SKILLS PROGRAM REPORTS

Logan North

To my view the most recent STEPS Group was a paramount success. A couple of participants said very little during the first five weeks. But all participants were very diligent and used the new book at it is meant to be used. Comments revealed that the book was also well read away from the group. Then

came the eye opener for me! At our 6th week break up lunch the most silent participants spoke loud and clear. Some secrets were revealed, ideas exchanged, plans outlined.

That is when it really hit home that formal and informal gatherings are equally important. Different

personalities for different environments. Also we are never too old to learn. This group of people were an excellent learning experience for me. Much credit must go to Shannon, our Student co-leader, who did a more than creditable job.

~by John Enright

Robina

Robina STEPS Skills Program started on 4 February, led by Linda Shaw (Allied Health Assistant, Gold Coast Community Rehabilitation Team) and Che Phillips (Physiotherapist and Peer Leader). As the first group in 2013, they were the first to trial the new STEPS Skills Program Workbook. Feedback was very positive – the group were very impressed with the layout and enjoyed the mindful breathing exercise in week 3. The leaders' reflected that lots of emotions were shared within the group, including a few tears along with a good dose of humour! After considering a few different options, the group settled on lunch at the Robina Tavern for the week 6 activity. The group has enjoyed catching up on a monthly basis with the Gold Coast STEPS Network Group.



Wynnum

The Wynnum STEPS Skills Program was held at the Wynnum Hall and started on the 9th of April with Lone Haywood (Open Minds) and Jasmine Tsoi (OT Student) as the leaders. The group was large in numbers, but the leaders commented that everyone had a chance to share their feelings and experiences. Both leaders reflected that there was a strong

sense of peer support from within the group – everyone was willing to help one another with the challenges they faced since their injury. There were a few people in the group who experienced speech and language changes since their injury – the group provided a great opportunity for them to "have a voice" and feel the support of other group

members. The group finished with lunch at Hogs Breath Café for their week 6 activity. The group has been invited to join the Bayside STEPS Network Group. Some participants are also interested in becoming STEPS Program Leaders to help with future groups in the Bayside area.

Ipswich

The Ipswich STEPS Skills Program started on the 7th of February with Lisa McAllister (Anglicare West Moreton) and Milissa Mansell (Trained Peer Leader) as the leaders. This was the first group for Lisa and while Milissa had previously led groups in the Logan area, this

was her first since moving to the Ipswich area. After the first week, the leaders' only concern was that there were no tissues! Towards the end of the program, one participant commented that he had been dragged "kicking and screaming" to the group, but that over

time, his attitude had changed and he was able to realise that "he was not the only one"! The group finished with a high tea at the Queens Park café and have continued their friendships through the monthly meetings of the Ipswich STEPS Network Group.

Browns Plains

The Browns Plains STEPS Skills Program commenced on the 11th of February 2013 at the Browns Plains Library. The group was led by Glenys Rye (Red Cross) along with Elaine Trotman and Michelle Owens (Trained Peer Leaders). The

leaders' reflected that the group quickly formed a strong bond as they shared their experiences of life after brain injury. The leaders' also commented that the group worked together to help group members with specific issues/concerns that

they raised within the group. The group met at the Calamvale Hotel for lunch for their Week 6 activity. Since then, the group has met a couple more times and is well on its way to forming the Browns Plains STEPS Network Group.

STEPS PROGRAM NETWORK GROUP REPORTS

Townsville

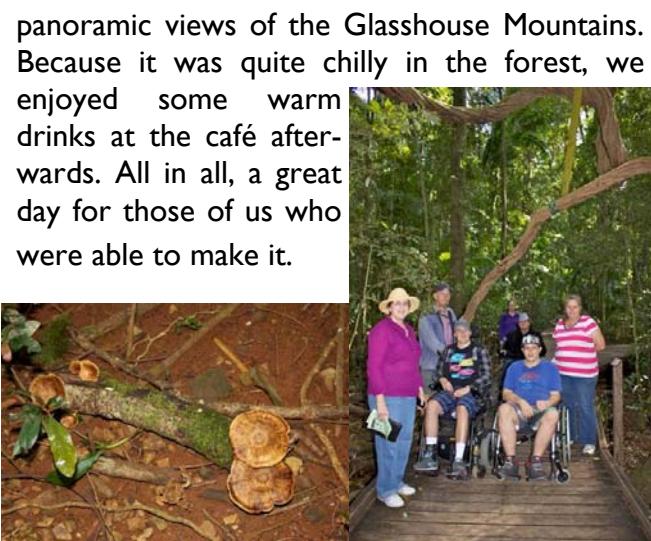
The Townsville Network Group has settled into a regular, relaxed habit of having its monthly meetings at a local Coffee Club. There is a spacious, versatile outdoor area where we can keep changing table and chair configurations as people come and go across the morning, or swap seats for a catch-up with someone else.

Areti took a few pics of us on a recent visit here.



Brainiacs (Caboolture)

This year, we are spreading our wings and trying new activities and adventures. So far, we have had fish and chips by the beach at Redcliffe, and then last month, we headed even further afield to Mary Cairncross Reserve in Maleny for a forest walk. We enjoyed the flora and fauna in the forest, including some interesting strangler figs and fungi. The walk is wheelchair-accessible and we were rewarded with stunning panoramic views of the Glasshouse Mountains. Because it was quite chilly in the forest, we enjoyed some warm drinks at the café afterwards. All in all, a great day for those of us who were able to make it.



Fraser Coast Hinterland- local newspaper feature!

SUPPORT GROUP FOR BRAIN INJURIES By Sue Downey, Fraser Coast Chronicle, Tues 26/3/13.

Ann Pyatt is 42 and cares for her husband who had an accident last year. She also has a young daughter with ADHD and cared for her mother for 5 years. It has not been easy for Ann but she said having support was essential in being able to cope. "It's hard sometimes but in the big picture it's a case of have to. My husband and daughter both need someone to care for them and I'm the one," Ann said.

Support groups offer more than a sounding board, as they give you a chance to build firm friendships with others who have similar experiences and emotions.

"It's important to be with other people so I come to the brain injury support group once a month, when I need some space for me."

Bill Salt was 58 when he had a stroke and his wife Robyn said it had been a long journey over the

past 7 years. "I'm still learning The Step Forward- Fraser Coast and having to find answers. Hinterland Brain Injury Support Group started in 2011 at the end of a six-week workshop called the and thankless job," Robyn said. STEPS (Skills to Enable People "I'm finding more support for and communities) Program, carers- it's out there but you do which assisted people with have to hunt for it yourself."

When she was 41, Leanne Emery got a bad ear infection from a swimming pool, which lasted for months before she finally had a seizure. "I was diagnosed with meningococcal and ended up in hospital in Brisbane, where I stayed for over 3 months. I had 9 strokes and had to learn to walk and talk again, but after 10 years I'm still going strong," Leanne said. "I get a lot of support from others in the support group." You would not know it to look at him, but Gary Armstrong also has a brain injury- from a motor vehicle accident in 1986. Gary said he found it hard to deal with sometimes. "I cope by playing the drums because it helps me to forget and coming to the support group has helped me to get on with people, which I could never do before," Gary said.

acquired brain injury, carers, family and friends to learn stress management, goal setting and coping with changes after ABI. They continue to meet monthly, alternating between education sessions held at the Maryborough Neighbourhood Centre and social community events.

Phone Jennie on 4130 8918 if you would like to know more about the group.



HELPING HAND: (Back from left) Ann Pyatt, group co-ordinator Jennie Whitley, Robyn Salt and Bill Salt, with (front from left) student social worker Natalie Kruger, Leanne Emery and Gary Armstrong. PHOTOS: CINDY ROBERTSON

Toowoomba

Although still a little hot, Toowoomba ventured out in early autumn for a round of putt putt, followed by lunch at the golf club. It was a very nice day, with some people really improving over the course. Pictured (from right) are Mick with his wife Liz, Mary Ann, Megan and then behind her is Ivan, Gay and Cameron. Thanks to Megan's mum Kai for the photo.



Brain Injury Friends (Bundaberg)

The Bundaberg Brain Injury Friends group has been meeting at a few of its favourite haunts in recent months. This is one of the STEPS Program's first Network Groups, having started in 2007. Over the years, there have been a mix of "good times" and "bad times" for various members and this group strongly values its capacity to

share these experiences with each other, and provide valuable support to each other. At times, this can be just a good, fun diversion from the toughness of life, at other times the celebration of an achievement or success, or at yet other times, deep and meaningful and sometimes very teary conversations and life stories

shared amongst members. Our local leaders, Leanne, Jennie and Gabby have also done a wonderful job over the past several years fostering this strength in this group. Well done to all members of this group, as this quality has definitely been drawn upon in the early months of this year.

Brisbane Central



was a big step for attention – especially the upside the group, but down elephant that apparently with some careful cost a million dollars! In planning, it has between these group outings, proven to be a the group has had structured great success. group discussions on a range of The group topics including self-identity after ventured to the brain injury and raising Queen Street Mall awareness of brain injury in the in March to give community. While trying new disco ten pin things is not easy, the group has bowling a go. been able to work together to One of the group make plans that best serve the

The Brisbane Central STEPS members even managed to score needs of people within their Network Group met in early a turkey (3 strikes in a row!). In group. The group has some 2013 to set goals and make May, the group took a trip to the more excellent ideas for the plans. The group decided to Gallery of Modern Art. There second half of 2013, so watch break from tradition and try a were some very interesting this space! few "new ideas" in 2013. This pieces that caught the group's

Headway Mackay

The Headway Mackay Group has had a long association with the STEPS Program (since 2006). 2012 was a challenging year for the group, but with the support of the local Commonwealth Respite and Carelink Centre, the group have managed to keep things going and continue to be a valuable source of support to people with ABI and their families in the Mackay region. In February 2013, the group held a 1-day brain injury forum. Ray Quinn (ABIOS Manager) and Ben Turner (STEPS Program Coordinator) were the guest presenters for the day. The first half of the day was for health professionals/service providers

followed by an afternoon session for people with ABI and their family members. In total, over 60 people attended on the day. The event was very well organised and those who attended said that they couldn't wait for the next one. One mother, who lives about 3 hours out of Mackay, said that the day

had made a big difference for her personally – not only had she been able to pick up some useful tips and strategies, but she had been able to connect with other people in a way that she hadn't done before. Congratulations to the Headway Mackay Group for another very successful event!



Maroochydore

Maroochydore Network Group welcomed some 'graduates' from the STEPS Skills Program late in 2012, to its Network Group. Together, we have tried a few

new activities, from morning tea up on the mountain at Buderim, to a BBQ picnic by the shore at Cotton Tree Park, followed by a discussion session on 'Memory'

at a local RSL club. Next up, we are heading to the beachside for lunch at a local surf club.

Nundah

Nundah also welcomed some 'graduates' from the Chermside STEPS Skills Program in late 2012 to its group, and we have been getting to know each other– and a few new cafes- over the past few months. Here are some recent pics.



STEPS PROGRAM LEADER TRAINING

STEPS Program Leader Training is next scheduled in Townsville on Thur 27/ Fri 28 June at CRNQ in Belgian Gardens. Contact Areti if you are interested in attending this training.

Later, training will be offered in Brisbane at BIOS offices on Wed 7/Thur 8 August. Contact Ben if you are interested in attending this training.

Contact us if you are interested in STEPS Program Leader Training in your local community.

SEEING BOTH SIDES

The Australian Physiotherapy Association recently featured an article in their monthly "In Motion" magazine about Che Phillips, who is a trained STEPS Program Leader on the Gold Coast. The article, written by Che, describes his journey of recovery and rehabilitation after sustaining a traumatic brain injury from a motor-bike accident in 2009. Prior to his injury, Che had been working as a Physiotherapist in private practice where he had a strong interest in sports physiotherapy. Che described the early phase of his recovery as follows:

"Dazed confusion mixed with helplessness – this is what comes to mind when I try to recall my first memories and feelings after awaking from a coma three years ago." Che's coma lasted 42 days and he was in post-traumatic amnesia for almost 5-months. He spent 7-months in hospital, including several months in the Brain Injury Rehabilitation Unit at the Princess Alexandra Hospital

where he underwent intensive therapy. After discharge from hospital, Che went to live with his parents and continued his rehabilitation in the community. His main goal was to regain registration as a Physiotherapist and start working again, which he managed to achieve in Sept 2011. Che reflected that his experiences of life after brain injury led him to evaluate the way he practiced as a physiotherapist - "While I was welcome to return to [the private practice], I felt I could draw on my experience and help patients who are in hospital." Che started working at John Flynn Private Hospital on the Gold Coast and with the support of the staff and others; he has made a successful return to practice as a physiotherapist. Che reflected on his journey:

"One of the many positives that have come from this journey is that I feel I am now a

better physiotherapist. Working in a rehabilitation and hospital setting, I find that I can relate more with the patients – especially those dealing with brain injury or stroke.... Whether it is simply helping patients to understand how therapy is going to benefit them, or fully realising the challenges that they will face at home and in the community upon their discharge, the comments from patients is that they feel I emphasise."

Che's ability to share his experiences and expertise has been a great asset to the STEPS Program on the Gold Coast where he recently co-lead the Robina STEPS Skills Program. Che is also a valued member of the Gold Coast STEPS Network Group.



SPOTLIGHT ON... ATHERTON

Famous for its beautiful scenery, Atherton located southwest of Cairns on the Atherton Tableland. As a major agricultural area, Atherton celebrates the Maize festival in August each year, with a parade full of decorated floats; the Maize Queen pageant and lots of other competitions.

Here is a bit of trivia- Ron Grainer, a music composer, is from Atherton and his most recognised piece of music is the theme from the TV series Dr Who!!

On the right is a photo of the Atherton STEPS Program Leaders, getting ready to lead the first STEPS Program in Atherton- don't they look great!



STEPS PROGRAM LEADER NETWORK

At our recent STEPS Program Volunteer Leader Morning Tea of Appreciation, we asked those present to reflect on their volunteer experience with our program.

Several of the leaders had co-led a number of STEPS Skills Programs and were also actively involved in Network Groups. Some described their initial motivation for becoming involved with the STEPS Program as being in response to looking for rehabilitation opportunities for themselves. This often led to them completing the STEPS Skills Program as a participant, before then deciding to progress to becoming a program leader. Many also described the personal benefits they had

experienced as a program participant, and their desire to offer others the opportunity to participate in a local STEPS Skills Program too, which motivated them to become a leader.

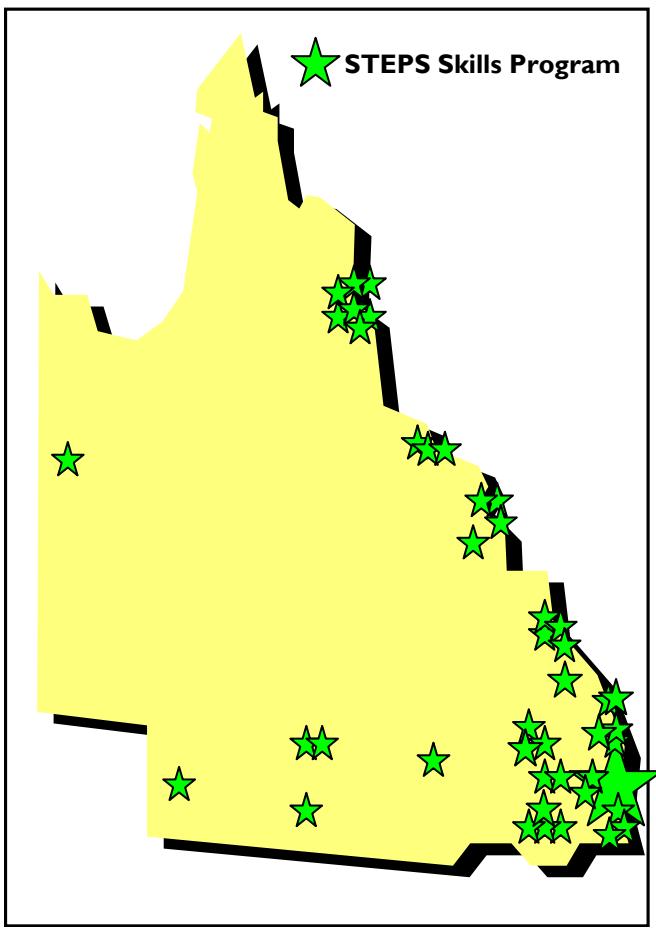
Some leaders described dramatic personal benefits relating to their involvement with the program. Several described that they are now much, much more empathetic, not just to people with brain injury, but more broadly in their everyday lives. Others added that they have gained valuable skills in group facilitation, communication and active listening, which again had benefits beyond the STEPS Program. For some leaders, their motivations for being a leader have remained stable over

time, whereas for others these had changed. While all leaders described that the STEPS Program enabled them to "give back" to others with brain injury, some also reported that it was equally the benefits to themselves, i.e. their own progress, the friendships they have made, the skills they have gained, etc, that motivated them to remain involved with the STEPS Program as a volunteer leader.

It was a highly valuable exercise, which gave the volunteer leaders a chance to discuss these themes as a wider group of volunteer leaders. For the record, we did also allow them to just catch-up and chat informally together over morning tea. Not all work and no play, after all!

STEPS SKILLS PROGRAM IN QLD MAP

2012 - Bundaberg, Cairns North, Edmonton (Cairns), Gladstone (2), Gold Coast, Ipswich, Kingaroy, Maroochydore, Redcliffe, Rockhampton, Toowoomba (2), Yeppoon, Beenleigh, Brighton, Buranda, Capalaba, Chelmside, Logan Central, Mt Gravatt, Newstead, Tarragindi



2011 - Biloela, Bundaberg, Yeppoon, Rockhampton (2), Southport, Townsville (2), Cairns (2), Noosaville, Maroochydore, Maryborough, Brisbane (12)

2010 - Mt Isa, Warwick, Rockhampton, Cairns (2), Townsville, Kingaroy, Yarraman, Gold Coast (2), Mackay, Beaudesert, Toowoomba (2), Brisbane (13)

2009 - Townsville, Warwick, Cairns, Rockhampton, Mackay, Gordonvale, Ipswich, Redcliffe, Brisbane (11)

2008 - Rockhampton, Warwick, Maroochydore, Far South West Qld, Cunnamulla, Mt Isa, Brisbane (5)

2007 - Gold Coast, Rockhampton (2), Bundaberg, Roma, Cairns (2), Charleville (2), Innisfail, Brisbane (6)

2006 - Maroochydore, Caloundra, Gold Coast, Mackay, Rockhampton, Bundaberg, Brisbane (4)

THE STEPS PROGRAM

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