

# AUSTRALIAN PSYCHOLOGICAL SOCIETY LTD

## Rural and Remote Psychology Interest Group Newsletter

*Celebrate Rural Resilience*

*Edition 7 June 2005*

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### **RRIG Convenor's Report – Ailsa Drent**

Welcome to 2005. We are certainly well into the year, and much is happening. In general, a greater range and amount of activity is happening in the RRIG. Our membership continues to grow steadily, and members are making their requests known. We are attempting to respond to each as best as is possible.

Important diary dates need to be noted and plans considered. The first of these is the APS National Conference to be held in Melbourne September 28<sup>th</sup>-October 2<sup>nd</sup> at the Crown Promenade Hotel. We plan to hold a forum again and also the AGM and election of office bearers. Please consider coming to Melbourne and applying for travel funding NOW. We would like new committee members, so please consider your availability-we won't work you too hard! A call for papers for presenting at the Conference has been made this week so can you please think about presenting very soon.

National Psychology Week provides a wonderful opportunity for us to enter the community promoting our profession. The dates this year are 6<sup>th</sup> -12<sup>th</sup> November, colours green and blue. Kits will be available again from the APS office.

For this year we are focusing on several new projects and continuing with ones already 'in train'.

- Robyn Bradbury has developed some prospective studies in several remote areas, as well as operating a test library for us all to obtain the tests we need. A list of available tests is attached to this

newsletter. Please use this facility by contacting Robyn on 0438 893 830. The test library is already operating in some unusual locations. See below the photo of Pepe in Samoa using one of the tests.



- Several members are now engaged in mentoring and supervision services and much is being learnt in the process.
- Web-cast PD and broadcasts. Pilot studies have begun with the APS trialling delivery of such a service. We hope that professional development will be able to be received at your computer as a result of much hard work by a dedicated team involved with the project. Some of you may be approached to be involved in trials during this year.

Please use this newsletter to communicate letters, articles, profiles, suggestions and ideas.

May the year be a professionally stimulating one for all.

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## **International Journal of Rural Psychology**

We have received an email from Associate Professor Maureen Dollard, Editor, International Journal of Rural Psychology asking for papers on rural and remote practice issues from RRIG members for inclusion in this journal. If you have a paper that you think might be suitable please contact Maureen by email at [Maureen.Dollard@unisa.edu.au](mailto:Maureen.Dollard@unisa.edu.au)

She is currently discussing the possibility of publishing the journal in hard copy as well as on line with a commercial publisher. It is a peer reviewed journal. She is also hoping to publish a book shortly on Rural Work Psychology: Psychosocial risk and challenge in rural and remote work. Maureen is chairing the next I/O conference and intends to make rural work psychology a key focus, so please keep this in mind as another outlet for RRIG members.

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### **Support for Victorian Psychologists Working with Individuals Infected or Affected by HIV/AIDS**

Diana Harte from the Victorian HIV Consultancy, located at the Alfred Hospital, has made contact with the RRIG to let us know about their services. Below is the article sent by Diana explaining this service.

In response to Robyn Bradbury's very thought provoking article on the needs of psychologists working in rural and remote areas in the December newsletter we thought it would be appropriate to highlight a resource available for Victorian rural and remote psychologists, as well as other health professionals working with people living with HIV/AIDS (PLWHA).

The Victorian HIV Consultancy (VHIVC) is a state-wide multi-disciplinary team focussing on the palliative, complex and continuing needs of PLWHA. Currently staffed by a full-time clinic nurse consultant and a half-time clinical psychologist as well as an infectious diseases physician, the VHIVC team aims to

support health care workers involved in the care of PLWHA, particularly those working outside of specialist HIV/AIDS services. In addition, the team endeavours to facilitate access to services to PLWHA who may be disadvantaged by isolation and other factors.

Psychologists working with PLWHA in rural and remote areas of Victoria may consider contacting the VHIVC when wanting, but not limited to:

- Secondary consultation
- Access to current literature about working with PLWHA
- Access to HIV education for themselves, their clients, their community
- Information about resources and services

Diana would also be very interested to hear from psychologists who would be receptive to being placed on a referral registry and/or who are currently working with PLWHA.

Diana Kim Harte- Clinical Psychologist  
Karen Blyth- Clinical Nurse Consultant  
Olga Vujovic- Infectious Disease Physician

Telephone Diana (03) 9276 6967, Karen and Olga (03) 9276 3658  
Email [D.Harte@alfred.org.au](mailto:D.Harte@alfred.org.au)  
Mailing address: Victorian HIV Consultancy  
The Alfred Hospital, Commercial Road  
Melbourne Vic 3004

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### **Experiences of a Rural Student- Alison Joseph**

Back in 2002 I was working in the city and commuting to work every day from my country home. I had decided that I eventually wanted to find an intellectually challenging and enjoying occupation where I could work locally and contribute to the good of the community in which I lived. I was aware of the shortage of allied health professionals in country areas and thought that I may be able to help. I had studied first year psychology as part of my undergraduate science degree, and

had done further studies in organisational behavior as part of a business degree. Psychology was something that interested me.

I hunted around for a suitable course and quickly settled on a post-graduate diploma (psychological studies) at Deakin University. Deakin had a good reputation in off-campus study and I was impressed with some of the aspects of the course. I was provided with work manuals that I completed at my own pace, had ready access to lecturers via email, and was exceptionally impressed by the delivery and collection of library books to and from my door. Given my location up a rough dirt road – it was quite a feat!

I completed the Post Graduate Diploma in Psychology in one year (with exemptions) while working part-time in a small local health organization. I then found my options for an Honours year exceptionally limited. To my knowledge there is no opportunity for completing Honours or Master in Psychology off-campus<sup>1</sup>. Given also that I had just incurred a substantial HECs debt through completing the post graduate diploma, and my now limited income, I did not consider I could afford the further expense of a post graduate diploma in psychology (which in one or two instances is taught off-campus). At this point my options for pursuing a course leading to registration seemed exceptionally limited and quite disheartening. After much consideration I decided to engage in 200km round-trips to attend lectures at Deakin, Geelong. For students who live more remotely, an Honours year would seem to be an impossibility.

Certainly, in recent years the advancements in electronic communication technology has allowed many universities to provide increasingly sophisticated solutions for off-campus study. Yet there appears to be a general reluctance to provide Honours and higher qualifications in an off-campus setting.

I appreciate there is much argument as to the need to provide research supervision in person and the benefits of doing so. However, as someone who is interested in pursuing a clinical path, I found the heavy emphasis of

research and statistics quite perplexing. Many other allied health professional training courses provide substantially more clinically focused training, with placements and case study examinations occurring within the first four years of the course. My frustration of juggling work and study, with extensive travel was compounded by my continual doubts as to the relevance of the course. As a student doing fourth year psychology – I am a very good statistician but have nothing more than a rudimentary understanding of psychological clinical practice!

I would suggest that those who are already living in the country are more likely to pursue their chosen careers in a rural location – but there are significant barriers placed in the way of country students completing the qualifications necessary for registration. These barriers, both financial and geographic, are inherent in a predominantly city-based education system that dissuades country students from pursuing these careers, diminishes their success, and/or requires them to leave the country for their studies – and once settle in the city find themselves reluctant to return. If there is a genuine desire to address the shortages of psychologists and other allied health workers in rural and remote Australia, it requires an approach that addresses the needs of rural and remote students, and provides them with a “level playing field” with their city counterparts.

The shortages in rural psychologists may reflect not only the willingness of graduates to work in rural locations, but may also be largely determined by an inherent bias in the education system. By addressing the issues faced by rural students it may be possible for many more people like me to gain the necessary qualifications for registration, and be able to contribute their services to the rural communities in which they already live.

NOTE FROM THE NEWSLETTER EDITOR:

Several universities offer APS- accredited fourth years in Psychology and Charles Sturt

and Monash Universities offer APS-accredited masters degree by distance education. Check the APS website for a list of APS-accredited courses.

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### **MIRAGE Group- University of Sydney**

The RRIG was invited to present on the pros and cons of rural practice at a forum hosted by the University of Sydney, Faculty of Medicine Rural Students' Group. Sue attended this event on behalf of the RRIG and attended a panel discussion between rural practitioners and rural students. She met with the Doctor of Psychology students and discussed rural practice and also promoted the work of the RRIG. The students were delighted that we were concerned about their well-being and loved our pens.

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### **RAP Link Report**

RAPLink (Regional Action Partnership link) had a poster presentation at the recent APS Victorian Branch Conference. It was manned by Elizabeth Murphy and John Champness. John is a long-time member of the APS and of the RRIG. Elizabeth has recently joined as a Professional Affiliate, after a long informal association. (Here's John at the conference.)



The theme of the conference, the Power of Compassion, was reflected in the RAPLink presentation which concentrated on the help RAPLink provides in marginalised areas of

society—small, rural, remote communities, communities that lack a voice of their own, groups that are regarded as ‘not mattering’ by governments and other authorities, rural youth seeking access to tertiary education, communities needing professionally qualified people to return to or migrate to the bush to stop the drain to the cities.

RAPLink’s presentation made the following points:

- We listen—we don’t dictate
- We show compassion—we aren’t ‘do-gooders’
- We are interested and show it—not dismissive
- We try to be helpful—not pushy

The aim of this voluntary group is empowerment for the community—they own their problem and they own the solution to it. Thus, RAPLink facilitates, clears pathways and creates useful links. RAPLink tries, through its ‘linking’ efforts, to help bring marginalised communities into the mainstream. Go to [users.tpg.com.au/raplink/](http://users.tpg.com.au/raplink/) for the RAPLink website.

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### **Conference Dates for Your Diary**

2<sup>nd</sup> NSW Rural Allied Health Conference  
28-29<sup>th</sup> October 2005

<http://www.hotelnetwork.com.au/conference>

*“Creating futures: Influencing social determinants of mental health and well-being in rural, indigenous and island peoples”.*

September 4- 7th 2006, Cairns, QLD

This conference is being hosted by:

- Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Psychiatrists
- Royal Flying Doctor Service
- University of Queensland/James Cook University
- Public Health Association
- Australian Association of Social Workers

Registration details will be provided as they come to hand.

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