

CISMFA 10TH ANNIVERSARY Speech

The following speech was delivered at the gathering for the 10th Anniversary celebration of CISMFA on 22nd November 2008 by Robyn Robinson

THE BEGINNING

CISMFA was incorporated on 7th October 1998, just over 10 years ago. Six months prior, following heavy debate about debriefing, Ian my husband said to me you “Either you have to do something positive to combat this debate or you have to let it go”. I talked to Pat Murdoch, who had been involved in the early development of the field. We were engaged in aquatic gym at the time, and between responding to the calls of the instructor, we thought we should form an organisation committed to the development of Critical Incident Stress Management.

Discussions were held with Dr Jeffrey Mitchell (then President of ICISF) & Dr George Everly. Both were totally supportive and encouraging. A Management Committee was formed with Pat and me as Vice-President and President, Steve Hollowood from Ambulance Service Victoria agreed to be Secretary and Allan Murdoch (Pats husband) was Treasurer. The general committee members were David Ryan (from Victorian Ambulance Services), Bill Clifford (from NSW Fire Services) and Matthew Richman (from Tasmania Police).

CISMFA was born.

We started with no money. Pat and Allan loaned us \$5000. \$1000 of this went in a day's consultation with Moore's solicitors to draw up our constitution.

OUR ACTIVITIES

Courses

The very first course that we conducted in February 1999 was Train-the-trainer in the Critical Incident Stress Management (CISM) Basic course. Many early staff support programs offer practical and one-on-one assistance. One of the aspects of CISM that is different is having the option of putting people together in groups which can achieve special and particular outcomes. This has always been a hallmark of the CISM model and what we do.

For the trainer program, we started with people who were already very experienced in this field and who agreed to be part of CISMFA: They included

- Michael Tunnecliffe: one of the most experienced and respected people in this field in Australia. He later came onto our Management Committee and has made many significant contributions to CISMFA
- Monica Kleinman: another pioneer in the field, staunch supporter of ICISF and CISMFA and also now on our Management Committee
- Bill Clifford: now retired from the field, but ever interested in staff welfare and a person who has made major impact in this area, especially within the NSW Fire Services.

From then on we rolled out the CISM Basic program and to this day it has been conducted about 250 times to a wide variety of audiences in 10 countries throughout the world (though predominantly within Australia).

Over the 10 years we have expanded our core courses, and trainers who can run them including Individual crisis intervention, Advanced crisis group interventions. Suicide prevention, Strategic response to crisis, and Pastoral crisis intervention.

CISMFA developed course work in other areas as well including Compassion fatigue, Acute crisis counselling, Using debriefing and defusing to manage high arousal, and Managing violence in the workplace.

Membership

In our first year we had 263 members. This has been fairly consistent over the years, though sometimes the figure falls a bit below this number. What stands out, however, is the number of people who have been members for all or most of these years. We have a good record of retaining people. Some are here tonight such as Michael Wurm and Diane Bartlett.

Conferences

Our conferences have been another hallmark activity. We held them in 2000, 2002, 2004 & 2006. Registrations, but for the last one, were in the order of the 400's.

We have had wonderful key-note speakers present including Dr Jeffrey Mitchell, Dr George Everly, Lt General Peter Cosgrove, Dr Atle Dyregrov, Mr Tim Costello and Mr Gary Raymond. Gary has presented workshops as well as conference key-notes for us. He is an extremely well-regarded speaker and we are honoured to have him and his wife here tonight and to have Gary present to us later. Gary has insights into suicide prevention that are born of experience. He also has the capacity to translate these insights into learnings so that others benefit.

Trainer program

Our trainer program has been particularly successful. We currently have 33 active trainers. Six will be added to this list next week. Mostly they are Australian but trainers also come from New Zealand, Hong Kong and Malaysia. They teach up to seven different courses.

Some of the trainers are here tonight. Christine Ellingworth has had many years involvement with CISMFA, as Executive Officer for nearly a year, as a member of our conference committee and as a very active educator. Jill Wood and Pat Johnson, from Cabrini Hospital, have been members of CISMFA almost from the outset. Cabrini was one of the first private hospitals to introduce CISM support for staff and this remains a successful program today thanks in no small way to their efforts. Gina Mammone, from NSW SES is a newer trainer who is full of energy and ideas. Paul Scott, our Treasurer, has together with his colleague Lyndsay Smith, pioneered some of our newer courses such as Pastoral Crisis Intervention. He has supported CISMFA in many ways including running courses for us without fee. Finally Peter Kueffer, a former Treasurer of CISMFA, has maintained and developed the staff support program in Victoria State Emergency Services. His colleague, Joy Etwell, is also here tonight and is another of our trainers

SPECIAL VENTURES

CISMFA has been fortunate to be involved in some special projects, none more so than with World Vision International. Following the Boxing Day Tsunami, course work to this organisation that had been in the planning was moved forward to assist staff in need. Tony Culhane and Dr Michael Hegenauer, from World Vision, found the CISM curriculum to be applicable and able to be generalised across culture and faith beliefs. Working with both CISMFA and ICISF they have become trainers in core courses. They are ensuring that staff care officers, in their bases throughout the world, have training in all core courses. It is one of the most comprehensive educational and support program for staff that I am aware of, not only in the field of humanitarian aid workers but almost anywhere. It has been a great privilege for CISMFA to be part of this progressive and innovative work.

CISMFA TODAY: IN SUM

There is no doubt that we have faced difficulties over the years. We have had to survive without external funding. The debate around debriefing has been difficult, the more so because from our perspective unfair criticisms have been presented quite relentlessly.

There have also been many rewards. We have been pioneers. We have persisted and even thrived - sometimes against the odds. Also, we have attracted to our organisation people who are risk takers, people who care about

their fellow staff and people who tend not to be ego bound but driven to assist others. Through these people one sees the best in human nature.

THANK YOUS

It is appropriate on an occasion such as this one to thank people. This task is a little daunting because there are so many people who have been involved with CISMFA and I apologise if I inadvertently leave out someone who should have been included.

My personal biggest thanks is to my husband Ian. He could not have been more supportive or understanding or more tolerant of me in my worst and most difficult moments. As well, he has read and edited all of the important written documents I have produced. Believe me, we are talking months of work.

Historically, Pat Murdoch made a very significant contribution. She was Vice-President for nearly 5 years. She also involved most of her family and many friends to help carry out our functions in those early to mid years. She spent endless hours assisting with our four conferences.

The Management Committee has been a backbone to the organisation and many have served for long periods. There are past Committee members who have contributed much such as Bill Clifford and David Ryan. Of our current committee, I have already mentioned some. Monica Kleinman, Paul Scott, Michael Tunnecliffe, Linda Espie & Annie Cantwell-Bartl have been invaluable. I would especially like to mention Matthew Richman who has been on the Committee from the outset. Vice-President for many years, he has MC'd our conferences and been a popular educator. Thank you Matthew for your many contributions and your personal loyalty.

In 2008 we welcome onto the committee two new members, Dr Rob Gordon and Alexina Baldini. Rob is nationally acclaimed. He is an experienced psychotherapist and educator, consultant to national disaster bodies and a theoretician in trauma. Alexina is also nationally acclaimed. She is an acknowledged trainer, widely respected consultant in this field and very experienced practitioner.

I especially welcome our new President Mr Chris Long. Chris first became aware of CISMFA through a consultancy between CISMFA and Greatconnections after he agreed to assist us in strategic planning and managing change. His knowledge, courtesy, interest and many skills have become apparent. It has not only been a great pleasure to work with him but it is apparent how very fortunate CISMFA is to have someone of his calibre agree to lead this organisation.

I would also like to acknowledge the great job that Annie Cantwell-Bartl did in her Presidency over the past 5 months. She stepped in, somewhat reluctantly, to

serve CISMFA in an hour of need. She has been available and responsible. She is a compassionate person who is very knowledgeable in the loss field in particular. She has served on the Management Committee for many years and returns to the Committee as Secretary.

The Executive Officer role is central to CISMFA. Christine Ellingworth did a great job in 2007. She moved the CISMFA Office to her own home at a time of great uncertainty in CISMFA's future. How do you ever adequately thank someone for making a commitment like this? All I can say is thank you Christine. It was one of the most difficult years in CISMFA's history and your willingness to assist and commit in these times is greatly appreciated. This year Linda Espie has assumed the role of Executive Officer. You would be hard pressed to find anyone with more energy, vision and commitment. Not many people would know this, but Linda was the person who first identified Jeff Mitchell's work and suggested we should ask him to Australia. Linda and I have worked together since the 1980's. Thank you Linda. I think you're fantastic.

We have been well served by administrative staff over the years. Debbie Rogers, in particular, was the founding administration person and she set up systems that have stood us in good stead. As well she built much good will especially with our educators and conference committees.

We have been fortunate to have other support staff who have also been excellent. Jan Stephenson and Bill Morcom have looked after our books and auditing. Sonya Zyntek has ably edited our newsletter for many years and various people have managed our web, including the current web-master George Gimian who does so on a voluntary basis.

Our trainers are the eyes and ears of CISMFA. They do a wonderful job. Many are here tonight.

The International Critical Incident Stress Foundation, our parent body, could not have been more helpful. They provide teaching material, support, membership affiliation and much more.

International relationships can be complex and difficult but I could not have asked for more from the many people who staff this centre including its President Don Howell. A trusting and collaborative relationship has been established to the benefit of all.

There are particular organisations that have supported CISMFA over the years. Some that come to mind are the Victorian Ambulance Counselling Unit, The Victorian State Emergency Service, NSW Rural Fire Brigade, NSW SES, Qld Fire Services, SA Ambulance Service, and FESA in Western Australia. In Victoria, St Vincent's hospital was one of the first hospitals to establish CISM and peer support programs. They remain one of the longest serving and successful

programs for public hospital staff. Jacqui Bloink has run that program for many years. She has been on our conference committees and is about to become a trainer. Thank you Jacqui for your long standing loyalty and support.

I would also like to make mention of Greatconnections. This is a body that links retired persons with professional and business expertise to non-profit organisations like CISMFA. We have had assistance from many sources on several projects and all have been helpful and successful. If you would like to know more about them please ask our office. I could not recommend the service more highly.

Finally, and importantly, our members and people who have attended our courses and conferences have been our rationale for being. We have greatly appreciated the support, feedback and learning that they have given us.

CONCLUSION

Ian and I entered retirement this July. I am enjoying working on projects without the same degree of responsibility that I used to have. In this capacity, I look forward to continued contact with CISMFA members and trainers.

I believe that the future is bright for CISMFA. There are general international financial concerns that may cloud us. Notwithstanding that context, I believe that our mission and the people that will carry it out are without equal.

It is especially good to see you all here tonight. We have come a long way together and its fitting that we celebrate our first 10 years together.

Robyn Robinson November 2008