

2. Stress

In 2009-2010, Dr Frank Lambrick, Senior Practitioner DHS, instigated an evaluation of a “Mindfulness Programme” (Stress Reduction) in conjunction with Yooralla and Monash University.

Modern science is unequivocal, stress is toxic to all human relationships.

Senior Practitioner Report 2011–2012 - Evaluation of a mindfulness program for disability support workers in Victoria

“Lead researchers: Dr Joanne Brooker (Dr Jo Brooker is employed as a Research Fellow with Cabrini Monash Psycho-oncology), John Julian (John has major interests in mindfulness and research into training and occupational mindfulness in the workplace.) and Professor Graham Meadows (Graham Meadows is a Professor in the Department of Psychiatry in the School of Clinical Sciences at Monash Health).

Monash collaborated with the Senior Practitioner and Yooralla to examine the impact of an eight-week mindfulness program on disability support workers in Victoria. Overall, the mindfulness program yielded a range of benefits to participants and held significant potential to be transferred to other work settings.

*The study was published in the international journal, **Mindfulness** (see Brooker et al., 2012 under Published research articles).*

*Another article that is currently under review by a journal examined the impact of mindfulness training on restrictive interventions implemented by a staff group that supported people with a disability who showed severe challenging behaviour. Compared with the combined number of PRN and emergency chemical restraints and seclusions for the two homes for February to June 2009, those for February to June 2010 decreased significantly. In addition, the reduction in the number of restrictive interventions from 2009 to 2010 was greater for the two intervention homes than the two contrast homes that did not receive the mindfulness training. **The findings suggest that mindfulness training helped the staff respond to clients’ challenging behaviours in a more mindful and less reactive way”.***

The results and improvements for the residents are clear cut. By lowering the Stress levels the participating disability workers began to understand, for the first time, why many disabled people were behaving in the manner they were. **We change** and with it a reduction of restrictive interventions i.e. **a reduction of abuse**.

From my experience, I find it difficult to comprehend why something internationally embraced, so thoroughly scientifically researched, so therapeutically beneficial, readily available and cheap, plus successfully evaluated within the Victorian disability sector, is ignored.

[REDACTED]

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The Age editor, Letters

Dear Sir/Madam,

In response to The Age editorial today, Tuesday 6OCT15 **“Disability regime needs urgent overhaul”**

Big problems have simple solutions-we change!

Within the disability sector violence and aggressive behaviour is referred to as “Behaviours of Concern”.

Are you aware that by simply addressing Stress, that is, by actively lowering stress levels experienced by **disability workers** a profound positive psychological change takes place in group home residents known to exhibit “behaviours of concern”?

Are you aware that Mindfulness Stress Reduction has been successfully trialled by DHHS, Yooralla and Monash University? The success of the programme was published in two international psychology magazines. See attachment.

The results and improvements for the residents occurred by lowering the Stress levels of the participating disability workers who understood, for the first time that many residents were simply reacting to the stressed behaviour of the Group Home workers.

This positive change appears counterintuitive and paradoxical. Stress reduction courses are well developed, cost effective and readily available in Victoria.

Monash University, Melbourne are world leaders in this field. In 1989 Monash University introduced Mindfulness (Stress Reduction) as part of the core curriculum for first year medical students. In 2015 Monash will include Mindfulness (Stress Reduction) training as a mandatory part of the core curriculum in every faculty. It is that important.

Mindfulness Stress Reduction has been embraced by multinational companies such as Google, Microsoft and Apple. In Australia, the Australian Institute of Sport, AFL football clubs and leading schools, universities and businesses.

Why is this “game changing” educational training denied to disability workers?

Yours Faithfully

Rob Walter



Published Letter Edited by ‘The Age’

Curbing the contagious effect of stress

By addressing the stress experienced by disability workers, a positive psychological change takes place in group homes where residents exhibit “behaviours of concern” (violent and aggressive behaviour). Mindfulness stress reduction has been successfully trialled by the Department of Health and Human Services, Yooralla and Monash University. The success of the program was published in two international psychology magazines.

The results and improvements for the residents occurred by lowering the stress levels of the disability workers who understood, for the first time, that many residents were simply reacting to their stress. Stress reduction courses are well developed, cost effective and readily available. Monash University and the University of Melbourne are world leaders in this field. Mindfulness stress reduction has also been embraced by multinational companies, such as Google, Microsoft and Apple, as well as the Australian Institute of Sport, AFL clubs and leading schools. Why is it denied to disability workers?

Rob Walter, [REDACTED]

The Age editorial

Disability regime needs urgent overhaul

Published: October 6, 2015 - 12:15AM

It is difficult to imagine what was going through the minds of staff at a specialist centre for autistic people in Heatherton when last year they set about building a two-metre-high wooden box, fitted with a metal lock. It might have been intended as a calming zone for autistic clients, but it resembled a brutal coffin.

The box was dismantled in April, after the manager of the centre complained to regional managers and her concerns were finally conveyed to the head office of Autism Spectrum Australia (Aspect). Aspect had taken over the business at Heatherton a few months earlier. It could be said the operation of that centre was in transition. But while Aspect says the lock-up box was never used, the fact that anyone considered it to be an appropriate management tool is cause for serious concern about the broader industry's standards of care for people with disabilities.

Similar complaints about restraints being used on people with autism or other forms of disability have emerged this year, most notably in Canberra, where a school principal was sacked for approving a steel cage to hold an autistic student. That all sorts of forcible restraints are being used in disability institutions and, indeed, in the mainstream school system is deeply troubling.

Certainly some children and adults can present with extremely challenging and potentially dangerous behaviour, and ensuring their safety and that of others is essential. But are restraints the answer? In our view, forcible restraints and lock-ups do not meet best-practice ideals for managing people with difficult behaviour. They are demeaning, potentially terrifying and counter-productive, and represent a denial of human rights. We do understand there may be extreme situations that warrant unusual levels of intervention, but restraints must never become a normal response to managing challenging behaviour.

These matters represent only the tip of the iceberg when it comes to dealing with some of the most vulnerable in our community. Victoria's Ombudsman, Deborah Glass, is making a valiant effort to understand how abuse is reported in the state's multi-pronged disability sector and what is done. She issued a damning report in June (the first of a two-part analysis) highlighting serious deficiencies in almost all aspects of the existing system. Indeed, "system" is hardly an appropriate term.

Ms Glass found there was no single entity – not the Department of Health and Human Services, not the Disability Services Commissioner, nor any other office – that had specific responsibility for dealing with abuse complaints in the disability sector, for reviewing or investigating incidents, or promoting measures to prevent abuse.