



do NO harm Training for Carers ACT - 26 Feb 5.00pm to 9.00pm

In 2010 Patrick McGorry was made Australian of the Year, and in his very first speech, his acceptance speech, he started a conversation with Australia about the stark realities faced by people with mental illness in this country. In many ways the effects of that conversation still remain, with mental health funding on the increase, more services created to address the needs of the chronically ill, media willing to provide in-depth coverage of the issues and a National Mental Health Commissioner to oversee it all.

At the time of Patrick's acceptance speech Mental Illness Education ACT (MIEACT) knew there was strong evidence supporting the effectiveness and power of personal storytelling on reducing stigma, discrimination and helping people better understand mental illness. In response to the new openness to conversations about mental illness by media and the broader community, some of MIEACT's volunteers wanted to talk more frankly about their experiences, not only to young people (in its School Education Program) but also to the broader community – including the media.

It is what happened next that urged MIEACT to take a closer look at the risks of personal story telling when re-telling episodes of trauma, suicide, self-harm and disordered eating. Initially it was the feedback from our Volunteer educators – about feeling vulnerable and unsettled after a session, and from audience individuals who also felt vulnerable and unsettled that caused us to investigate. What we found after extensive research, consultation and review, that there are some topics, especially those of suicide and trauma, where the evidence about the benefits of storytelling points the other way. In response to this MIEACT developed the 'do NO harm' framework, to support the many Volunteer Educators who bring stories of trauma to their work and the people in our audience who may be susceptible and vulnerable to negative reinforcement or ideation.

MIEACT's do-no-harm policy now underpins how we now talk about traumatic experiences, suicide, self-harm and disordered eating. Basically, 'do NO harm' means that we never talk about the means, methods or details; but we always, *always* talk about the effects from trauma on our lives - our health, work-life and relationships with others. Most importantly, we always talk about what we are doing to overcome the effects of the events in our lives - what we do to stay well, work and have meaningful relationships.

By talking about complex issues in this way, we ensure that our re-telling - our own storytelling - is not traumatising for others, or would give people in our audience ideas about methods or means – especially to those who may be vulnerable to suggestion. When talking about the effects of our trauma we also talk about what we have done to overcome them - what *help* we sought and how we manage the day to day - and as we do so, we remind *ourselves* of the positive place we have made; our re-telling does not leave us diminished or vulnerable.

For further information, please call: Jacqui Price on 02 6257 1195 or email: jacqui@mieact.org.au