

Polio Day

12 October 2009

Try and try again! That was the mantra for so many children (and adults) who struggled to move their limbs after surviving poliomyelitis. They make up the more than 40,000 Australians who were recorded as having contracted polio between the 1930's-60's. During these epidemics, many cases actually went undiagnosed.

Today, thousands of polio survivors are struggling with a set of debilitating new symptoms identified as the late effects of polio. They can include new muscle weakness, joint pain, chronic fatigue, swallowing and breathing difficulties, sensitivity to cold and sleep disturbance.

In April this year, polio survivors Liz Telford, Shirley Glance and Fran Henke joined Polio Network Victoria's, Mary-ann Liethof, at the "Living with Polio in the 21st Century" Conference and Post-Polio Wellness Retreat in Warm Springs, Georgia, USA. They shared this experience with 150 people on Polio Day, 12th October at Darebin Arts & Entertainment Centre in Preston. The Body, Mind and Spirit of 'Wellness' was covered through a variety of interactive 'Try Activities' which included:

- Pain: Cause & Management - jointly facilitated by IA's psychologist, Dr Andrew Sinclair, and Epworth Rehab's Director of Pain Services, Dr Stephen de Graaff;
- Write Your Own Story facilitated by Katherine Ross;
- Seated Yoga & Meditation by Trish Jones, Chiro Yoga
- Exercise Options by Simon Mathieson, Co-ordinator of Polio Services Victoria (PSV);
- Learn to play Boccia by Bocce Victoria;
- Explore Mobility Aids & Equipment with Anthony Bonaccorso from Mobility Plus;
- How to Maximise Independence with PSV's OT, Margaret Petkoff and Orthotist, Stephen Hughes;
- Introduction to the Internet: with John Wade;
- and Mini Seated Massage Sessions with Kangan-Batman TAFE's Myotherapy students

Feedback from the day included comments like:

"Excellent venue and organisation."

"Easy to manage day."

"I was able to get information about a new orthotic – it had some new designs."

"It was wonderful to spend the day with people who had also had polio – big family!"

"Good atmosphere, lively, positive, affordable."

"A great day, and I don't feel so along anymore. Good job!"

Polio Network Victoria's Mary-ann Liethof organised and MC'd the day and was ably assisted on the day by a number of IA staff members including Anne Moribito from Fundraising, Suzanne Ryan-Evers and Natalie Saccaro from Communications, and Jenny Koadlow from Counselling. A warm Independence Australia welcome was made by the new Manager of Community Services, Michael Williams and Jill Burn, Chair of the Polio Advisory Committee followed up with a welcome from the PAC.

Additional funding was provided by the City of Yarra, City of Moreland and City of Darebin Councils and the Lions Club of Forest Hill donated a 4-wheel electric scooter to raffle. This was won by the PAC Chair, Jill Burn. Those who stayed until the end of the day were also in the running for 16 fantastic door prizes.