

Adelaide - Course Report

Adelaide, 16-19 July 2009 by Geoff Johnston

The course was held at the Comfort Inn at Haven Marina at Glenelg a beautiful sea-side suburb of Adelaide. Returning graduates and the new students met at the venue on Wednesday night to meet each other and for an introductory session. Why do graduates of the Programme return to courses? Reasons include to strengthen their own recovery and to help the new students on the road to recovery.

People anxious about coming to the programme were soon put at ease after realising everyone in the room except perhaps family members were recovering/recovered stutterers. After a brief introduction by the Regional Director Geoff Johnston and some input from the returning Graduates the primary course instructor Chris Gerraty from Melbourne addressed the group. First day videos were held to record the new students' speech prior to the course beginning. Many demonstrated "fluent" speech being covert stutterers getting by in life by avoiding words and situations but living with the fear of being "found out".

On Thursday morning instructor Rob Lucas with help from Wendy O'Hagan took all returning graduates into another room to drill the Checklist, Rules, Directions and Laws as a way of assessing each individual's progress and strength of technique. Only the strongest graduates were to work 1:1 with new students. Three pairs of graduates headed out to do a quick-fire 50 contacts on the streets. New students were given a basis of theory before the first break. Next a powerful breathing and speaking technique was taught with drilling and discipline resulting in new people after lunch saying their names and addresses powerfully. By bed-time many people who struggled Wednesday night were confident speakers.

Friday was further drilling of the technique using the checklist method for all future speaking. Pause...Breath...Speak...Release. Issues of fear and anxiety were addressed and the holistic focus of the programme emphasised. The group looked at assertive self-acceptance as the way forward and the mental attitudes we need to cultivate. Seven students signed up as members of the programme.

Graduates took the new students out onto the streets to show them how to approach and talk to strangers. 100 contacts was the target. The stories of the new students showed their perception about reaction from listeners was changing. Split sessions on Friday night were new students having a Q&A session with RD Geoff Johnston, Letting Go and Having Fun led by Rob Lucas and Women's Issues led by Jussey Verco.

Saturday morning included the public speaking Harrison Workshops with all of the new people really enjoying speaking to a group perhaps for the first time in their lives. During the lunch break the new students were ready to go out and make contacts paired with a graduate. Public speeches were then conducted in Moseley Square with perhaps 70 onlookers. Several people who on the Wednesday night said there was no way they would do a public speech, were up on their feet and making eloquent speeches. Graduate Jeff Mutton proposed to his girlfriend who thankfully accepted.

Split sessions on Saturday night were Assertive Communication, Addressing Problems in the Real World and Telephone calls using mobile phones.

Sunday sessions focussed on issues with home and work, allocation of ongoing coaches and planning to succeed. The closing session after lunch was attended by friends and family who came along to hear a summary of the course, what to expect with regard to the new graduates after the course and of course the final new student graduation speeches.

My special thanks to instructors Chris Gerraty, Rob Lucas, Ray Welchman and Anne Vreudenberg. Without the returning graduates there would be no course so a special thank you to them. Awards in the form of book prizes were given to graduate Andrew Duck for his discipline and help with the new students and to student Madeline Klose who displayed great courage during the four days and left with new beliefs about herself and her ability to speak.

Finally, congratulations to the seven new graduates of the programme who must now be brave and disciplined to take their new found speaking skills out into the big sometimes cruel world. Thankfully they have their coach and the support network of the McGuire Programme to help them along their journey to Freedom.