

The McGuire Programme

Course Report – Melbourne October 2006

By Geoff Johnston, Regional Director, Australia

The last course in Australia for 2006 was held in late October at the Victoria Hotel in Melbourne. It was our first course at that hotel and it suited our purpose extremely well. The course was attended by 28 new students and up to 30 graduates participated in the course at various times. Without the returning graduates, conducting courses would be impossible. Thank you for your ongoing support.

Instruction on this course was shared by many people with Chris Gerraty, Rob Lucas, Andrew Harris, Ray Welchman and Geoff Johnston playing leading roles. Other senior graduates were given the opportunity to instruct modules and run split sessions. It was encouraging to the new students to see so many recovering stutterers in leadership roles and speaking so well.

New students and returning graduates met on the Wednesday night and the nerves and anxiety quickly dissipated. It's quite empowering to be in a room of people who have been through the same experiences that you have; people who understand the daily struggle and anxiety!

First day videos were conducted on the Wednesday night. Students ranged in age from 13 to 53. The videos over, students looked forward to the next four days with hope and optimism, especially after hearing the returning graduates introduce themselves and speak with such confidence and eloquence.

Thursday sessions lay a strong foundation for recovery. As Rob Lucas says, it's like laying the reinforcing rods before you pour the concrete slab on a building site. The strong breathing and speaking technique taught on the first day, is a strong basis for moving forward with confidence. All students were able to stand up in front of the group and say their names without any problems by mid-afternoon.

Friday sessions maintained the focus on technique that was continued throughout the entire course and beyond. Overcoming the psychological aspects of stuttering and taking charge of your mind and thoughts when feeling fearful and anxious were topics covered on day two of the course. During the afternoon old graduates showed the new students how to do contacts with people in the streets of Sydney. They all realised that speaking to strangers rather than being a fearful experience, can be a lot of fun. Friday night was given a choice of split sessions Problems in the Real World, Assertive Communication and The Self-Critic.

Public speaking workshops were conducted on the Saturday morning followed by students doing contacts. Public speeches were held at Federation Square, a new location for us in Melbourne. Everyone spoke with great confidence and eloquence and started to challenge their "I can't do that" beliefs. On Saturday night participants had a choice of three split sessions, Self-discipline, Phone Call Practice and Letting Go.

Sunday sessions focused on what to do when people left the course including modifying the system that is you, assertiveness training, followup provisions and allocation of coaches. Family and friends attended at 1:00pm and were provided with a course summary. Closing speeches followed with presentation of graduation certificates and encouragement awards.

Melbourne was a larger course than normal but had an energy and support often not found on small courses. Many new graduates have already joined Toastmasters and are challenging their previous speaking lives and beliefs. The changes required for long-term recovery have started for those people.