

The McGuire Programme

Course Report – Sydney September 2006

By Geoff Johnston, Regional Director, Australia

The September course in Sydney was held at the Hotel Y on the Park just adjacent to Hyde Park in the middle of Sydney. The course was attended by 27 new students and up to 30 graduates participated in the course at various times. Many thanks to those returning graduates who believe so much in the programme they want to come back to help other people who stutter.

Instruction on this course was shared by many people with Scott Harper, Rob Lucas and Geoff Johnston playing leading roles. People who had participated in the Sydney staff training several weeks earlier were given the opportunity to instruct modules and run split sessions. They all conducted themselves in a confident and professional manner.

Thank you to all graduates who travelled from interstate to attend the course. I wish to say a special thank you to recovered stutterer Wendy O'Hagan who continues to inspire us all. I also welcomed Elaine Blumgart, Speech Pathologist from Sydney and John Steggles, President of Australian Speak Easy Assoc., both attending the entire course.

New students and returning graduates met on the Wednesday night and the immediate rapport and empathy was obvious. Students found comfort being with a group of people who understand completely the feelings and emotions associated with stuttering.

First day videos were conducted on the Wednesday night and we found the usual mix of overt and covert stutterers ranging in age from 15 up to 79. Four students were under the age of 18 and were accompanied by parents. Students came from SA, ACT, QLD, VIC and NSW. The videos over the new students looked forward to the course with excitement and a little apprehension.

Thursday sessions consisted of learning and drilling the breathing and speaking technique. Also covered were goals and objectives of the programme, psychological and physiological causes of stuttering and the checklist. By mid-afternoon all students were able to stand up in front of the group and say their names without any problems. From people almost afraid to speak in the morning to public speakers in a few hours demonstrate the importance of a powerful breathing technique.

Friday sessions included fear reduction tools, overcoming the psychological aspects of stuttering and taking charge of your mind and thoughts. Decision time Friday lunch-time and all 27 students decided to stay and joined the programme. They realised in a day and a half that this programme was the way forward for their recovery.

During the afternoon old graduates showed the new students how to do contacts with people in the streets of Sydney. Many funny stories were related when reporting back about the contact session. Friday night everyone was given a choice of split sessions Positive Thinking and Problems in the Real World conducted by Lisa Brune (nee Moore), a past instructor on the programme.

Public speaking workshops were conducted on the Saturday morning followed by students doing contacts. Unfortunately our public speeches at Darling Harbour were hampered by rain and wind but were completed. Our plan to conduct them on stage with PA system was not possible and the crowd was not great but everyone had a go and spoke with great confidence and eloquence.

On Saturday night participants had a choice of three split sessions, The Self-Critic, Expanding Your Comfort Zone and Phone Call practice. During this session our oldest new student fell seriously ill and an ambulance had to be called. Fortunately among our new students we had two doctors who were able to take charge until the ambulance arrived. Their patient spent the night in

hospital but was back on the Sunday to make his closing speech and graduate. He didn't want to miss a thing!

Sunday sessions included 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.

This course was perhaps the most committed and powerful course I have ever attended. Lasting friendships were made and I'm delighted with the progress of ALL new graduates since the course. This course has indeed been life-changing for many of the new graduates.