



**MIFWA**  
**mentalillness**  
*fellowship of WA*



#### **Mental Illness Fellowship of WA**

Level 3, 9 The Avenue, Midland  
P.O. Box 1947, Midland WA 6936  
**Telephone** (08) 9237 8900  
**Email** info@mifwa.org.au  
**Office hours** Mon–Fri, 9am–5pm

#### **Lorikeet Centre**

104 Cambridge Street, West Leederville  
P.O. Box 1006, West Leederville WA 6901  
**Telephone** (08) 9237 8951  
**Facsimile** (08) 9381 9495  
**Email** lorikeet@mifwa.org.au  
**Office hours** Tues–Fri, 9:00am–4:30pm

#### **Individualised Support for Community Living**

83C Main Street, Osborne Park WA 6017  
**Telephone** (08) 9340 5000  
**Facsimile** (08) 9340 5099

#### **Wheatbelt Office**

Regional Home Care Services  
149 Fitzgerald Street, Northam WA 6401  
**Office hours** Mon–Fri 8:30am–4:30pm

Or call **1800 985 944**  
9:00am–5:00pm weekdays

**www.mifwa.org.au**

## *Forward*

*Coming together is a beginning; keeping together is progress; working together is success.—Henry Ford.*

It is an honour to be asked to write a forward but also interesting in that it is for something that is looking back!

Schizophrenia—a word that frightens many people but that is all it is a ‘word’.

Giving people meaning behind the word followed by support to both understand the meaning and to enable them to deal with this new understanding—that was what the early days of the Schizophrenia Fellowship of WA were about.

Information, education, support and advocacy—so it was in the early days, and so it is today. Nothing changes—people are still frightened with the diagnosis of mental illness, they still need time to be heard, they still need information, they still need support and we still need to advocate within the community at local, state and national levels for a society that will be understanding and accepting.

To the founding families and early Fellowship pioneers thank you for directing us to the path to follow.

Ann White  
**President MIFWA**

## Introduction

Welcome to this snap shot version of our history as we look back over the last 25 years, celebrating our 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary as an established Fellowship. We wanted to produce something for you to take home as a keepsake. While are busy compiling our full history and we hope to have this available for release over the coming year. Thank you to Sandra Vidot for taking time to interview key people from our past. Snippets of these interviews are included throughout this snapshot.

### The Essence of the Fellowship Story

It all started in 1980 with a vision by small group of families with loved ones affected by Schizophrenia. Their aim was to take a stand against a community afraid of this condition, to influence social change and find a way to offer their loved ones and others a better life.

In 1990 The Schizophrenia Fellowship of WA (the Fellowship) was officially incorporated as an association. At the heart of the Fellowship story is ordinary people. People whose lives were transformed by the diagnosis of schizophrenia. Families who were bewildered by the symptoms of the disorder, yet driven to find a way to offer their loved ones, and others, hope for a better life.

For me, Lorikeet was hope, a beacon, a lighthouse for people who were lost to bring them home. *It offered hope that Recovery was possible and that you could lead a normal life, whatever normal is.* It offered friendship and meaningful relationships that my husband Dan still has, 22 years later. Allison Fillery MIFWA Life Member

### Chairpersons/Presidents of SFWA then MIFWA:

George Covich, Glen Stitfold, Bob Hetherington, Maria Harries, Dr. Hugh Cook, Steve Wiles, Denise Bayliss and Ann White

### Executive Officers

Ann White, Gary Williams, Sandra Vidot and Monique Williamson



Previous SFWA Logos

### Glen Stitfold, Founding Family Member and Board member

In the early days there were a number of quite high profile people, including members of parliament who were recruited by George Covich. Most of these people gradually decided that we were 'not for them'—i.e. not in an area which would keep them interested. Notable exceptions were Mr. Keith Wilson (at that time, Minister of Health) and the Right Honourable Bob Hetherington. About this time the organisation was named the Schizophrenia Fellowship of WA, had a Constitution registered and was incorporated.

A major early ambition we had was to create a strong social network. We organised some dances, picnic BBQ and other social events, even an Art Exhibition which were all quite successful. Gradually the attendances at these social and information sessions declined so that only a very few attended. It was embarrassing to have such a poor attendance with busy high profile people and artists, giving their valuable time and effort, so these activities were stopped. I think that Carers and family members were not able to cope with the extra effort of organising to attend these things on top of the effort and stress of the day to day dramas.

Establishment of Clubhouse was probably the first and most important objective of SFWA. The model we were hoping for was that of Fountain House in New York and Bromham Clubhouse in Melbourne, operated by the Schizophrenia Fellowship in Victoria (now MI Fellowship, Victoria). There were some huge hurdles to overcome and it was about now that the organisation nearly imploded with all sorts of infighting and disagreements. I was President at this time and I soon knew I was hopelessly unable to hold things together. I was totally out of my depth so I decided to step down and nominated Bob Hetherington to take my place, secured his co-operation and his election. Bob's election allowed the membership to refocus and the emergency passed.

Bob did a huge amount of organising work and early in his tenure, achieved more support from the Health Department so that we could employ staff to assist. Ann White—now MIFWA's President became our first Executive Officer. There was now so much work to do. Some funds were secured from St. John of God so that we were able to secure an experienced Clubhouse Co-ordinator to get Clubhouse underway. We were fortunate enough to have Dave McDonald from a Clubhouse in Canada who came over with his family, and stayed for 12 months.

I am astonished at the way the organisation has grown and diversified and strengthened over time and it has been my pleasure to witness this.

# The Early Years

## Establishing a Clubhouse in WA 1990-1995

In November 1991, we received a letter from the Minister for Lands, Hon David Smith, informing us that land was available as a site for a Clubhouse, contingent on us managing to get finance and beginning to develop the site. Through the years of lobbying and advocating for change we were starting to see results.

The Fellowship is highly reliant on volunteers, mainly parents and carers of people with schizophrenia. The work of volunteers included organising special events, functions and answer phones during the week, giving information and often counselling callers.

The Sisters of St John of God promised a salary for the Co-ordinator of the Clubhouse for one year, possibly more. Funding for Clubhouse was expanded, with promised funds by The Minister of Health to cover 3 salaries and operating expenses.

In 1994 Lorikeet Clubhouse began operations at our first Clubhouse building at the old Occupational Therapy Building at Lemnos Hospital, "Crete House". This was through initiative from Dr Neville Hills, Executive Director at Shenton Park Psychiatric Services for the Elderly, as well as the North Metro Regional Health Service. We leased on a peppercorn rental for 2/3 years.

The Fellowship of WA hosted an Open forum attended by over 200 people. Minister for Health Keith Wilson was in the audience and committed to take the Fellowship's case for a Clubhouse in WA to the Commonwealth Government in Canberra and lobby for funding.

Getting an experienced Clubhouse Co-ordinator/Manager for Clubhouse was a challenge. After much searching we found David M. MacDonald, Manager of Pathways Clubhouse, Richmond, British Columbia.

## Our Activities

### Schizophrenia Awareness Week

Thursday morning tea group, primarily organised by Irene Stitfold provides support for carers and people with schizophrenia.

Last Wednesday night of each month—meeting in the Selby centre for persons who may be interested. (Usually a speaker, if not we talk to each other).

### Mental Health Week

### Carers Week

The Thrift Shop—1994 Euan and Jenny Hurse join the Fellowship from Queensland with experienced in running Thrift Shops. The Fellowship opened a thrift shop at 194 Whatley Crescent, Maylands.



MIFWA began as a grass roots organisation, but it is professional and well respected within the community and this continues today... We employ people that identify with lived experience and we also have people that have lived experience but are not employed as peers. I believe that we have survived because of the dedication of the people that work for MIFWA, their genuine concerns for the people that are supported and the Board making the right choices'.

**Joyce Vidot Meerkat Mob**  
Physical Health Program 2015

### **George Covich, Founding Family Member of the Fellowship.**

There were three families who were involved in the beginnings of the Fellowship, myself and Sue Covich, Bill and Sue Cebula and Glen and Irene Stitfold. The fourth founding family members, Kath and Larry Ursich joined later and Kath was our first Treasurer. Five years after that, I invited Bob Hetherington to join.

The first meeting was called by Dr. Helen Ward from Avro Clinic when a decision was made to form the Fellowship and the first meeting was held in my home in Floreat. Dr. Ward was aware of the Schizophrenia Fellowship in Melbourne so I contacted Dr. Margaret Leggatt who was the Director in those days. The Fellowship was in operation 18 months and with the assistance of Keith Wilson, Minister for Health then and Malcolm Roberts, the private psychiatrist who started the Psychiatric Emergency Team with Michael Ash, we acquired offices in Selby Street.

Bill Cebula, Bob Hetherington and myself went to Melbourne and Adelaide to discuss the development of Clubhouse in WA and visited the Clubhouse in Melbourne. I still have the letter from Margaret Leggatt dated 4<sup>th</sup> October, 1991 acknowledging the establishment of the Fellowship in WA, due to my "extraordinary and untiring dedication and enthusiasm." Dr. Leggatt stated in the letter that I had managed to circumvent the difficulties of coping with community apathy, ignorance and misunderstanding by recognising that success would only come through promoting awareness of the plight of the mentally ill loudly and persistently. "The Schizophrenia Fellowship in Western Australia had achieved extraordinary development in a very short space of time and George must be given the credit for this." Dr. Leggatt went on to become the world President of SANE.

I was originally working with Bob Hetherington to build a Clubhouse on property that I had obtained from the government in Selby Street, where the Autism Association is now located. David Smith who was then Minister for Lands and had a son with a mental illness acquired the land for SFWA, had it rezoned for our purposes on a 99-year lease arrangement to build Clubhouse. Members including a member who was an architect had developed the plans and drawings for Clubhouse and a potential benefactor contacted me offering \$500,000 if could also attract some government funding.

We ran into problems when Bob Hetherington and Geoff Smith were against the building of the Clubhouse on the property due to an issue with power lines. Because of these problems, I withdrew from the Fellowship.

If I have one message for the Mental Illness Fellowship of WA today, I would take it back to the vision of our Fellowship Newsletter of 1992—"Help us help ourselves".

# *Foundations*

## *From volunteers to an executive officer 1995-2000*

The inaugural Executive Officer of the Fellowship, Ann White, began work in June 1996.

We are now well established on the internet. SFWA is hooked up with "Clubmail", a site on which all Clubhouses with email can communicate and access to keep in touch.

The Schizophrenia Fellowship Australia was formed from all of the Schizophrenia Fellowships across Australia. The first meeting of the newly incorporated Council will be held in Townsville where they began work on a Strategic Plan.

In 1997 the Fellowship supported the establishment of the Mental Health Law Centre and assisted with chairing the AGM.

The Fellowship Offices moved from Selby Centre in Shenton Park to Bagot Road, Subiaco in 1999.

In 1999 the Fellowship secured a contract with the Mental Health Division to deliver 'support services for carers and "operate a 'Clubhouse' type rehabilitation program'.

### ***Additional Activities***

- » Newsletter: Three Newsletters were printed during the year (450 and 550 copies) circulated to members, other interested people and organisations
- » Monthly Evening Discussions still continuing
- » Young Wives Group held Thursday afternoons (knitting, craftwork, sewing techniques and other skills are learnt)
- » Self-care for carer's courses and group, information forums, seminars, workshops
- » Tweets Corner a café within Clubhouse came from the Accreditation visit
- » Lorikeet offers Transitional Employment Placements
- » Lorikeet Poetry and Prose Competition
- » 1999 Thrift shop closes as costs could not be covered
- » The Fellowship volunteers have together formed a new fundraising group 'Circle of Phrenz'

### **Maria Harries, President of SFWA 1997–2002, Board member until 2007**

These were difficult times and the change process was not easy because the original intention for SFWA had been purely consumer and carer led and managed; that was its strength, with a number of very passionate people developing grass roots services for families. Ann White the first Executive Officer of SFWA and the only paid staff was the holder of tensions at every level.

If SFWA's first service, Lorikeet, was to function, funding meant compliance and structure and I remember an example when some money had gone missing. It had been placed in a drawer by a staff member at the request of a participant, then went missing and this incident raised a lot of questions about who was responsible and alerted the investigators about the lack of protocols in place about managing money and other things. This example opened up a hornet's nest but led to the need to increase procedures in place and Insurance. It was the beginning of Lorikeet being seen to be more bureaucratic as we had to examine and refine policies, procedures, measures, outcomes, expenditure and pays.

Bob Hetherington had managed to acquire some property from the State government on the corner of Stubbs Terrace in Shenton Park, but it was near power lines and members thought that it would interfere with the mental health of Clubhouse members. Subsequently, the Health Department determined that Clubhouse and SFWA offices had to move because there were alternative plans for the site. These moves were the subject of ongoing discussion and frustration between SFWA and the Mental Health Division and the process involved a great deal of work between myself and Ann White in writing funding applications to the Mental Health Division and Lotterywest to justify the ongoing need for Lorikeet and for new administration offices for the Fellowship.

Bob Hetherington was also one of the instigators of the National body, now the Mental Illness Fellowship of Australia (MIFA). He understood the importance of a national structure that needed to be strong and to meet legal and accountability requirements to get funding.

*MIFWA would not be where it is today without the pain and the perseverance of values and principles that were important and honouring the members who started it all; they were before their time; the Fellowship has never given up on co-production with consumers and carers leading the way and has made true progress in the direction it wanted to go.*

The strength is demonstrated in its growth and was achieved by working with the tensions rather than riding over the tensions by being dominating. Many other organisations have not been able to do this. The Fellowship has flourished because it has maintained the values of those who started it. It belonged to the founding families, but then no longer and it is a legacy that the Fellowship must always own.

Bob Hetherington, who passed away earlier this year, was I know thrilled with the development of MIFWA.

## *New Locations New Name*

### *2000-2005*

In 2002 Lorikeet Clubhouse moved into its new home at Cambridge Street, West Leederville. The purchase, remodelling and refurbishment of a permanent home put a stop to staff and member anxieties surrounding relocating.

The opening was set for the 12th Dec 2002 with an old friend of the Clubhouse, then Minister for Health, Bob Kucera completing the formal opening. Other speakers included MIFWA President Glen Stitfold, Clubhouse Member, Wayne Leonard, past President Maria Harries and Clubhouse Co-ordinator Trevor Bloxsome.

We now hold monthly Clubhouse dinners at medium priced restaurants and cafes to allow members to socialise away from Clubhouse.

In 2002 the National Fellowship decided to change its name to MIFA, The Mental Illness Fellowship of Western Australia. All states apart from NSW and WA have adopted this.

On the 20 November 2002 Schizophrenia Fellowship of WA made the decision to change its name to Mental Illness Fellowship of WA (MIFWA).

In 2003 the Fellowship commenced Well Ways training developed by MIFVIC.

In 2003 the Fellowship office relocated from Subiaco to 'Fellowship Central' at 110 Edward Street, Perth. This office purchased with a grant from Lotterywest. An Ex Committee of Management member Vic Smith provided expertise in researching the real estate market, locating property.

The MIFWA website went live in March 2005.

The State Government introduced three year funding agreements with the community sector.

Barbara Gatter's "Review of MIFWA Services" provided a clear vision and sound template for MIFWA to begin a process of change. The "Review of Services" document contained 33 recommendations, 23 related directly to the Lorikeet service. Areas of improvement ranged from issues such as improved financial management practices, research and discussion, development of a new service stream based on the 'Recovery Model' philosophy, improved purchasing arrangements in the catering/kitchen area and effective management of staff issues.

### Dr. Hugh Cook Fellowship Board 1999–2013

One of the major achievements was the change and move away from the Schizophrenia Fellowship of WA to the Mental Illness Fellowship of WA in 2002 a sign of the broader expanse of MIFWA, as Lorikeet Clubhouse had been the only service of SFWA. This was a time of much tension as Lorikeet was the reason for SFWA to exist. The Lorikeet Clubhouse saw itself as quite independent and the Health Department and Mental Health Division at the time needed to be persuaded that there was adequate oversight of Lorikeet's financial governance. Lorikeet wanted to remain independent and retain its autonomy and there was much conflict with members who were all people with a mental illness, an enormous and significant issue at the time.

The milestones for SFWA and MIFWA came initially from the founding members who put in an enormous effort and initiative on behalf of their children who had serious mental illnesses.

When Gary Williams became MIFWA's Executive Director in 2004, we felt that MIFWA, to survive in an increasingly competitive NGO environment, needed to expand its role. Following a review of its services carried out by Barbara Gatter, the Early Intervention Recovery Program for young people diagnosed with early episode psychosis was developed and funded.

Later from 2007, when Sandra Vidot became CEO, further expansion occurred through the introduction of carer/family and peer support programs, an integral part of service delivery by NGO's through the delivery of non-clinical programs that assisted carers and people with a mental illness to help each other, manage their mental illness and organise their lives.

In terms of significant contributors, the founding families of SFWA, in particular Glen Stitfold with whom I have had a long association, Lloyd Marsh who was the consumer advocate on the Board of Management for many years, and past Executive Directors, Ann White, followed by Gary Williams and Sandra Vidot. I recall with some humour when I was invited to be on the Board of Management, thinking that this might be a problem as I was a Psychiatrist. Lloyd Marsh assured me that it was not a problem because I was a Child Psychiatrist. Lloyd was a wonderful support throughout with his intelligence and his solid stance in upholding the rights of people with mental illness.

On the periphery, Eamon Shandley, Professor of Mental Health Nursing was a stalwart in the development of Lorikeet clubhouse and from him I learned some of the conflicts within the organisation and the influence of some members on the function of Clubhouse.

### Sue Weston, Board member, Carer advocate and staff member since 1999

In 2003, the Mental Illness Fellowship of Victoria offered other State Fellowship members, the opportunity to undertake training as a facilitator for Well Ways—'Building a Future' for carers of people with a mental illness. My name was put forward along with Ann Bates and we went to Melbourne for training. A significant strategic change began to take place around this time in terms of introducing support mechanisms for Carers. The Fellowship employed only three or four staff at this time, and I had a real sense of achievement in being able to deliver Building a Future in the Perth metropolitan area.

Well Ways is still operating. From 2010/11 the program was expanded with Federal funding, to the south west rural areas. I do see this initiative as one of my greatest achievements, having the opportunity to establish Building a Future in the rural areas. It gave me the opportunity to liaise and build networks with a number of services in the Wheatbelt; Aboriginal services, KEEDAC, Holyoake and Wheatbelt mental health. Some of these collaborations were sometimes a challenge but necessary for infiltration and they are still operational.

We changed the Well Ways model slightly to cater for the vast distances throughout the Wheatbelt as it was developed mainly for Victoria where needs were different. For instance, we offered 'Snapshot' in a retreat format that involved 2 shorter sessions over two days. Snapshot is one of the suite of Well Ways programs offered to Carers as an introductory session to encourage participants to then progress to the longer 12-week Building a Future commitment. We managed to get Perth Home Care Services on board to fund accommodation and meals for the Retreat.



The Fellowship's foundations and history I believe have remained intact. There are many examples of people who began as volunteers, choosing to dedicate their time; these same people have maintained their dedication and passion, so there is still a strong thread.

The Board has representation from both Consumers and Carers as well as representation from a number of professionals with particular expertise. It is an important element that consumers and carers continue to have a voice on the Board and that it is not tokenistic. I was on the Board when Lorikeet moved to Cambridge Street, some people and members left at this time, but I believe that Lorikeet services should remain true to and guided by Clubhouse standards and principles.

Significant people in the Fellowship's history included Glen Stitfold, Maria Harries, Ann White, Keith Wilson, Dr. Hugh Cook and all the CEO's. The Manager of the Carers program, Samantha Harris was a significant influence in my continuing development.

My messages to MIFWA would be to continue to retain a strong consumer and carer focus and grass roots representation, i.e. the people that are living it, day to day. MIFWA needs passionate and well informed staff around mental health and careful selection of staff is essential. MIFWA provides excellent and much needed services, recognises the importance of the psychosocial rehabilitation process and fulfils a distinct need, along with other non-government organisations. These needs are critically important, especially for isolated rural areas and I hope we see an expansion in support for these regional areas.



Keep on doing more of what you are doing: it works, it supports, it's still needed. Continue to recognise that we can identify the needs, but we do not have to be the ones to provide the services to meet those identified needs but what we must do is continue to advocate to ensure that somebody meets those needs. Continue with state and national peak body involvement— together we can do it..

**Ann White, Schizophrenia Fellowship of WA Executive Officer June 1996–February 2001**

## *Building Partnerships*

### *2005-2010*

In 2005 project funding for Lorikeet's Early Intervention Recovery Program (EIRP) was costed and presented to the Office of Mental Health (OMH).

In 2005 Virginia Langford of Canada, an experienced mental health and Social Worker and author of "Grieving Mental Illness: A Guide for Patients and Caregivers", presented a number of workshops in Perth and Bunbury. This was part of a collaboration of the Well Ways project between MIFWA, ARAFMI and Bunbury Pathways' 92.

In 2006 Executive Director Gary Williams resigned. Sandra Vidot was appointed as the Fellowship's CEO.

In 2006 the Council of Australian Governments (CoAG) set 'treatment of mental illnesses nationally' as a priority. \$1.9 billion was dedicated over 5 years to fund initiatives for new services to address gaps in mental health service provision. This was the first time in history such a thing has happened.

After a slow start in 2006 the Early Intervention Recovery Program began recruiting consumers. A rapid expansion of the program followed.

In 2007 COMIC WA and MIFWA partnered together to deliver workshops, seminars and presentations across the mental health sector.

In March 2007 the Family Support Program commenced, supporting 23 families.

In 2007 COMIC WA was commended for their community education presentations and workshops.

### Craig Hurdle, Member of Lorikeet since its beginnings as a Clubhouse in Shenton Park

I was involved in the beginnings of Lorikeet as a Clubhouse when it was purely member run and went to visit and bring back ideas from Stepping Stones Clubhouse in Brisbane. At that time, we were consulting with Clubhouses in different parts of the world and the Eastern States. I mainly worked in Catering when Lorikeet was in Shenton Park.

The Lorikeet structure is still based on the original Clubhouse principles and our newsletter, the Squawk is still distributed to other clubhouses around the world and in the Eastern States.

Lorikeet and its activities offers friendship and an understanding of mental illness in the general community; it is somewhere for members to go, like a little family. Members used to come for a day or a block placement with Careers Australia. I am particularly interested in promoting Photography to members and currently doing a TAFE course in community services.

The milestones I believe are the change in premises from Shenton Park to Cambridge Street in West Leederville and the growth in member numbers. The gym has also been a great addition. There have been significant changes in staff over the years and the current manager, Ernie Hansen has been really great for Lorikeet The support staff do a great job.

I am also aware that MIFWA now has more programs for people with mental illness and carers and I continue to be a strong advocate for Lorikeet in the general community.

### The Tecwyn Jones Bequest Grants

Tecwyn Jones was a much loved member of the Lorikeet Centre since its beginnings in 1994. He sadly passed away in 2004 and generously left a substantial bequest to MIFWA.

In 2007 the MIFWA Board of Management set up 'The Tecwyn Jones Bequest Grants' program, where MIFWA members can apply for a grant up to \$1,000 to help with leisure, education and individual pursuits. Each year different members are selected.

This program was officially launched at Schizophrenia Awareness Week in 2008.

MIFWA express our sincere gratitude to Tecwyn Jones for his generous bequest. May his memory live on in each of us.

MIFWA started from a true need, a grass roots organisation that grew with the needs of the people. We haven't lost that vision, and the values that we live and breathe—taking the time with people to understand them and follow through consistently.

Sharon Karas, Manager MI Recovery and Rural Well Ways Program 2015

### Allison Fillery, Committee member 1993 & 2005, Life member of MIFWA

My husband was diagnosed with Paranoid Schizophrenia in 1993—our son was 6 weeks old. A pharmacist was at the first team meeting about our situation; this pharmacist was Glen Stitfold and of course one of the founding family members of SFWA. Glen told me about the Fellowship meetings every Thursday. I was 3000 kilometres from home and staying in a cottage in the hospital grounds of Shenton Park, so it was arranged for my baby Jamie and I to be picked up to attend these meetings, in the course of which I met Ann White and Irene Stitfold.

During the first two years with SFWA, we started a mentoring group. Myself, Keith Wilson, Glen Pickett and Tony Fowke were a mutual support group for each other and we tried to match a person with a mental illness to someone of the same age group that could be their 'go to' person.

We started a playgroup for other families where mental illness was present, trying to make sure that the kids were OK, assisted with paying bills. Long standing Lorikeet Clubhouse member Tecwyn Jones became a surrogate grandfather to Jamie. As Jamie grew, Tecwyn celebrated his birthdays with us, taught him how to play soccer and bought him soccer boots. Tecwyn was a generous soul with his time, sometimes blunt but very kind. He bought shoes for kids, always put children first, gave food vouchers to struggling families, without ever letting on it was himself doing the providing. No one ever knew of his wealth. He was their grandad and that is how he saw his role.

The Playgroup was peer led; developing resilience in kids was a focus and empowering parents to be the best they could be. Sometimes we would stand in for other parents at school events because we felt that we had an obligation as a mental health family to support all the kids as best we could. I think the Fellowship has always been about family. We supported each other as families and it was not just about the mental illness. Although this had brought us together, there were a lot of positives, for survival purposes, and we helped each other with problem solving. I became a COPMI (Children of People with a mental illness) Auntie.

I believe that I was a significant contributor in the early days of the Fellowship, along with a number of others. They included Bob Hetherington, Tecwyn Jones, Keith Wilson, Jeff Faulkner, a past patron, Dr. Hugh Cook and Sue Weston, a carer. When I joined in 1993, women like Ann White, Maria Harries and Maxine Drake helped me to be the strong woman that I am today. Maria and Maxine taught me and empowered me to change the system, to have a voice and know how to use it. In my first five years with the Fellowship, the collective wisdom from this group helped to make my family resilient. Jan Davis, a long standing volunteer at SFWA and MIFWA also was a significant contributor and helped me a lot.

I miss the Thursday groups which included all members of the family and MIFWA has changed for me because when I go in these days, there is hardly anyone that I still know. I have so many fond memories.

My end message is: **"Resilience is the muscle in your heart that tells your spirit that everything will be OK"**

## Support from Australian Government for Mental Health 2010-2015

MIFWA was successful in obtaining contract extensions to 2014 to deliver Family, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs funded Family Support and Well Ways Regional Programs. Our partnerships with Bunbury Pathways, Bay of Isles Community Organisation (BOICO) in Esperance and Busselton LAMP resulted in the training of 25 carer facilitators for ongoing delivery of Well Ways education in all 3 regions. MIFWA provides Carer Support Well Ways to the Wheatbelt region.

The Federal and State governments acknowledged the importance of making the mental health of all Australians a priority. The Federal government honoured this by promising a \$2.2 billion package for new and expanded services for the nation. They also included \$4 million to establish a national mental health consumer organisation.

By 2010 MIFWA employed over 40 staff and was working towards the inclusion of peer workers in all of its programs.

The Tobacco Free Program was funded on 2011 by the Mental Health Commission. The program will be rolled out to the local community by Peer Facilitators, those with a lived experience of mental illness and who have given up smoking.

In March 2011 the MI Recovery Program was officially launched. This is part of the Well Ways suite of programs. It provides information and the skills needed to empower people to manage their mental illness. This program aids participants to re-discover and start to achieve their hopes and dreams.

After 7 years in the leadership role Sandra Vidot retired as the CEO of MIFWA and was succeeded by Monique Williamson. We thank Sandra for her long term commitment to the organisation and warmly welcome Monique to the team.

In 2014 we employed 60 staff across 10 programs. Up to 50 people utilised around 1000 hours of professionally instructed gym sessions at Lorikeet. 60 people participated in health and wellbeing coaching and or group work.

Between 2013-2014 MIFWA was funded by the Mental Health Commission to explore and improve the mental health of fly in fly out workers (FIFO). "This FIFO Life" aided the creation of a website and resources to help improve the mental health and wellbeing of the FIFO community. "This FIFO Life" was developed by mental health professionals, Julie Loveny and Sue Crock

People like Bob Hetherington and each CEO has brought something unique and this has been great for MIFWA. The new CEO, Monique Williamson has done the same with more growth through NDIS... I am passionate about MIFWA because I have been around for 15 years and witnessed the growth. I see a lot of new faces in the office these days but MIFWA still retains its friendliness and is very welcoming to all. *Gaye Hodgson—staff member of SFWA and MIFWA since 1999*

### Sandra Vidot, CEO MIFWA 2007–2014

I was privileged to work for MIFWA during a time of significant growth guided by a Strategic Planning process which included whole of family support needs, peer support, physical health and meeting the housing needs of those with challenging behaviours.

During this time, MIFWA secured recurrent funding from the Mental Health Commission of WA for the Well Ways Carer Education Program previously funded for a 2-year pilot by Lotterywest. Through Commonwealth funding in 2008, MIFWA introduced the Family Support Program and a year later, the Well Ways regional project in the Wheatbelt was introduced.

During this 7-year period, MIFWA also went on to secure additional funding from the Mental Health Commission for a Parent Peer Support Program, the Individual Community Living Program for people with mental illness who were being relocated into the community following long periods of institutionalisation and a Physical Health program.

Throughout my time at MIFWA, my dream was to have 2 Lorikeet Centres. I knew the work that was being done there and it was enabling the members to live better lives in the community through a range of supports. Lorikeet belonged to the members who contributed significantly to Centre planning, production of the Squawk newsletter, to reception duties, delivered talks to hospitals, at Homelessness events, Mental Health and Schizophrenia Awareness Week events to raise awareness of the issues faced by people with serious mental illness. Another member offered Reiki, reflexology and laughter Yoga at the Centre and later went on to work for MIFWA's Physical health program.

MIFWA I believe has had many significant contributors from the early founding family members, dedicated Board members, CEO's and staff who have continued the focus on family support and identifying and advocating for funding to meet unmet needs.

Each Executive Director or CEO, from Ann White, to Gary Williams then myself, followed by Monique Williamson has brought to MIFWA their particular and very different contribution and each I believe has experienced a number of challenges as change agents during their time with the Fellowship . The Board of Management has evolved over the years to ensure that representatives have the necessary business acumen, while retaining always, the voice of the consumer and the carer.

These voices must always guide us. This was the basis of establishing the Fellowship by the founding family members and the guiding principles for Lorikeet when it began as a Clubhouse for its members.

My fondest memories are around having lunch and spending time at Lorikeet with the staff and members and drawing the knowledge and wisdom of the other State Fellowships around the country which made up our national organisation, the Mental Illness Fellowship of Australia (MIFA).

### **An Unexpected loss of the Fellowship President, 2011–2012**

Denise Bayliss was elected as President due to the unexpected passing of Steve Wiles. Steve was passionate and dedicated to improving services for those living with a mental illness and their families.

In 2013, the Fellowship purchased the third floor of the Midland Business Centre in The Avenue, Midland and sold its office at Edward St, Perth. The new office is big enough to house most of MIFWA programs except Lorikeet Centre (Leederville) and Independent Community Living Program—in partnership with Aftercare (Osborne Park). The new building consists of a training room, additional offices to rent out to other organisations and a Boardroom, fitted with state of the art equipment. This was provided by a grant from Lotterywest.

### **Byron Hobbs, Member of Lorikeet for 12 years (and a reputation for being the computer whiz at Lorikeet!)**

I am self taught; I teach and repair the computers at Lorikeet. I have been into programming of computers since the age of 12. There have been many changes of staff at Lorikeet, and I believe that the staff are friendly and helpful; I enjoy socialising at Lorikeet where I have a lot of friends. I am currently studying IT networking and software development at TAFE.

I think that over the years, different managers and staff have brought to Lorikeet, a range of different ideas and ways of doing things. There are many activities on offer now in sport and recreation, including outdoor activities and camps to Kalbarri, Albany, Narrogin, Busselton where members have an opportunity to look around, go on bush walks and work as a team to cook and clean. Members have also been on fishing expeditions and have been able to access activities in the community, like squash and kayaking.

I am impressed with other MIFWA programs, like the Independent Community Living Program and MIFWA's 'Meerkat Mob' which holds weekly cooking classes at Lorikeet and would love to get into one of these classes but they are currently full. I was also impressed with the Quit Smoking program and I know people who have significantly reduced their habit due to this program.

I think that the benefits of Lorikeet are in teaching members how to cook and clean and to live well in the broader community. Lorikeet Centre is a great help to people who are isolated, coming into Lorikeet is a reason for many members to get up in the morning

### **Jan Davis, Volunteer at SFWA and MIFWA for 17 years**

I have been with the Fellowship since the days when Ann White was the CEO and we were at the Selby Centre in Shenton Park. I joined to get a break from my duties as a Carer and to get more office experience. In those days, the Fellowship's Helpline was the main service and another volunteer at SFWA, Penny Fitzgerald spent a lot of time on the Helpline, listening and trying to support those who called.

In terms of milestones, I believe that MIFWA is doing a lot more and this is being recognised by government with more funding and more programs for community support. I have a good knowledge about MIFWA's Well Ways Group Program as I have attended this program as a Carer of a person with a mental illness. I know that programs like Well Ways do a lot of preventative work with Carers and MIFWA's Meerkat Mob program try to help people with mental illness to better look after their physical health. Also the Early Intervention Recovery Program helps young people diagnosed with early episode psychosis.

MIFWA's foundations were the 4 families who commenced the Fellowship. It has changed from the small friendly Thursday group of consumers and carers of around eight, who would get together to share their experiences and to develop friendships. It has changed from having a helpline for people experiencing problems with mental illness to people accessing what they need through the internet. There are always new faces in the Midland office and there isn't a lot of sitting and chatting around the lunch table as there used to be when we were in MIFWA Central in Edward Street near the city. I would like to see something like the Thursday group reintroduced where we could sit and chat, share a meal, have an opportunity to unload and find support and companionship.

In my view, the significant contributors have been the first Executive Director of SFWA, Ann White, Gary Williams the next Executive Director and then CEO Sandra Vidot, who all in their own way, brought MIFWA to where it is today. Past Presidents like Bob Hetherington and Maria Harries helped to build the Fellowship in the earlier days, Irene Stitfold as one of the founding family members started the Thursday Group and in those days Glen Stitfold supported me as a Carer because he had been there and he understood.

Still a volunteer, 17 years later, I can say that MIFWA still gives me something to look forward to every week, sometimes I have to drag myself in but once I am there I enjoy the work and I believe that MIFWA offers a lot of support in the community to people with mental illness and their carers.

MIFWA is so good at identifying unmet needs and addressing these. MIFWA should continue to do what we do really well; and maintain high standards of service and great reputation.

**Gaye Hodgson, staff member of SFWA and MIFWA since 1999**

**Glen Pickett, member of Lorikeet since its Clubhouse days in 1998, and 2 term MIFWA Board member**

In the early days, MIFWA central did not exist, there was only Lorikeet Clubhouse and it was purely member driven, with a cafeteria run by members. When we were in Shenton Park, we used to grow our own vegetables and herbs to use in the cafeteria. We used to prepare the lunches, set the tables, serve and clean up afterwards. We had some staff there to help out who were Occupational Therapy students, Ian Laing was the Manager then and we had an Employment Board in the Clubhouse which advertised jobs that members may be interested in.

The Clubhouse model was based on the U.S model, models in the UK and in the eastern states and we still share the Lorikeet newsletter 'Squawk' with these clubhouses and they send us theirs. We have had a succession of Managers since, all bringing their different strengths. With the move of Lorikeet from Shenton Park to Cambridge Street in West Leederville, we struggled to find a replacement manager for some time.

Lorikeet offers many different things to the members and the community.

The suggestion by Lloyd Marsh a few years ago about the use of this grant to provide funds to consumers and carers on an annual basis has had a lasting impact. Lloyd was consumer representative on the Board at that time. I also have fond memories of Dr. Hugh Cook as a senior and distinguished gentleman with a lot of knowledge about the system. Dr. Cook was on the Board for many years and in the early days, he did presentations on how mental illness affected families.

I believe we still have a long way to go, especially in addressing issues like homelessness. There is still a lot of stigma around but we now have a Mental Health Minister, Helen Morton who is really strong in the mental health area. It used to be dark hole but I think we are leading in the right directions and Lorikeet has certainly taken up the fight. There is also our national organisation, the Mental Illness Fellowship of Australia (MIFA) and its networks where we hear a lot about what is happening in other states because sometimes I think WA is still isolated.

Personally, I am much more confident now to do talks about my illness and involvement with Lorikeet to the Community Mental Health Clinics; I used to be too embarrassed in the past. The mental health system is a bit different nowadays. Lorikeet is a valuable service and tries to lead by example, to show that people can live with mental illness and work.

I still struggle with some of the new terminology, like the 'Recovery Journey' and 'the lived experience' and I preferred the old one of 'people with a mental illness.' For Lorikeet, I think that members need more instruction in the use of technology to keep up to date; it's everywhere now, with banking and in the supermarket checkouts.

**Vivien Hannaford, Lorikeet member for many years, Board member, volunteer Receptionist at Lorikeet and the Individual Community Living Program**

In my role as Receptionist at Lorikeet, since it moved to Cambridge Street, West Leederville, I answer phones, greet visitors to Lorikeet, talk to members and support them wherever I can. I also do tours of Lorikeet for visitors and people from other agencies.

As a Board member of MIFWA, I think that all board members share a common interest and are interested in hearing the consumer voice. Glen Pickett and I provide that.

Lorikeet is a haven for members, with about 40 attending daily, offering entertainment, friendship, Art groups, a range of outings and camps. For me personally, Lorikeet provides a real sense of belonging and I love speaking to and supporting the members. We have held Open Days during Mental Health Week and Schizophrenia Awareness Week, poetry competitions which resulted in the publication of a Poetry Book. This project received an Achievement Award from Connect Groups in 2013.

One of the significant achievements that I can remember is around a member of Lorikeet, who used to run Reiki and Laughter Yoga at the Centre and later went on to becoming a paid staff of MIFWA's Smoking Cessation program and the 'Meerkat Mob' physical health program for people with mental illness.



I believe MIFWA has survived for 25 years as it listens to the people it supports and works in a way that best suits the person. It is an organisation that works in a wholly inclusive and respectful way always doing what it takes to make things work for the person.

**Dawn Walton,  
Service Development Manager 2015**

Call **1800 985 944**

9:00am–5:00pm weekdays

**[www.mifwa.org.au](http://www.mifwa.org.au)**