

Stepping Stones To Success – 100 Strong

In the first quarter of 2012, Family Drug Support ran its 100th Stepping Stones to Success and with it, its 1000th participant. In the 10 year plus history, Stepping Stones to Success has reached many milestones and achievements. Where to begin? Best we start from the beginning.

It all began with Tony Trimmingham and the work he did as a relationship counsellor and group leader. Prior to starting FDS in 1997, Tony ran literally hundreds of group courses around rebuilding life after divorce and separation. The concepts underpinning the groups were that ‘you are not alone’, that ‘you can and will recover’, ‘self-awareness and growth is important’ and real changes take courage and pain. Essentially, the group provided a road map enabling people to take on new skills through individual learning and more importantly through drawing on the collective experiences and wisdom of others facing similar challenges.

For those who have completed Stepping Stones, you will no doubt recognize all of the above as the core of the program.

Of course there are obvious differences between divorce/separation and dependent drug use. In 1999, Tony was assisted by Jon Rose and Claudia Houareau from Drugnet Western Australia in developing the ideas of collective wisdom the families’ stages of change. Then Tony developed the Stepping Stones model and produced the manual.

2001 saw Tony Trimmingham run the first Stepping Stones to Success. Many of those who attended are still to today part of FDS. From its humble beginnings in 2001 to May 2012, Stepping Stones has been run 103 times and attended by 1002 participants. Let’s take a moment to reflect on these figures. The AOD sector recognizes that there is a glaring gap in family specific AOD programs. Of the few that exists, almost none have stood the test of time, rarely do they run regularly and are often poorly attended.

In contrast, Stepping Stones to Success stands as a shining beacon for families.

Meanwhile Stepping Stones goes about its business. The course not only runs in most metropolitan cities in Australia, it also services the regional/rural areas. This in itself is unique. I am certain that the AOD industry and government alike recognize that services are threadbare in these areas. In most regional/rural areas, FDS provides the only family centric support services through Stepping Stones and through the course, the emergence of an ongoing Support Group.

As well as withstanding the test of time, Stepping Stones remains as relevant today as it did back in 2001. Successive governments have come and gone with its varying (for some non-existent) focus on drugs and its effects on families. Meanwhile FDS have survived the many ebb and flows through the provision and sadly the withdrawal of funding. Incidentally, this is not unique to Stepping Stones; it applies across the board with all of

FDS' services. The unique thing is that at no time has any government questioned the validity of Stepping Stones and indeed any of FDS's programs.

Does it work? This is a question posed by academics, funding bodies, individuals and FDS ourselves. Without going into painful statistical and research details, the answer is a resounding YES. The program includes a questionnaire process that has been evaluated by independent bodies. It measures how family members are dealing with anger, boundary, control, denial, family, self-esteem and trust around drug use. The bottom line is that those who completed Stepping Stones experience significant increases across all areas. Even more significant is that this increase is sustained and built upon when measured again 6 months after the course. FDS is currently working with the National Drug and Alcohol Research Centre (University of NSW) to publish data and findings.

In 2009, Stepping Stones to Success won a National Drug and Alcohol award.

In the same year, we received official accreditation from the Institute of Group Leader at their silver level. The publication of research data will enable Stepping Stones to reach the highest level – Gold.

There you have it, a quick history of the program. But let us never forget the human side of the program. FDS have amassed over 1000 evaluations from participants asking for feedback designed to improve the delivery of the

program. Overwhelmingly, the feedback continues to be extremely positive.

I aim to put together a summary and highlights in future Insights to provide another view of Stepping Stones. In previous and future edition of this magazine, you may have read some poetry from participants. I can't begin to express how much I am touched by them – poignant, raw, pain and beautiful.

Going into its second decade of delivery, we are fortunate to have a growing team of amazing Stepping Stones to Success leaders. FDS is confident that Stepping Stones will go from strength to strength with more deliveries nationwide.

My own passion and motivation in leading Stepping Stones to Success has not wavered over the 10 years I have been with FDS. To see individual family members arrive at the course down crested and at the end of their tether and emerging with reality based hope and skills makes it all worthwhile.

Through testimonies, feedback, evaluation and statistics, Stepping Stones does enable family members to become more resilient, better able to cope and have the strength and skills to ultimately survive the journey intact.

I am proud to be the manager of this program. Thank-you Tony and FDS for the privilege and trust in running Stepping Stones. It has certainly helped me to grow as a professional and more importantly as a person.