

## on Odyssey of hope



Daily Telegraph,  
Saturday August 7, 2009

## Families set out

**Kate Sikora**  
Health Reporter

A 12-year-old girl is abandoned on the front porch. School the next day. A little girl's laugh is heard.

The walls are dotted with drawings of a girl and on the corner is a basket overflowing with toys. Young mother Brigitte is smiling but another daughter Ruby, who has just moved to the front.

Across the hallway a little girl, no older than five, is sitting and her mother is at the doorway from a doorway.

It is a typical house that can be found in any Australian suburb. But this home is a quiet one. It is an empty house. Brigitte's world is anything but ordinary.

Brigitte, 27, is a recovering drug addict and always has a child who is being cared for by her dad. All the women during the 1980s and 1990s were told to get on with it and to get on with it. Brigitte is a recovering addict and she has a child who is being cared for by her dad.

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- ### Odyssey Recognition
- Support that Odyssey House has recently received from the following donors is greatly appreciated.
- McDonald's Restaurants
  - Australian Youth & Health Foundation
  - Mr J David
  - Ms L English
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  - The Rodney & Judith O'Neil Foundation
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  - The Victor Smorgon Charitable Fund
  - Vincent Fairfax Family Foundation
  - Ms J Wilkinson
  - Ms K Wilson

## ODYSSEY HOUSE



*'A Calm in the Sea of Addiction'*

## Taking life for granted

To demonstrate the real work of Odyssey House, this column features an Odyssey House resident's story.

As the youngest of three children Juls grew up in a traditional family lifestyle celebrating all of the typical milestones, attending dance classes and enjoying life. After attending a private North Shore high school and graduating with high marks, Juls went on to be a professional classical ballet dancer. After a serious injury, she was forced to stop dancing and this was to mark the start of what would be a long battle with alcohol addiction.

"I was first introduced to alcohol at age 12 with friends I did not like the taste of it and all through my addiction later on in life, I would never like the taste," said Juls.

As Juls turned 21 she started work in the hospitality industry where "it was just part of the culture to drink". With the odd hours of work and the environment, her drinking began to escalate. Juls knew her drinking was out of control when she started having a bottle of vodka for breakfast and trying to mask the smell of the alcohol with perfume and breath mints.

"It came to a point when I was confronted by my father with a pile of brochures on rehabilitation programs as it was obvious to my parents that my drinking was out of control," said Juls. After attempting a number of short term programs, in 2001 Juls entered a 10-month program with the Salvation Army, and with their assistance she remained sober for the next six years.

Over the next six years, Juls entered into a turbulent relationship with a partner who was involved with drug misuse. While Juls was never enticed to the drugs, it had an impact on her. During this time Juls and her partner also had a precious little boy, Ollie.

Juls was diagnosed with post-natal depression and her relationship with her partner finally came to an end. "I



Juls is making a fresh start

purchased and skulled down half a bottle of Vodka, and basically picked up where I left my drinking six years ago," said Juls.

Over the next two years Juls was in and out of rehabilitation programs, but could not retain her sobriety. Ollie was taken into care by family out of concerns for his safety. "The next thing I knew I was in Brisbane. I don't know how I got there or what I was doing, hanging around with people I didn't know. The worst part was that I had no memory of what I did while I was drinking," said Juls.

This all came to a head when Juls was informed that her brother had been diagnosed with cancer. "I realised that I had to change my life and stop taking it for granted. I called Odyssey House and was on a plane to the Admissions and Intake Centre the next morning," said Juls.

Juls's Odyssey journey has been

long and struggling at times.

"It took me a long time to come to terms with my emotional and behavioural issues, however I have finally worked my way through it all and I am eternally grateful to Odyssey," said Juls.

Thanks to housing from the Drug and Alcohol Women's Network (DAWN) Juls has recently moved into her own accommodation, and has Ollie back in part-time care. "Odyssey has been a humbling journey I have realised what I had taken for granted in my life".

"I really want to spend some time volunteering at Odyssey to give life back to others as Odyssey has done for me. I then hope to study and work with disadvantaged and challenged youth in the future".

"Perseverance - it is worth it, and now I feel I am worth it," said Juls.

**YES! I would like to help Odyssey House assist residents to live a drug free life.**

Please find enclosed my donation of: (please circle)    \$50.00    \$100.00    \$500.00    or \$ \_\_\_\_\_

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## A message from the Chairman



Cathy Doyle

It is hard to believe that we are already into September and planning for Christmas, and as usual Odyssey House and the Board have been diligently working away.

Odyssey House recently held the annual Ladies Luncheon sponsored by Perpetual. There was a fabulous turn out to hear from the guest speakers Professor Kaye Wilhelm and Odyssey graduate Lee.

I was privileged to attend the official opening of a new 'Covered Outdoor Learning Area' built at the Assessment and Referral Centre. This was one of a few projects that was funded under the government's Building the Education Revolution (BER) program. Also in attendance were Federal and State MP's, Laurie Ferguson and Graeme West respectively. The COLA will provide the residents in the program a fantastic covered area for speciality classes, therapy groups and a place to meet with their families on visits.

The annual Real Men Cook celebrity chef luncheon has just been held at bel mondo. This is always a fabulous event with a sell out crowd. Be sure to read more about our celebrity chefs in our next newsletter!

Finally, the Board continues to work and support Odyssey House in its quality improvement program as we review the Odyssey House strategic plan for the next two years. It will be a challenging time, one we are dedicated and looking forward to.

Cathy Doyle  
Chairman



CEO James Pitts and Dr John Howard

## Milton Luger Forum Outcomes

Themed "Looking After Your Mind", the annual Milton Luger Forum was held at Odyssey House in Sydney on 29 June 2010 to coincide with the focus on mental health during National Drug Action Week.

Experts, counsellors and researchers attending welcomed the current public spotlight on mental illness, which it is hoped will lead to more funding and better treatment for people struggling with both a mental illness and alcohol or other drug problems.

Dr John Howard from the National Cannabis Prevention and Information Centre (NCPIC) told the Forum that while strong associations are often found between cannabis use and symptoms of mental illness, more

research was needed to establish a causal link. Cannabis is not a benign substance for some young people; it is a known risk factor and can be a key to "turn on" mental illness in those with an existing predisposition due to genetics or personality traits.

Australians with co-existing drug dependence and mental illness have been disadvantaged for many years when it comes to obtaining effective integrated treatment, and their health outcomes are consequently much worse than people with just one condition.

Odyssey House CEO James Pitts noted that approximately 46 per cent of the centre's clients have a co-existing mental health problem according to 2009

admissions data, up from 30 per cent in 2006 and 10 per cent in 1999; alcohol misuse and depression is the most common co-existing condition.

Odyssey House offers the Janus program to provide specialist mental health services for residential clients with a psychiatric diagnosis, including post traumatic stress disorder, depression, anxiety disorder, schizophrenia, and personality disorders. Clients also participate in the DDIG-iTs group (dual diagnosis in group therapy), which provides a safe, supportive environment to learn and discuss issue related to mental illness.

Janus Psychologist Trupti Dave of the Odyssey House After Care Program caters to clients with ongoing, intensive or acute mental health problems. Ms Dave, who is also chair of the Campbelltown Community Drug Action Team, said increased involvement by council, support agencies, police and other community services has assisted in educating others about mental illness while improving support for clients after rehabilitation.



Odyssey Graduate Lee, CEO James Pitts and Professor Kay Wilhelm

## Ladies Luncheon

The annual ladies luncheon hosted by Perpetual and Audrey Page & Associates was recently held in June. The luncheon featured a fabulous presentation by guest speaker Professor Kay Wilhelm AM.

Professor Kay Wilhelm is a Consultation Liaison Psychiatry expert at St Vincents Hospital.

In addition, she has had over 20 years experience with the clinical and research arm of the mood disorders unit. The topic of her presentation was on 'Urban mental health around city living and the impact of drugs and alcohol'. A lot of interesting conversation was generated amongst the 90 ladies in attendance.

Odyssey House graduate Lee overwhelmed guests when she shared her story of addiction and her personal Odyssey journey to rousing applause.

Overall this was a successful event, which raised much needed funds to continue our life saving programs.



Stuart is ready for the challenge

## The trip of a lifetime

Odyssey House Clinical Mental Health Worker Stuart Balzan is going on the trip of a lifetime thanks to Rotary.

The Group Study Exchange (GSE) program is a unique cultural and vocational exchange opportunity for professional young business and professional men and women between the ages of 25 - 40 offered by the Rotary Foundation of Australia.

After an intense application and interview process, Stuart was successfully nominated on behalf of Rotary Club of Macarthur Sunrise to be part of this exceptional opportunity.

The theme of this GSE program is 'Youth Mental Illness', an area that Stuart has a dedicated interest in with his

work at Odyssey. The highest client population at Odyssey House is between the ages of 18 - 25 presenting with a Co-occurring mental illness - and this is on a steady increase.

The GSE team will be touring other Addiction and Rehabilitation services in Canada and New York State over a period of 4 weeks, staying with Rotary host families. "I am really excited by the opportunity to exchange ideas and theories with the other services and explore how they deal with the issues of clients who have a mental illness" says Stuart.

Some of the other services they will be visiting include Hincks - Dellcrest Centre, Dr Marshall - Psychiatrist in Chief Karenblum, The Canadian Mental Health

Association Toronto, CAMH - Centre for Addiction and Mental Health Teaching Hospital Toronto and the Portage Drug and Alcohol Rehabilitation program.

In addition to visiting the services, program participants will also participate in 15 to 20 Rotary club presentations, 10-15 formal and social visits, attend the district conference and a number of cultural and site tours.

This once in a life experience is designed to have an invaluable impact on the participants. "I am really looking forward to coming back and presenting to Odyssey the tools I have learned and hopefully implementing some positive actions moving forward" says Stuart.

## A message from the Chief Executive Officer



James A. Pitts

We have been in the midst of a closely contested Federal election campaign. This resulted in the saturation in all media outlets with the slogans, sound bytes and soliloquies from both of the major parties. Fortunately, or fortuitously Odyssey house was able to receive very substantial positive coverage of its unique programming and the successful outcomes for its clients.

We were featured in Sydney's Daily Telegraph newspaper through a 2 page spread which focussed on our Parents and Children's program. This was followed by a feature article on one of our female residents Juliet, in the latest edition of Grazia magazine. This type of coverage assists greatly in conveying to the public the comprehensiveness, and effectiveness of our services.

On another positive note we completed successfully our accreditation review with the Australian Council on Healthcare Standards (ACHS). Odyssey is required to be involved in a Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI) process. This type of review ensures the governance, clinical and operational components of the organisation meets Australian standards for community health organizations. Much credit should be given to the staff team which coordinated the collection and collation of the massive data base needed to verify adherence to the various standards. They are Sharon, Sharlene, Leonie, Steve and Steph!

James A Pitts, MA  
Chief Executive Officer

## Diary Dates

For further information on any of these events, please contact marketing on (02) 9820 9999 or email marketing@odysseyhouse.com.au

Paradise Investment Management  
Goulburn to Citi Corporate Charity Ride  
- Sunday September 12

Australian Fund Managers Awards  
- Thursday 21 October

Odyssey House Open Day - Sunday 31 October