



LIKE MINDS, LIKE MINE  
Whakaitia te Whakawhiu i te Tangata

# Like Minds

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WHAKAITIA TE WHAKAWHIU I TE TANGATA

## WHAT'S INSIDE

- 1 Talking with an Angel
- 5 Jana Lucas
- 6 reTHiNK Possible Worlds
- 7 Media Grant recipients launch their projects
- 8 Georgie Tutt
- 9 Frans Knottenbelt
- 10 Daniel Real
- 11 *A Gift of Stories* - 10 years on
- 12 Young people talk about discrimination



Johnny impersonating Elvis Presley at the 2011 Santa Parade in Henderson, Auckland.

## Talking with an Angel

Johnny Angel is an artist, a musician, a published author and one of the 'stars' featured in the latest *Like Minds, Like Mine* TV ads.

Johnny decided to audition for the ads because he felt in a good space and wanted to share that with others. "I felt a lot better. I felt good and well, and I'm doing the things I need to do in my life."

Johnny first experienced depression in 1993 when he was at Teachers' Training College in Auckland.

"Everything was going well but I felt under a lot of pressure," he says. "It was a physical feeling - like liquid in my brain. I would look in the mirror and say 'You're ugly. You're a loser.' I stopped showering, stopped brushing my teeth. I didn't sleep. I started wanting to kill myself. It was horrific."

Johnny's sister, who worked in mental health, noticed something was wrong and called the mental health crisis team. Johnny was assessed and taken to an Auckland mental health unit. He felt safe there and made some steps towards recovery.

“Daniel's had so many challenges and I really admire how he's come out the other side...I'm proud to be his sister. He's such a positive, motivated person.”

NATASHA REAL

>> [continued page 2...](#)



Johnny with mother Lolita (far left), girlfriend Fiona Bax and father Paulo (far right).

“When I came out of the depression I didn’t want any help. I just wanted to get on with my life. I didn’t take meds. I just went out drinking and partying. Ten years went by. My family was saying ‘You’re not doing anything with your life’, so I went back to teachers’ college. And that was when it [depression] hit me again.”

Johnny confided in his sister and went to stay at her house. However, the situation deteriorated and he attempted suicide. He was admitted into a mental health unit at Middlemore Hospital.

### Reconnecting with his talents

A breakthrough occurred when Johnny found the occupational therapy room at the hospital and rediscovered his love of drawing, something he had shown talent for at school. “I started feeling better. I started looking in the mirror and saying, ‘It’s going to be okay.’”

Johnny moved back into his sister’s place in Māngere and took stock of his

life. “I looked back. What was I good at? My art, singing and acting. I made some serious decisions. It was an epiphany.”

Johnny decided to try going into business. He drew up sketches and set up meetings with people who might be able to help. The Pacific Education Centre helped out by giving Johnny a workstation. In return he did some drawings for their website and made some patterns for their library.

“I was really pumped,” says Johnny. “My dream was to create a Samoan superhero and draw a comic book and make a movie.”

### bro’Town beckons

One of the employees at the Pacific Education Centre told Johnny that *bro’Town* was looking for animators. “I had no training,” says Johnny, “just my Samoan comic book sketches, but I gave it a go.”

Some people told Johnny that he would never make it in the animating world, but he secured a one-year contract with *bro’Town*. “It was really difficult but I loved it,” Johnny says.

Johnny also completed his comic book about a Samoan superhero, *The Adventures of Afi – Wars of the heart*.

Creative New Zealand gave Johnny funding to print 500 copies and he toured schools with the Duffy Books Tour, speaking to school assemblies. They were delighted to have a Pacific artist, as most of their guest speakers are sports people.

Music has also played a key role in Johnny’s recovery.

Johnny says there’s a feeling he gets when he sings. “I feel nice inside. It’s really soothing. I sing in the shower, when I’m walking, in the car, I go to karaoke. I just sing because I enjoy it.”

“ It was a physical feeling – like liquid in my brain. I would look in the mirror and say ‘You’re ugly. You’re a loser.’ ”

JOHNNY ANGEL

Johnny has recently returned from an Elvis impersonator competition called, Elvis Downunder. “I had just broken my leg”, says Johnny, “so I had to go on stage dressed as Elvis in my cast and crutches!”

### Staying well

Over time, Johnny has developed personal strategies for staying well. He experienced a change in his attitude, recognising he needed support. “I said, ‘I need help. I can’t do it alone.’ I took the advice of the people I trusted,” he says.

The most important thing for him has been having a dream – a goal to work towards. He also writes in his diary and practises positive self-talk.

“I say things to myself like ‘It’s going to be alright. It’s going to be okay. I can do this. I want to live.’ When I look at all the things I am really good at – I’m an artist. That’s who I am. It took me 32 years to say that.”

Johnny has since gone on to star in the phase 5 *Like Minds* TV ads, been a guest on the Nutters’ Club TV and radio show and has even appeared on the New Zealand version of *Stars in their Eyes* as Tony Orlando singing, ‘Knock three times’. He also has a very supportive day job as a peer support worker for Pathways Trust in Auckland (Pathways is a national provider of community-based mental health and wellness services).



Johnny (left) with his sister, Teri Lauu (right).

### Support from family and friends have been crucial to Johnny

*I used to sleep all day. My sister made me breakfast, lunch and dinner. She showed me how to have a sleeping pattern. Mum and Dad prayed for me. We had a big family meeting where they all prayed for me. My brothers understand. I don’t drink, don’t smoke, and don’t do drugs. I’m not a party guy anymore. They respect that.*

### Support from family

Teri Lauu is Johnny’s sister and played a big role in supporting Johnny in his journey to wellness. She works for Challenge Trust (a national mental health service provider) in Auckland as a qualified health professional working alongside people with traumatic brain or spinal injury and tells us how she supported her brother.

**Being there and speaking out:** I talked to the immediate family and became Johnny’s spokesperson. I advocated strongly on Johnny’s behalf with clinical teams and other agencies involved in his care.

**Practical support:** Johnny lived with my partner and me. We set up a roster for him during the day and night, so he could get into a routine and this absolutely worked a gem. We implemented strong boundaries and were consistent in our communication. Johnny had space to pursue his art and music – which flourished.

### Impact of the experience on the relationship:

Johnny and I have always been very close and we have an even better bond now. I have learnt to listen more and he has learnt to ask for help more. Johnny checks in with me about things affecting him at work or home and we both share our perspectives.

**Discrimination:** I noticed a lot of discrimination and found myself defending people with mental illness, not because of my brother, but because of the derogative language people used.

### New perspectives on mental illness:

Knowing treatment and support is available and not being afraid to talk about it with family, friends and in public social settings is important. The knowledge that I have gained from my experience with Johnny has impacted on my interaction with other people who have lived experience. I am able to empathise and relate better to their needs.



Johnny (left) with his friend Malo Silailai (right).

## Support from friends

Malo Silailai – one of Johnny's friends, who features in the *Like Minds* TV ads – is now a counsellor for a Community Alcohol and Drug service and is doing his Diploma in Alcohol and Drug Counselling through Weltec.

**Being a friend:** Supporting Johnny was nothing huge. I've known Johnny since 1989. It's a long-term friendship and it was just about being a really good friend. Seeing Johnny through tough times, visiting him, letting him know I was there. We'd do everyday things together, such as going for a cruise, having a feed, playing Playstation, or going to the beach – just doing whatever Johnny wanted to do. It didn't take much. Just keeping in contact.

“ The reward is seeing him back on his feet again. Happy. Living life passionately. Being on that journey with him is a privilege. ”

MALO SILAILAI

**It wasn't always easy:** There were a lot of times when Johnny didn't want visitors. He would send his flatmate or his sister to the door. I just tried to be as consistent as I could and tried to catch up with Johnny regularly. It was hard to see him hurting or when he was not looking after himself.

**Discrimination:** I noticed heaps of discrimination. I think being Pacific it's always been a 'voodoo' thing. Culturally for us these things are more like curses – a fear of the unknown. You don't really talk about it.

**Awareness of mental health issues:** I'm a lot more aware about mental health issues through my friendship with Johnny. When Johnny says, 'I have to get to sleep by 9.30pm', I can understand that now.

**Good times outweighed the bad:** Johnny is such a funny guy. The reward is seeing him back on his feet again. Happy. Living life passionately. Being on that journey with him is a privilege.

By Ruth Jackson

**i** To view the *Like Minds* TV ads online, go to: <http://www.likeminds.org.nz/av/view/listing/#category-11>

Pathways Trust:  
[www.pathways.co.nz](http://www.pathways.co.nz)

bro'Town:  
[www.brotown.co.nz](http://www.brotown.co.nz)

Challenge Trust:  
[www.challenge.co.nz](http://www.challenge.co.nz)

# Jana Lucas: From nomad to homebody

Jana Lucas first started showing symptoms of bipolar when she was 17, living in Bristol.

Amazingly, for the next twenty years, she was treated for depression with various drugs, which had the effect of making the ups and downs more pronounced.

For much of that time she lived a nomadic lifestyle, moving from London, to Brighton, St Ives, Berlin, Amsterdam, Zaragoza (Spain) and other places, before settling in New Zealand nine years ago.

She now lives in Mt Eden, Auckland, with her partner, Cindy and their cat, Missy.

“Over those years, I lived with the ups and downs, sometimes self-medicating,” she says. “Then two years ago, I was in a terrible state and went to see my doctor. She advised that I needed more expert help and it was only then that I was properly diagnosed and treated.”

Jana started to develop a greater understanding of her health needs and what keeps her well (see sidebar).

With regard to discrimination, Jana says she has been very lucky. “I’ve experienced more homophobia than discrimination associated with my bipolar.”

She believes you choose when to be open about your condition. “Amongst friends I think it is important to talk about it. You don’t want to be hiding things. My friends have been very supportive and understanding.”

Jana’s partner Cindy says that over the years she has supported Jana in a number of ways. “Mostly it’s about being there for her, not judging her and keeping my patience when things are not going well,” she says.

“Jana is such a wonderful person and the hardest thing is seeing her in pain and feeling like I can’t do anything for her,” Cindy says. “When she was not correctly diagnosed and was receiving the wrong treatment, there were times when I thought we would lose her.”

“She used to have three or four episodes a year of severe depression – I could always tell when it was happening and my stomach would drop and my heart would start racing. I didn’t know what to do because I thought that the medication should be working.”

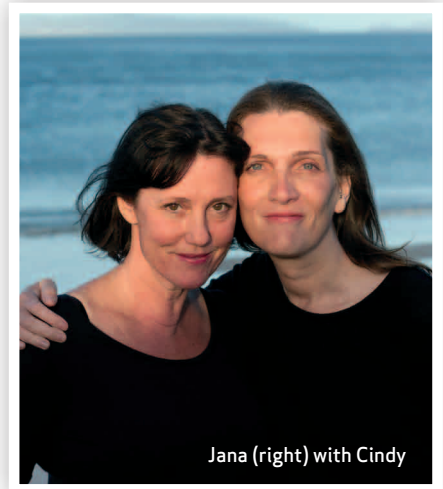
“Being unwell has had a huge impact on our lives and affected Jana’s self-confidence and her self-esteem. This has sometimes impacted on her professional and personal life. Now that she has the right support and treatment, the episodes are far less frequent and she works through them faster.”

Cindy believes the experience has taught her a lot about herself. “It hasn’t changed my values or attitudes as I was brought up to accept people for who they are, but it has increased my knowledge hugely.”

She says there are times when it is really hard being with someone who experiences mental distress, but “the most important thing is that we are able to get through it and that we are OK and healthy”.

Jana emphasises the importance of a good, continuous support network. “Having that support takes the isolation away,” she says, “It is important to have friends, family and professional contacts you can go to who will listen.”

She says society is changing all the time. “As people know more people in their own lives with experience of mental illness, it changes their opinion



Jana (right) with Cindy

## Jana’s list of dos and don’ts

- Do keep social
- Do mindfulness meditation
- Do exercise
- Do eat healthy food
- Do talk to someone close to you
- Do try Cognitive Behaviour Therapy
- Don’t smoke
- Don’t drink
- Don’t take recreational drugs

and increases their understanding. And with public education, research into health, and messages about keeping well, I think the walls are slowly coming down.”

Last year, spurred on by her experiences and a desire to work in a more interesting environment, Jana enrolled in National Certificate in Mental Health Support Work at Manukau Institute of Technology. She will finish in 2012 and eventually hopes to go into a counselling role in the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) community.

“I have a lot of goals and a long road,” she says, “but my passion for this type of work will get me there.”

**By Cate Hennessy**

## ➔ AUCKLAND PUBLIC reTHiNK THEIR POSSIBLE WORLDS

The multimedia theatre show from this year's reTHiNK Grant recipients – *reTHiNK Possible Worlds* – hit the stage at Galatos in Auckland on 14-15 October and garnered rave reviews and inspired responses.

“It was like eating a good meal: not so much that we are sore, not so little that we are still hungry...” said one reviewer on Theatre View. “The dance is allowed to wash around the vocal performer, wrapping them in a cooperative interplay [that offers] constant glimmers of hope, of escape routes and pathways to human dignity.”

For four months prior to the final show, 13 poets, dancers and musicians collaborated to tell the story of three central characters (a searcher, a thinker and a visionary) as they journey out of unwellness, with the help of a seer, a translator, a rebel and a survivor.

The central message was ‘we are all human beings navigating the maze of life.’

The *reTHiNK Possible Worlds* crew undertook two street-art chalking missions, ran film-making workshops and performance workshops, created a Facebook quiz and performed at a range of prelude events as they worked to get the message out into the public sphere. The cast produced a series of weekly blogs on The Big Idea that clearly demonstrate the impact the project had on them as participants and the message they were hoping to get across to the audience.

Members of the public were invited to create a response on film to the central message (above), with the finalists becoming part of the *reTHiNK Possible Worlds* show.

On opening night Lora Keyes was announced as the *reTHiNK Possible Worlds* YouTube competition winner for her video-poem ‘Hearing Voices or Uninvited Guests that Overstay Their Welcome’. All finalist film clips can be watched online on The Literatti’s website ([www.theliteratti.com/rethink-possible-worlds.html](http://www.theliteratti.com/rethink-possible-worlds.html)) and YouTube channel ([www.youtube.com/literartist](http://www.youtube.com/literartist)).

One hundred and sixty people saw the show over the weekend of Mental Health Awareness Week and even more people have been involved in the project in the lead-up to the final event.

The show itself was professionally filmed and is currently in post-production phase.

**By Miriam Barr**



PHOTOS COURTESY OF ERIN GAFFNEY

## ➔ MEDIA GRANT RECIPIENTS LAUNCH THEIR PROJECTS

Some of our 2010 recipients have recently completed their projects. In case you missed their news, here's an update:



**Pat Deavoll** released her book *Wind from a Distant Summit* in early October. The book chronicles Pat's extraordinary career as New

Zealand's leading woman mountaineer – her adventures, challenges, sacrifices and achievements. What is perhaps most remarkable about Pat is that she has achieved so much despite a life-long struggle with clinical depression, and about which she writes with a moving honesty, humanity and insight.

Listen to Pat's interview with Kim Hill, recorded 15 October: [http://podcast.radionz.co.nz/sat/sat-20111015-0930-pat\\_deavoll-048.mp3](http://podcast.radionz.co.nz/sat/sat-20111015-0930-pat_deavoll-048.mp3)

Read more about her book and order your copy by going to [www.patdeavoll.co.nz](http://www.patdeavoll.co.nz).

**Dylan Keys** launched his solo exhibition – *Nine: a journey through mental illness and addiction* – mid-November at Creative Tauranga's gallery.

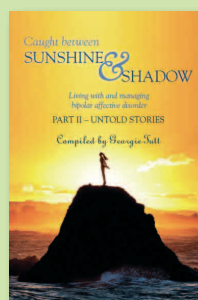
For years, Dylan masked the symptoms of anxiety and depression with alcohol and drug abuse. The paintings in *Nine* chronicle Dylan's journey through mental illness and addiction to recovery.

Some of the works symbolise Dylan's fears and challenges, while others represent his re-emergence into the outside world with a healthier mind and body, when he quit drinking, drugs and cigarettes.



Dylan is determined to share his experiences, through his art, to help those who are struggling with the same problems that dominated his life. You can follow his journey and see his work by going to [www.creationsofdylan.tumblr.com](http://www.creationsofdylan.tumblr.com)

**Georgie Tutt** has just published her second book, an e-publication called, *Caught Between Sunshine & Shadow: Part II - Untold Stories*, that is the sequel to last year's *Caught Between Sunshine & Shadow*. Both books share New Zealanders' experiences of Bipolar Affective Disorder, and Georgie (who lives with the disorder) wants the stories to challenge misconceptions about bipolar disorder, reduce discrimination and promote wellness and recovery.

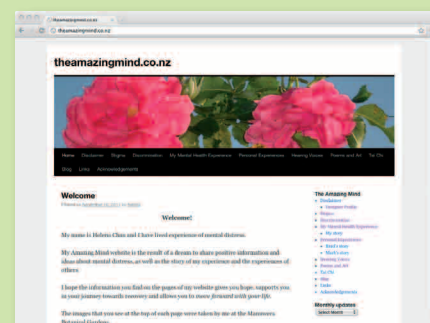


Read more about Georgie on pages 8 and 9 and visit her website [www.cbsas.co.nz](http://www.cbsas.co.nz)

**Helena Chan** has a vision – to share her experience of mental distress and recovery with those interested in hearing about her journey. Helena was able to realise her vision by launching her Amazing Mind website in late November. The site is truly a personal journey in which Helena tells her story, shares her experience of issues such as stigma and discrimination, and lets people know what worked well for her as she moved towards recovery.

Helena is planning to update her website as she gets feedback and comment from other people – which she welcomes through her blog ([www.theamazingmind.co.nz/blog/](http://www.theamazingmind.co.nz/blog/)) and Facebook page ([www.facebook.com/theamazingmind](http://www.facebook.com/theamazingmind)). Her aim is to make more people aware of the realities of experiencing mental distress and how important good mental health is.

Go to [www.theamazingmind.co.nz](http://www.theamazingmind.co.nz)



## ➔ TE KOROWAI HAUORA O HAURAKI ENGAGES THE COMMUNITY

*Like Minds* provider Te Korowai Hauora O Hauraki successfully engaged their local community in two Mental Health Awareness Week events that got people thinking about the *Like Minds* messages.

One was their community quiz night, which involved 17 teams and 86 people from tangata whaiora, Thames

Coromandel District and Hauraki District Council staff, through to GPs, surgeons, mental health workers, kaumātua-kuia, rangatahi and everyday community members.

A section of the quiz, focused on mental illness, discrimination and stigma, led to lively discussions during the quiz and really got teams thinking.

The other was a screening of *The Insatiable Moon*. There was an overwhelming response, the venue was a sell-out and interesting feedback was received from people attending, including: "I didn't realise discrimination, stigma and all that happened pertaining to mental illness." "We aren't alone anymore."

# Georgie Tutt – sensory overload

“ My head was racing with ideas and I felt that I was going to burn up. I was like a pinball machine with thoughts bombarding my brain cells. ”

GEORGIE TUTT

Georgie Tutt describes herself as a happy-go-lucky sort of person, who sees the good in people. “I used to want to put a fire cracker up a person who showed signs of depression. I had no understanding or appreciation of how hard it was for them to change.”

Then, when Georgie was 28 years old, she had her first manic episode. She was diagnosed at the time with bipolar disorder, but refused to believe it. It wasn't until her second episode, ten years later, that she finally accepted the diagnosis.

“For me, being in a manic phase meant sensory overload,” Georgie says. “All of my senses would become supercharged; the way I'd see things was wonderful, my sense of smell, taste, touch and libido were all heightened – I didn't want any of it to stop.

“Every song I heard had meaning, everything I saw was for a purpose, and I felt euphoric like I'd tapped into a new energy source.

“Then the 'scary' stuff starts. Not wanting to go to sleep because your thoughts are so black. Your head is buzzing with ideas and thoughts and you can't keep up with the pace.”

In her manic state, associations between even the smallest of things take on huge significance, becoming something akin to a revelation in her mind. So being given the diagnosis of Bipolar Affective Disorder was most definitely BAD, and that is how she felt about herself. However, thanks to a supportive husband – Frans – family, and friends, Georgie has come to terms with her condition.

“I believe that I have the best, caring and supportive group of family and friends anyone could ever have, who accept me for who I am and never judge me.”

“Today, I acknowledge that I have bipolar and I have learnt how to manage it,” Georgie says. She shares some of the strategies that she's put in place (see sidebar).

Georgie, a 2010 media grant recipient, has also recently published her first e-book – *Caught Between Sunshine & Shadow: Part II – Untold Stories* – a sequel to her print publication, *Caught Between Sunshine & Shadow*.

As she was compiling the stories about other people's experiences of bipolar, Georgie discovered they felt the same way as she had. “I have met so many wonderful people who have given me new ideas and ways to try, and – like me – valued the importance of a strong support network.”

Georgie is currently working as a primary school teacher, and says she is “accepted for who I am and not judged on my condition”.

**By Georgie Tutt, Cate Hennessy**

**i** For orders and more information go to [www.cbsas.co.nz](http://www.cbsas.co.nz) or you can contact Georgie on 07 548 0948 or email [info@cbsas.co.nz](mailto:info@cbsas.co.nz) Read more about Georgie on page 11 of Issue 43: [www.likeminds.org.nz/file/Newsletter-Archive/PDFs/lmim-newsletter-43.pdf](http://www.likeminds.org.nz/file/Newsletter-Archive/PDFs/lmim-newsletter-43.pdf)



## Georgie's strategies

1. Frans (my husband) and I have a great relationship and I trust his judgment. He has a good handle on my moods and can tell me if I'm more over reactive than usual.
2. I have learnt to say “no” when I feel that I have taken on too much. It is good to be busy but sometimes too much pressure can tip me over the edge.
3. I use music – especially Baroque and certain songs – to calm my thoughts and give me strength.
4. The smells of certain flowers and herbs provided a calming and grounding effect for me when my mind was racing with uncontrollable thoughts.
5. Cutting back alcohol and caffeine has a positive effect.
6. I have a fantastic support network of family and friends.

# Frans Knottenbelt – supporting Georgie

“ I am less tolerant of the ignorance of people who are highly opinionated on how people who are mentally unwell should be treated, when it’s obvious they have no understanding of what it is like for a person being mentally unwell. ”

FRANS KNOTTENBELT



Frans is Georgie Tutt’s husband of 21 years (they’ve been together for 25 years). He says that how unwell Georgie is has a great deal of influence on how he supports her.

“If Georgie becomes too unwell, then we can do little to rectify things and we have to call in the crisis team – which can be very distressing,” Frans says. “However, as we’ve gained more experience about how to manage bipolar, we seem to be more adept at heading off what would have most likely become more severe episodes.”

He says that after the first episode it was very hard seeing Georgie – “normally a vibrant, very happy, carefree, energetic young woman” – being totally debilitated, first by the illness and then by the medication\*.

“I watched the impact that the bipolar had on her image of self, her self-esteem, her confidence,” he says, “and I wondered what would it mean for her [and our] future.

“I didn’t know if this was how it was going to be from here on; what would happen when we started a family; the reactions from others – it was all difficult”

Being with Georgie, and supporting her, has completely changed Frans’ opinion of mental illness.

“I had an ill informed, inaccurate perception of mental illness,” he says. “I’d never really thought about it, or had any real contact with anyone with a mental illness – and I guess thought it was a bit like having a permanent mental disability which affected you 24/7.”

Now he tends to view people’s mental state as a continuum of mental health that we all move back and forth along.

“I believe, given the right stimulus, we are all capable of experiencing ‘shifts’ along the continuum,” he says. “It’s just that some people are more sensitive to certain triggers which cause these shifts to be more extreme and they manifest as ‘labelled’ mental illnesses.”

Frans says he is also now much more comfortable talking with people who may have experienced mental ill health themselves, and with people who, like him, live with people who have experienced mental ill health.

“I now have personal experiences that provide me with a greater insight and understanding of what they might be feeling, which allows for communication at a level that was not previously possible,” he says.

He is also grateful for the help and support they received from friends, neighbours and family. “Once we faced

## What you can do

Frans says the key is to accept that ill health is something that can crop up from time to time and, when it does, to take more care to help by:

- Reducing any external and or internal pressures or stresses where possible (e.g. taking over more of the things your friend or family member might normally do; help ensure they re-establish a good sleeping pattern. It may mean going to the doctor, discussing how to adjust medication or liaising with their work about needing some time out)
- Let those friends who are aware of their history know that the road might be a bit bumpy so they too can support their friend appropriately
- Respecting their wishes e.g. they may not want to let certain people know or may choose to stay away from events or gatherings
- Be reassuring – it’s just that they are unwell. You can shrug off any embarrassing or out of character things they may have done.

up to Georgie’s experience after her second major episode - they were wonderful!”

It has been a sobering experience for Frans and made him realise you can’t take everything for granted. “But, it also makes you more empathetic and more able to help and support others who may similarly be knocked down – you really understand that any of us may stumble.”

**By Frans Knottenbelt, Cate Hennessy**

\* The medication Georgie was initially prescribed had some unpleasant side effects.

# Daniel Real – speaking his truth

Daniel Real is an achiever. He has presented *Like Minds* workshops, represented *Like Minds* at numerous community events and helped produce a weekly *Like Minds* radio show on Arrow FM – an Access Radio station in the Wairarapa.

Behind a radio microphone Daniel Real is completely in his element. He speaks confidently and clearly and creates an easy rapport with his interview subjects and the audience, often cracking jokes.

The highlight of Daniel's radio work was interviewing John Kirwan about his book *All Blacks Don't Cry*. This interview was part of a radio show that won Daniel an NZ on Air 2011 Award for Best-spoken informational language programme.

Yet Daniel also has experience of psychosis, depression, anxiety, obsessive-compulsive disorder, social phobia and Tourette's syndrome. He describes this experience as "really hard at times but quite enlightening too".

He believes it has given him a positive edge in his life and his radio work, as he and his guests get to be honest and tell the truth about mental illness.

"Audiences learn things that they didn't realise about people with mental illness – they were caught up in the myths. When you tell it how it is, people can make their own judgements," he says.

When Daniel first became unwell he was living with his parents, Lorraine and Brian Real, and two younger siblings, Samantha and Jacob.

Mum, Lorraine says that Brian, Samantha and Jacob initially found it hard to cope, as they hadn't had any previous experience with mental illness, and felt quite powerless.

"Brian assumed that as I was a qualified caregiver for the elderly, I would have more knowledge and patience to



support Daniel – but I felt helpless at times too."

However, Natasha Real, Daniel's older sister – who is very close to her brother – was there to help her mother support Daniel when her mother needed it.

"In the beginning I didn't really have a lot of understanding of what Daniel was going through," she says, "so I can understand as a family member what it's like, how scary it can be.

"He's my brother and, even though he's experienced mental illness, he is still the same person. I didn't find it hard to help him, but I did find it hard to watch him struggling. I worried that other people wouldn't accept him – that they'd be mean to him, so I wanted to protect him."

Now, Lorraine believes supporting Daniel through his experience of mental illness has made them closer and more understanding as a family.

"It was hard seeing Daniel acting different and struggling to communicate. It was hard not being able to fix his problems, or make him feel better, but then he would have a good day and there was hope," she says. "Being open as a family was really important."

Natasha credits Daniel's experience for setting her on her career path as a support worker for people with mental health issues. She is also studying towards a Bachelor in Nursing.

"For me it's quite bittersweet," she says. "If Daniel hadn't got unwell I wouldn't be on the path I'm on now. When he got unwell I educated myself and that led to me becoming a support worker."

She thinks it is amazing what Daniel has been through. "He's had so many challenges and I really admire how he's come out the other side. Seeing him achieve so much with his art, his writing, and his radio show – I'm proud to be his sister. He's such a positive, motivated person."

Daniel's mum, dad and younger brother and sister are very proud of him too!

Daniel has recently started working for Pathways Trust in the Wairarapa as a Peer Support Worker, where his experience of mental illness is a pre-requisite for the job.

He says, "Through my experience of mental illness I learnt a lot more about myself and it's definitely something that's made me more appreciative of life."

**By Ruth Jackson**

# A Gift of Stories – ten years on

“A Gift of Stories was the only book in the library that gave me an insight into other people’s experience of mental illness. It made me feel less alone and gave me hope.”

GEORGIE TUTT, WHO HAS LIVED EXPERIENCE OF BIPOLAR (SEE PAGE 8)



In December 1999, Dr Julie Leibrich – the first Mental Health Commissioner with a consumer perspective – authored (along with people who had lived experience and a diagnosis of mental illness) a book, *A Gift of Stories: Discovering How To Deal With Mental Illness*.

This book, amongst only a few others, marked a significant turning point. It was one of the earliest collections sharing people’s authentic experiences.

The book was distributed freely and widely in NZ to consumer organisations and libraries, so that as many people as possible could access it. For the past decade *A Gift of Stories*, with its frank and honest biographies, has touched many people’s lives.

*A Gift of Stories* found its way from New Zealand to the UK, Ireland, USA, Canada, Australia, Zambia, Norway, India, and Russia. It has been used within the consumer movement, the education of health providers, in self-help and therapeutic groups, and to develop health practice and policy.

British specialist in rehabilitation and recovery, Dr Glenn Roberts, named it as ‘the book which has most influenced him in his career as a psychiatrist’. It has been recommended in dozens of articles and books and has inspired other books. They include:

- *Kia Mauri Tau! Narratives of recovery from disabling mental health problems*. Lapsley H, Nikora L & Black R. Mental Health Commission, 2002.

- *Life is for Living: 25 New Zealanders living with disability tell their stories*. Office of Disabilities, 2005.
- *Beyond the Storms: Reflections on Person Recovery in Devon*. Edited by Laurie Davidson and Linden Lynn. Devon Partnership NHS Trust, 2009.
- *Psychosis: Stories of Recovery and Hope*. Edited by Hannah Cordle, Jane Fradgley, Jerome Carson, Frank Holloway, and Paul Richards, Quay Books, London, 2011.
- *Recovery Journeys: Stories of coping with mental health problems*. Film by Michelle McNary and accompanying booklet edited by Jerome Carson, Frank Holloway, Paul Wolfson and Michelle McNary.

More than ten years later, Julie still receives letters and emails about how *A Gift of Stories* has helped others deal with their own experiences. Julie says one letter from a stranger resounded with her.

They said: “The relief and recognition of myself in a couple of the stories was profound... For the first time my tears were not cried out of aloneness or ‘lostness’ or from a lack of hope. As I read and cried, cried and read, I started to feel a greater acceptance of me – all of me.”

Recently she wrote to all the contributors to let them know how well the book had fared. She began her letter to them with a quote from Dr Jerome Carson, Consultant Clinical

Psychologist, South London and Maudsley NHS Foundation Trust.

“This is an amazing and inspiring book and if I could recommend only one book to read about recovery, this would be it... The book has travelled all over the world and continues to inspire hundreds of mental health professionals and service users.”

Julie retired from her job with the Mental Health Commission in 2000, after she became extremely ill. Over the past ten years, Julie has been publishing poetry and children’s stories and working on a new book about personal sanctuary, which will be finished next March.

**By Julie Leibrich, Cate Hennessy**

**i** To purchase *A Gift of Stories* go to Otago University Press: [www.otago.ac.nz/press/booksauthors/2006/gift\\_of\\_stories.html](http://www.otago.ac.nz/press/booksauthors/2006/gift_of_stories.html)

To read more about Julie: [www.bookcouncil.org.nz/writers/leibrichjulie.html](http://www.bookcouncil.org.nz/writers/leibrichjulie.html)

To download *A Gift of Stories: Ten Years On – Some feedback to contributors* (June 2011): [www.likeminds.org.nz/file/Newsletter-Archive/PDFs/a-gift-of-stories-the-impact-our-book-has-made.pdf](http://www.likeminds.org.nz/file/Newsletter-Archive/PDFs/a-gift-of-stories-the-impact-our-book-has-made.pdf)

# Young people talk about discrimination

The Mental Health Foundation's current *Like Minds* qualitative research project – carried out by Dr Heather Barnett, Te Reo Satiaga and Shona Clarke – explores rangatahi (young people) experiences of discrimination associated with mental health issues.

A total of 30 young people participated in seven focus groups across the greater Wellington region. The guidance and support of cultural advisors allowed the team to connect with rangatahi and ensured a high level of Māori participation, which meant three of the focus groups were for young Māori people only – and the other four were open to any young people. Almost half of all the participants were young women and just over half were young men; half were aged 18 or 19.

## Challenges

Challenges encountered by the research team as they were working on the project included:

1. How to effectively advertise a range of different focus groups (e.g. Māori, Pasifika, gay)
2. How to engage rangatahi so they felt comfortable participating in a group forum about mental health issues.

Those rangatahi that participated in the focus groups, discussed what the terms 'discrimination' and 'mental health issues' meant, as many young people were unfamiliar with these terms, or weren't comfortable talking about mental health issues with their male mates.

The youth advisory group members concluded that rangatahi are often hard to engage about mental health issues or to encourage to participate in a group, and that what works for one person may not suit another person.

## What rangatahi have to say

"It became very clear from talking with rangatahi that discrimination in relation to mental health issues is often only one aspect of young people's experiences of discrimination," Heather says. "Many rangatahi spoke at length of multiple forms of discrimination over the course of their lives, that have had a significant, negative impact on their mental health."

Other forms of discrimination – being treated unfairly or unjustly – mentioned were because rangatahi are young, Māori, Pasifika, gay; because they have a history of contact with CYFS and/or youth justice services; because they reside in a particular area that the police view in a negative way; and because of a mental illness diagnosis.

Heather says, "The initial analysis indicates the research will contribute to a deeper understanding of discrimination – in all its forms – as it relates to young people's lived experiences of mental illness."

The full results of the research will be published in early 2012.

By Cate Hennessy, Heather Barnett

**i** Read the previous *Like Minds* article: [www.likeminds.org.nz/page/237-quarterly-newsletter+may-2011+new-like-minds-research](http://www.likeminds.org.nz/page/237-quarterly-newsletter+may-2011+new-like-minds-research)

Read 'Youth quizzed on mental health discrimination': <http://www.newswire.co.nz/2011/07/youth-quizzed-on-mental-health-discrimination/>

Or contact Dr Heather Barnett on ph: (04) 801 0353 or email: [heather@mentalhealth.org.nz](mailto:heather@mentalhealth.org.nz)



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*Like Minds, Like Mine* is the programme to counter stigma and discrimination associated with mental illness and is an initiative of the Ministry of Health.

[www.likeminds.org.nz](http://www.likeminds.org.nz)

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