

## Tale of a Journey Reaches Troubled Teens

Dozens of troubled and severely disturbed youth have been set on the road to recovery from their mental illnesses with a unique form of group therapy pioneered by Ron Phillips of the Campbell Lodge mental health unit at Middlemore Hospital.

The technique, Therapeutic Storytelling Intervention (TSI), uses the fictional tale of a boy's journey from childhood to adulthood to "touch and open young people in surprising and amazing ways".

Working with groups of eight or nine, Ron draws on the theme of his Tolkien-style book *Gem of the First Water* to reach his patients and help them to understand and overcome their own issues and problems.

On the way they become involved in a "questioning process" that enables them to identify with the main character as he copes with the struggles of adolescence which "provoke reflection and provide a blueprint for change".

Explains Ron: "Although telling stories attracts them initially, it is the relationship between the Storytelling, the questioning process and the interaction between the storyteller and the group that forms TSI."

Campbell Lodge is part of the Counties Manukau mental health service, where Ron has been a family and group therapist for seven years. He has a Masters Degree in counselling and guidance and developed TSI after finding troubled teens difficult to reach using more traditional forms of therapy.

The programme is custom built for youth who suffer from mental illness and according to Campbell Lodge clinical head Hugh Clarkson, it has a much higher success rate than other group therapy approaches.

Compared with only about three sessions in other courses, Campbell Lodge patients become so absorbed in the story and the process that during each 16 to 18 week course, they attend an average 14 sessions.

The technique is also being used by the police and the Drug Abuse Resistance Education (DARE) Foundation in its To Make a Change programme. The Safer Streets Trust has taken it to 200 high schools throughout the country and there is wide interest in TSI in the USA and Australia.

Another example of the lodge's outreach programme can be seen at Kedgley Intermediate School in Papatoetoe, where Deputy Principal Carol Taylor and two other staff members run TSI groups for children at risk.

The aim is to prevent the development of mental health or other problems further down the track. Carol says that in terms of children's ability to take responsibility for themselves and their behaviour, the success has been phenomenal.

Over the course of the programme, seven or eight students get together for supervised, hour-long sessions twice a week and go through a self-realisation journey. "At the end of their journey, we provide each student with a copy of Gem of the First Water," says Carol.

Most of them take it home to share with their family and use as a reference for their journey into adulthood. We are constantly amazed at the courage with which our young people who have completed the TSI journey face traumatic and scary life events."

Ron Phillips says TSI at Kedgley Intermediate is an excellent example of community outreach in terms of preventive medicine. "Once these issues are resolved at this level, the need for further treatment is greatly diminished," he says.

For more information on Ron's form of group therapy, visit the website at [www.tsi.co.nz](http://www.tsi.co.nz).