

2017 Hall of Fame Induction: Lizzie Griggs, Matthew Toomey and Jeffrey Jackson

Speaking notes by Julie Bates

Good evening everyone. It is once again my pleasure to welcome you to the NUAA Hall of Fame awards. It is that part of the NUAA AGM that has become a much anticipated event over the past 7 years or so in honouring people who have bravely challenged the lies, stigma and discrimination perpetuated against people who use drugs.

It honours those who have paved the way and strengthened drug user organising, community development and peer education, and have championed sensible public policy in law reform and pharmacotherapy and generally, making a difference to the lived experience of people who use drugs!

Each year the Board goes through the process of identifying people who have made a significant contribution to this effect. This year, NUAA is honouring three outstanding individuals and their colleagues – all of whom contributed so much to the early days of harm reduction, community development and unique and world-first approaches to person centred medico/social care for people living with or at risk of HIV, the likes of which had not been seen before.

So without further ado I would like to introduce you to our 2017 HoF inductees and welcome to the floor to receive their awards, two of my endearing friends and colleagues, Ms Lizzie Griggs and Mr Matthew Toomey. Matthew and Lizzie will also be accepting this joint award on behalf of their colleague, the late Jeffrey Jackson and the team of the Albion Street centre world-first AIDS outreach bus. All of them trailblazing harm reduction heroes of the most extraordinary kind.

Now for a word or two on the illustrious careers of our inductees to give you a sense of how worlds collide and where they came from at the emergence of the HIV epidemic – what they championed and achieved at a time before social media, mobile phones, life-saving treatments, legal NSPs, formal approaches to community development and non-judgemental support for people then living on the margins of society, untrusting and uncared for with major health issues likely, in most cases, to shorten their lives with lots of suffering along the way.

Lizzie Griggs

Lizzie was a barmaid before graduating as a Registered Nurse in 1981. As Lizzie says, having the gift of the gab was perfect for both careers. In 1985, Lizzie was employed as 1 of 3 nurses to work at the newly established Albion Street Centre in Surry Hills – the first HIV/AIDS Community based service to provide HIV testing, case management of PLWHA, STI screening, counselling and safe sex education/condom distribution.

At her interview, Lizzie asked “What will my job entail?”, to which the reply came: “We're not quite sure yet, make it up as you go along!” A bit like all of us back then – making it up as we went.

Later in 1985, she was invited to be the first nurse to help set up the newly planned AIDS outreach bus – affectionately called “The old Ugly” – joining the late Jeffrey Jackson, the first counsellor on board the bus. Shortly after, they were joined by Matthew Toomey and others.

In the early 90s, Lizzie helped settle the AIDS bus into its new home at the Kirketon Road Centre and then went on to work as the NSW HIV/AIDS Surveillance Officer for the Ministry of Health for 13 years from 1994-2007.

But there was more to Lizzie, who through the 80's sang in 2 bands, the fabulous and famed Gone Wrong girls & Eve & the Forbidden Fruits. They had a big gay following and played at various HIV/AIDS related functions, and a couple of funerals I'm told.

Lizzie continues to work as a Clinical Nurse Specialist at RPA Sexual Health Centre in Camperdown, where she was instrumental in assisting in the set up and managing a Test (Rapid HIV Testing) for the past 3 years, and also assists in the management of the EPIC Study, providing Prep to those most at risk of HIV infection.

Matthew Toomey

After spending most of his misspent youth printing T shirts, singing in bands & using the occasional drug, in 1982 Matthew says he got his first 'real job'. He was employed by KXYR as a street-based youth worker in Kings Cross under the guidance of Sister Noelene White of the Good Shepherd Sisters. In 1986, Matthew joined the newly launched AIDS bus.

Matthew has worked for many GLBTI organisations and harm reduction/ community development projects. In 1990, he was employed as the ACON Venues Officer and later that year was the recipient of an ACON/NUAA Tribes project grant with its now infamous project name "Fit for a Queen – New or Clean", part of which he oversaw NSPs at all major Sydney dance parties and worked with the late Levinia Crooks establishing a National Sex on Premises project, which delivered free condoms, lubricant and information to venues where sex was happening right across Australia.

In early 1995 he worked for Foley House, or Badlands as it was known then, and in June 1995 he took up the position of coordinator of the Gold Coast Drug User Organisation GAIN. Moving on in 1998 to the corporate world, he took on the position of International Marketing Manager for ASP Plastics the Australian manufacturers of FITPACK containers.

In 2001, he received a grant from NUAA Tribes to run Australia's first crystal meth peer education project with gay men as the early focus for education around crystal. He later took up positions with AIVL as coordinator of the National Psycostimulant & Hep C Research Project and writing the AIVL Methamphetamine section for Handy Hints.

His last project in the harm reduction field was with Newcastle University as Associate Researcher for the Perceptions of the Needle Syringe Program in Hunter New England Region, NSW. Matthew is now working on a musical and digital photography of Sydney Harbour.

Jeffrey Jackson

Lizzie and Matthew accepted the award on behalf of Jeffrey Jackson. They will ensure it finds its rightful place where it can be seen and acknowledged by a new generation of harm reduction advocates, bringing attention to the myriad of contributions Jeffrey made to social justice for the community's most marginalised.