

# Melissa Moon on MH101

## Seeing the bigger picture...



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If mental resilience had a poster girl, it would be star athlete Melissa Moon. Whether charging up the stairs of the world's tallest buildings, or battling through the heat of the Mojave Desert as one of 20 runners completing the 15200-mile Blue Planet Run global relay, she digs deep to find the mental strength needed to complement her physical abilities. But the mental toughness is tempered by the other side of Melissa Moon, the side that has seen her volunteer at Wellington's Compassion Centre Soup Kitchen for eight years. It was this work that led her to complete the MH101 workshop in December 2009.

"Community is an important part of my life and I am committed to my work at the Compassion Centre," says Melissa. "Our team's mission is to 'support people in need to live with dignity in the community'. We work with those on the margins of society. Mental illness is common among them – but so, I have learned, is a spirit of endurance."

For Melissa, the MH101 workshop offered the opportunity to build on her already considerable knowledge of mental health issues: she has completed psychology papers at university and has 'on the job' experience at the soup kitchen.

"The MH101 workshop was great, because it reinforced much of what I had already learned, but added a new dimension of personal experience to it," says Melissa. "Having a facilitator with experience of mental illness made it all so credible – if you've been there yourself you truly, truly have that extra understanding."

"I felt endeared toward the facilitator, who had worked through their experience of mental illness and was using that in a positive way, to help and guide others."

Melissa – who works as a motivational speaker herself – believes that personal stories are always a highlight of training. "We all deal with things in different ways," says Melissa. "Having someone say 'this was the situation I encountered and this is what I did' is really powerful. It gives you ideas on how to work with people to get the best out of them."

In her day to day work at the soup kitchen, Melissa says she is constantly reminded of how vulnerable the people she works with really are – and how anyone trying to help needs to look at the bigger picture, instead of focussing on immediate behaviour.

"One incident can be the result of years of pent-up frustration," says Melissa. "The key message that I got out of MH101 was to try to see the bigger picture and don't respond negatively. Respond in a calm way, letting them know you understand that what they're experiencing at the time is their reality."

Melissa has no hesitation in recommending the MH101 course to others.

"Education is so important to understanding," she says. "The course taught good practical skills too, but it's the overall education experience that is so powerful."

"MH101 encourages people to stop and reflect. We need to do that more. Walking alongside street people, I see how much they get judged in their day to day lives. I believe that we all need education to be able to move past judgement, respond positively and assist wherever we can."

**For more on MH101, visit [www.mh101.co.nz](http://www.mh101.co.nz).**

**Recognise**

**Relate**

**Respond**