

### Hope for Life News

*We are looking forward to continuing our training, resources and initiatives in the second half of 2011. If you would like to know any more about our work or interested in training, please don't hesitate to get in contact with us.*

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**In this issue...** we are looking at mental health in regional and remote Australia. With the 2011-12 Federal Budget delivering a 10-year roadmap for mental health reform and with Treasurer Wayne Swan allocating \$2.2 billion over five years via a National Mental Health Reform package, it is hoped that mental health in regional areas of Australia will receive the boost that it so desperately requires.

This issue's feature article will look at the current state of mental health in regional Australia, the issues involved as well highlight some programs and organisations that are working hard to make a difference.

Please read our information about a new Hope for Life initiative called 'Hope for Life Champions', you may know somebody who would be interested.

We also review the book 'Against Depression' by Peter Kramer and let you know about upcoming suicide prevention & bereavement support events.

### The current state of mental health in regional Australia.

- Rates of suicide and suicide attempts are higher in rural and remote populations of Australia, with very remote regions having suicide rates more than double that of major capital cities.
- Males who live in rural and remote communities are particularly at risk with their suicide rates being 1.7-2.6 times higher than their urban counterparts. (Commonwealth of Australia, 2010).
- Evidence shows that the prevalence of depression is no different in rural communities than it is in metro communities in the city, the rates of suicides are higher in rural communities, because untreated depression is a higher risk factor for suicide

Nadine Bartholomeusz-Raymond, who is the program manager for regional communities with Beyond Blue, stated in an interview for ABS Rural that the higher rates of suicide are because of the additional stresses in rural communities, with ongoing environmental adversity - such as droughts and floods (6/5/2011).

A survey by the Queensland branch of the Australian Medical Association found that nearly 60 per cent of doctors have seen, or expect to see, a rise in mental health problems in areas where the summer floods and cyclones hit.

These depressing facts highlight the need for improved support, education and services in regional and remote Australia – not only in the area of suicide prevention, but also in mental health, which is a major contributor factor to suicidal behaviour.

### What are the key issues?

- Access to appropriate health care and mental health services in many regional and remote communities is limited meaning that many conditions go undiagnosed and untreated. In many cases the local GP is the sole provider of health care in a community meaning that there is a lot of pressure on them to have the knowledge and skills to identify signs of mental illness or suicidal tendency and then provide the appropriate treatment.
- 91% of Australia's psychiatrists have their main practice in metropolitan areas meaning that either people from regional and remote communities need to travel long distances for treatment or 'do without' (National Rural Health Alliance, 2009).
- A shortage of workers in the rural health sector often means that people are not able to be provided with the follow-up or out-patient care that they require.
- The 'ocker' male Australian culture encourages men to 'suck it up' and not be 'wimps' when confronted with adversity or difficulty. Expressing or talking about emotions and feelings is not widely accepted in the Australian culture, particularly in Australian outback/regional communities who pride themselves on being rugged, self-sufficient and tough.
- Farmers and local business owners often feel an 'obligation' to the community as the success of their business often has a significant impact on the economic state of the community (through employment, spending etc). This may result in them experiencing feelings of stress and anxiety, but also having reluctance to seek help for these feelings.
- Natural disasters such as drought, cyclones, floods, bushfires and pest infestations also contribute to mental illness and

have a very direct impact on income and wellbeing for rural Australians (National Rural Health Alliance, 2009).

- The seasonal employment nature of many regional and remote communities adds to the financial stress and social isolation felt by many people who live in these areas.
- The existence of factors such as 'suicide clusters' found in many Indigenous communities also adds to the increased rate of suicide in regional and remote Australia.

### *Hope for Life Champions*

The Hope for Life Champion Initiative is all about change at a local level and helping communities to recognise that they can make a positive difference. By enlisting the help of motivated, educated and committed people (Champions) who can communicate effectively, advocate and engage with their local community, this project aims to build the capacity of Australians to help each other.

Specifically, through the work undertaken by Hope for Life Champions, it is hoped that communities will:

- increase their awareness of issues relating to suicide and suicide bereavement support;
- create more linkages between those at risk and existing support resources;
- become more proactive and active in not only suicide prevention activities, but also in providing support to those who have lost a loved one through suicide (e.g. undertaking QPR and Hope for Life training on line); and
- improve their ability to respond appropriately to those at risk of suicide and those bereaved by suicide.

Champions are not employed on a paid basis by The Salvation Army to act in this role, but rather they look for, and create, opportunities to champion the suicide prevention cause as part of their everyday life. They may do this by offering to speak at their local school assembly, putting up posters on local notice boards, visiting community centres and other relevant organisations to talk about Hope for Life or undertaking other activities in their local community that will help to educate others about suicide prevention and bereavement support issues.

### *Why do we need Hope for Life Champions?*

Suicide can happen to anyone. Suicide crosses all boundaries including age, socio economic position, gender, ethnicity and family status and yet suicide is a preventable form of death. If people feel supported, if they have access to a listening ear, if they are given hope that tomorrow will be better, that the future can be brighter, people who are suicidal can go on to live happy, productive and fulfilling lives.

Hope for Life Champions can do all of this, and are needed in all walks of life; in schools, in the workplace, in churches, in youth groups, in sporting clubs and in all areas of the community.

- Access to violent and immediate means of death (e.g. firearms) raises the completion rates of suicide in regional and remote Australia.
- 'Gatekeepers' in regional and remote communities include community health nurses, teachers, local government personnel, sports coaches, and small business owners. Most of who have not had any training in suicide prevention or suicide bereavement support.

### *Who are Hope for Life Champions?*

Hope for Life Champions are everyday people who are passionate about suicide prevention and supporting those who have lost a loved one through the tragedy of suicide. Champions are also people who want to advocate for change at a local level and are committed and motivated enough to take action.

One of the key messages of Hope for Life is that everyone has a role to play in suicide prevention and bereavement support. The Champions initiative gives people in the community an opportunity to make a difference by engaging, educating and advocating.

Champions seek to engage others in suicide prevention and bereavement support activities. They educate people about issues and ways to help. They also advocate on behalf of those at risk, those bereaved and the Hope for Life project by building awareness and creating community linkages at the local level.

Hope for Life Champions are special people who volunteer to be a shining light of hope in their community.

### *Role of Hope for Life Champions*

Hope for Life Champions have three main elements to their role; engagement, community awareness and public education and advocacy.

**Engagement:** In order for a Champion to successfully promote change within their community they must be engaged with it. This may mean meeting new people, creating mutually beneficial networks and learning about the local community; what business exist, what social support services are available, what social and leisure activities are popular and who are the people that live there.

**Community Awareness and Public Education:** One of the biggest issues in suicide prevention and bereavement support is that many people still do not understand the issues involved or have been wrongly educated. Dispelling the myths and removing the stigma that surrounds this topic will only be done through talking about the issues, identifying the facts and sharing the stories.

**Advocacy:** Advocacy simply means encouraging change and the Hope for Life Champions are agents of change within their community. They are advocating for those who are risk of suicide (now and in the future) as well as for those who

are bereaved through suicide in the hope that through greater community engagement and improved understanding, people will be better able to reach out and help each other.

It is important to note that Champions are ambassadors for The Salvation Army and the Hope for Life project and therefore, it is important that Champions act professionally and responsibly when performing their duties as Champions.

How to become a Hope for Life Champion

Hope for life is recruiting Champions and we will provide training and resources which will equip Champions to become Agents of Hope in their local community.

For more information and to obtain a Champion application form,

**Please contact**

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### Book Review - 'Against Depression' by Peter Kramer

Kramer wrote this book after being deluged by stories of depression, depression research, and patients after he wrote 'Listening to Prozac'. While touring for this and his previous works, he would often be asked a question, "what if Van Gogh had taken prozac?" The real question he's being asked is whether depression should be cured, or whether curing depression would take away something that is an essential part of being human. In 'Against Depression' Kramer helps the reader understand exactly what depression is and what it is not; That it can affect a person's heart literally as well as figuratively. He seeks to divorce human emotions, which he celebrates, from the illness of depression by focussing on the science of the brain. Even those who have a vast knowledge of depression, personal or otherwise, will find this book a valuable educational tool.

### Key Upcoming Events

For information on these and other upcoming events please visit <http://www.livingisforeveryone.com.au/Events.html>.

**14th NSW Rural Mental Health Conference** (22 Jun-24 Jun)

**Rural & Remote Mental Health Conference 2011** (9 Aug-11 Aug)

**12th International Mental Health Conference** (24 Aug-26 Aug)

**Grief and bereavement - International Perspectives (Australian Centre for Grief & Bereavement)**

Sydney (17 & 18 October); Melbourne (20 & 21 October)

### Training in Suicide Prevention and Bereavement Support

Would you know what to do? Would you know what to say? Would you know where to go for help?

Are you interested in finding out more about Information, resources and training for those that support people who are at risk of suicide or lost a loved one to suicide? Hope for Life will help you to develop the skills, confidence and knowledge to respond to these situations.



Hope  
saves lives

**Contact Us:** W [www.suicideprevention.salvos.org.au](http://www.suicideprevention.salvos.org.au) E [admin.hopeforlife@ae.salvationarmy.org](mailto:admin.hopeforlife@ae.salvationarmy.org) P 02 9356 2120