

# Opening up about mental health...

No matter what the condition, an umbrella can support you. Local identities are holding an umbrella as a symbol to let people know it is OK to open up about mental wellbeing.

Empathy is walking beside someone without judgement, bravery is sharing without fear.

Join us on Wednesday, October 10 at 6.30am at the Jetty for the CHES Employment Umbrella Walk and let people, who feel ashamed of having this condition, know that they are supported.

Mental health does not discriminate; young or old, male or female, rich or poor, socially or culturally.

Join us in normalising this issue that affects one in five people in our community.

CHES will give 100 umbrellas to the first arrivals or bring your own brolly (BYOB).

For details call CHES on 6691 9333.



## Denise Knight

*Mayor, Coffs Harbour*  
One of my very dear friends came out of his house one day and stood naked on his tennis court ready to kill himself and his wife managed to stop him. The scary thing was none of us, not her, not any of us, had any idea. They were living in a metropolitan area, so there was lots of support available for him, not like in the regions, so I directed my main support to her. If she fell apart, who was going to help him, as he relied on her for everything

in his recovery and she was slowly wearing down. When the focus is on the patient, as it should be, everyone forgets about the carer and their needs.

We are lucky Baringa Hospital have opened their mental health unit, as it's another support service we didn't have before. It's OK to ask R U OK, but you need to make sure you hear their reply and look for the signs, particularly in young men aged 18-25 years.



## Ashleigh Gibbs,

*Marketing Manager of CHES Employment*

Due to numerous stressors (including the sudden loss of a parent) I suffered an adjustment disorder (breakdown) in 2010. In my recovery I was referred to a disability employment service (CHES). I felt mortified at being considered disabled. For the past 20 years I had travelled internationally advising multinational companies on their technology, brand and marketing strategies.

However by sharing my lived experience with those who understand I soon realised that there was nothing to be ashamed about. CHES White Collar service is great in supporting professionals like me. I take responsibility for my mental health and use my talents to normalise mental illness. Special thanks to Warwick McClelland, an exceptional clinical psychologist for people who are high functioning with mental health issues.



## Jenny Oloman,

*Manager Economic Development Unit, Coffs Harbour City Council*  
I first came in contact with mental illness in my last years of high school, when a close family member was diagnosed after a collapse and had shock treatments and so on. It caused a lot of angst and upset in our family because we were dealing with an unknown illness, so the family faced a crisis of how do you help, what do you do? We told the

person it's just an illness like any other and after treatment started they went on to lead a perfectly happy, 'normal' life. I find there is more awareness and understanding now, but still not as much as there should be. If you were diagnosed with measles you wouldn't be embarrassed, mental illness is just another disease that can be treated. You need to acknowledge it and get help as soon as you can.



## Elizabeth Ruthnam,

*CEO Baringa Private Hospital*

I have experienced and witnessed at first hand the anguish caused by anxiety disorders. Basically if you experience an anxiety disorder you will not enjoy your life. It is worth treating, you are worth helping, we all deserve to be happy. There is lots of help out there with your GP, local community psychologist, Headspace, the local public hospital or at Baringa where we have

three consulting psychiatrists and an inpatient unit.



## John Sercombe,

*owner coffsproperty, chairman of The Nationals Coffs Harbour branch*  
I lost one of my brothers to suicide resulting from divorce, at 34 years of age, in 1991. In agency practice, one of our staff was persecuted by one of our landlords' tenants until that staff member was unable to work in this industry anymore. In the political sphere, the participants are immersed in such a pressure cooker, that they and their families are on the brink as a daily experience.

Employers often work twice as many hours as their staff for very little or no return, but they have the constant pressure of knowing that if they close the business, then the families of their employees will be destitute for some time as a reflection of this action. I would like to see greater mental health support available to employers, as small businesses employ the most people in this beautiful country and there is only so much weight you can place of the back of these very small donkeys!



## Terry Allen,

*Prime TV News journalist, North Coast Football spokesperson*

I think the most significant factor for men in my age group is discovering when they turn 30, 40 or 50 is they are not what they expected to be at that age when they were younger. I know a lot of people who sit back and reflect I was going to be a millionaire and own my own house, those were my goals and instead I'm renting, working for someone else and slip

into depression. The problem is most men only have two or three close friends throughout their life and it is easy to drop off the radar. The most important thing to remember is to not isolate themselves, they must stay connected with people in their peer group and it's important to be vigilant about your friends staying connected.



## Steve Metcher,

*Salvation Army officer*  
Two close family members, who also serve our community in different ways, suffer depression. My brother is a police officer who due to the pressures of that work attempted suicide. He is fortunately alive and well today. My wife is an ordained Salvation Army minister who has clinical depression and could not possibly survive if it were not for anti-depressants. Our Wednesday night Live Free services attract many

people with addictions, scars in their hearts or with mental health problems and they have renamed the service Recovery Worship. The tragedy in mental illness is people are more terrified of what people think than of a fear of failure. If your heart is right and your motive is right, God will do more with your mistakes as you are having a go.



## David Doyle,

*C.ex Group chairman*

I ran over an anti-tank mine in Vietnam and spent nine months in tropical hospital, where it was tough and go whether I'd lose my leg, the discs in my neck are all shot and I still can't hear properly. If you suffer injuries of any description and you're a sports-loving person, you get down about not being able to chase the kids around and go paddling. My first marriage broke up because of my hospitalisation, my anxiety and inability to

cope with the situation and also because I wasn't around to help when my second son was born. I still don't go to movie theatres and other crowded areas. Mental illness is nothing to be afraid of, as everyone goes through life with a mental injury somewhere that's going to affect their outlook on life. Never be afraid to discuss it, and admit you need some help, whether from a mentor or doctor.



## Heather McKinnon,

*partner, Slater & Gordon*

My father had bipolar disorder during my childhood and was undiagnosed until the early 70s when I started high school. He had psychosis and my childhood was characterised by complete uncertainty, chaos reigned and it was like walking on eggshells. Then he formed a relationship with a brilliant psychiatrist, got treatment and went on to live a highly functional life. In the grand traditions of Freud, I left my family and fell almost immediately in

love with my first husband David Watts at university, but he was not diagnosed with bipolar until he was in his late 20s. Although he had good treatment, he self-medicated with alcohol and sadly could not be saved and he suicided in his early 30s. Since then, a local GP who specialised in mental health who linked me with a fantastic psychiatrist, who has helped me to cope. I know the intervention dad received completely transformed his and our lives and I urge people to get professional treatment early.



## Bob Payne,

*President Coffs Harbour RSL Sub-Branch*

There were 500 men killed in Vietnam and by 1987 as many had suicided on their return. When I got out of the army and went to work in civilian life I used a lot of alcohol, had a real short fuse of a temper. I was unemployable and couldn't go into a crowded supermarket, a staff lunchroom or a doctor's waiting room where there were other people.

In 1996 I started getting help – medication, counselling and psychiatric and was able to turn my life around. I've been on medication for anxiety and Post Traumatic Stress Disorder for 12 years and if I go off them, I'm swinging from the trees and watch out, Tarzan! Through the RSL sub-branch we're trying to reach all veterans – of whatever theatre – and connect them with help like the Veterans and Veterans Families Counselling Service at Lismore.



## Dion Dawes,

*Coffs Comets rugby league player, car salesman*

I felt like I was walking around with my eyes half shut, everything was dark when I first started experiencing depression just after my first child was born. It was black, that black dog they talk about. I handed in my resignation and I'm just so lucky my boss didn't accept it. Our club doctor, David Ellis has put that many stitches in my head over the years and when I told him how I was feeling he reacted so

quickly, he took all the stigma away and made it so easy that my eyes opened up and I walked out feeling a million dollars. Then he prescribed medication and I felt the change within weeks.

Act. Don't just tell people you're feeling a bit down, go and see a professional.



## David Kennedy,

*director Side-By-Side Aboriginal Consulting*

I've got mild depression and anxiety. I think they call it executive stress. When anxiety hits, everything is overwhelming, everything is too big and there is nothing you can get a grip on. I take medication, I go to the gym, I get involved in lots of groups and do my bonsais. The physical exercise is fantastic for mental health, and talking to my wife and playing with

my dogs, that helps too. If you're not feeling good about yourself, you need to talk to somebody about it.



## Geoffrey Scotford,

*actor and playgroup facilitator*

I've had internal struggles with anxiety and a fear of failure all my life and would have episodes and lose the plot. I would become completely disassociated – walking down the street singing. I didn't take all my clothes off or anything, but I'd become very disorganised trying to overcome the feelings of torture in my mind. It was a real cry for help. I had a major breakdown in 1972 and I've been on mood stabilizers or anti-depressants since then.

If you think somebody is troubled and in denial, then you need to be as close to them as they will let you be in a friend-to-friend sense.

You need to be non-judgemental, not like a person who told my friends she thought 'depression was the ultimate form of selfishness'. If things get beyond what you can do as a friend, then suggest they get professional help.



## Scotty Seccombe,

*martial arts instructor and Anzac Day parade marshal*

For many in the army, Post Traumatic Stress Disorder is not a disease, but a brain injury. PTSD, chronic depression and alcoholism are manageable once you and the people around you understand the beast. Depression affects your ability to function, your ability to cope, thinking becomes very cloudy, decision-making becomes erratic. It got to a point where I just couldn't get out of bed to face

customers. My wife and son were walking on eggshells. I thought I'm not mad, everyone else is. Once I was diagnosed, it was like I was given ammunition and knowledge as to how I could manage this beast and my wife was arming herself with information which enabled her to better manage me. Younger veterans should get a check-up and not be afraid to acknowledge the beast, because your quality of life can change dramatically.

**CHES**   
employment, vocational & support services

Coffs Harbour Office: (02) 6691 9333

### Mental Health contacts and websites

Veterans and Veterans' Family Counselling Service at Lismore: 6622 4479

Beyond Blue Info line: 1300 224 636

LifeLine: 13 11 14

Grow Peer Support: 1800 558 268

Search YouTube for:  
Coping with Depression (1/3)

Secret Life of the Manic Depressive with Stephen Fry  
Depression & Anxiety: my story



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