

Date
Subject**3 March 2011****Young Carers Program opens in Newcastle thanks to nib foundation grant**

Children of parents with a mental illness are often a neglected group of carers, but thanks to a national partnership grant from nib foundation, young carers in the Hunter now have access to much-needed mentoring and support services.

The \$500,000 grant from nib foundation has seen the establishment of the Schizophrenia Fellowship's ON FIRE support program across New South Wales, with the Newcastle program launching today.

The award-winning program provides support to young carers of a person with a mental illness through early intervention assistance, resources, education and mentoring to help them better cope with what can be a disturbing and often traumatic family circumstances.

nib foundation Chairman, Terry Lawler said the extension of the unique program into the Hunter will provide young carers, aged eight to 18 years, with access to ON FIRE activities, education and mentoring.

"Supporting young carers is one of nib foundation's focal areas so we are delighted to be able to assist the Schizophrenia Fellowship address the often forgotten needs of these young people," Mr Lawler said.

"The program is expected to have a multiplier effect, providing indirect benefits to the parent with mental illness, other carers and family members, friends, schools and the community at large," Mr Lawler added.

According to the Schizophrenia Fellowship, in 2005 there was between 21% and 23% of children living in Australian households where at least one parent had a mental illness. This equates to just over a million children nationwide.

Mental health issues are also placing increased pressure on our health system. During FY10, nib health funds paid out almost \$15 million for mental health treatment and services, an increase of 4.8% from the previous year.

Newcastle program co-ordinator, Michelle Burroughs said the ON FIRE support program will help create a better future for many young carers, while also reducing the health cost burden in Australia associated with mental illness.

"These children are themselves at risk of developing a mental illness, as well as a range of other personal issues including physical health problems, isolation, poor coping and life skills, behavioural problems and disturbances in interpersonal functioning," Mrs Burroughs said.

Recruitment of program participants and volunteers is now underway, with the first fun day to be held in April. Participants will take part in recreational and education activities such as life skills and self-confidence building exercises during the respite day.

The Newcastle program will be officially opened at 11am today at the new Carer Assist office at 5/161 Maitland Road, Mayfield.

FURTHER INFORMATION

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