

Date 15 April 2011

Subject CanTeen and nib foundation supporting Hunter youth

A new comprehensive support program for young people living with the diagnosis of a parent with cancer, or who are dealing with the loss of a parent to the disease, will be launched in Newcastle today.

A first of its kind in Australia, the CanTeen Offspring Support Program has been developed courtesy of a \$1.5 million grant from nib foundation to provide a range of support services for these young people aged 12 to 24 years.

CanTeen CEO Andrew Young, said the ongoing increase in cancer rates in Australia, combined with a lack of targeted, age-appropriate mental health support services, has created a significant need for such a program.

“Having a parent with or dying from cancer can have a devastating effect on the lives of young people. On average, young people who have a parent with cancer show considerably more psychological distress than young people who have cancer themselves,” Mr Young explained.

“In Australia today there are 15-times more young-people who have a parent diagnosed with cancer, than young cancer patients. This combined with lack of appropriate counselling and support services, shows just how important this program is to our community.”

“CanTeen is extremely thankful for nib foundation’s support in partnering with us on this very important initiative. We know it will make a real and positive difference to the lives of so many young Australians,” Mr Young added.

Over the next three years the program will provide support to more than 300 Hunter youth through the provision of a multifaceted program, such as specialised counselling service (face-to-face, telephone and online/email counselling), information resource/books and practical skills development, respite, recreation and peer support.

The Offspring Support Program will assist young people like Ashlea [22], Hailey [20] and Emmily [16], three sisters from Newcastle who have been living with cancer in their family for over a decade. Both of their parents have had cancer, and their father died after battling a brain tumour for 12 months.

As the eldest, Ashlea took on many responsibilities, from cooking the family meals to driving her father to appointments and her sisters to school.

“It’s not supposed to happen. You aren’t supposed to have to worry about leaving school early because your Dad is dying and there is no one to look after your younger sisters,” Ashlea said.

In recent years it has been widely acknowledged that for this group, even without the complication of a cancer diagnosis in the family, there is a significant lack of targeted mental health support.

Australian of the Year, Professor Patrick McGorry (a leading international researcher, clinician and advocate for the youth mental health reform agenda) referred to the 12-24 year age group as “the weakest link in the public mental health system”.

Research conducted by CanTeen, in conjunction with the University of Sydney, has found that young people who have a parent with cancer report a complex array of needs, many of which go unmet. This group has also been found to be at significantly higher risk of psychological distress. It also showed that one in two people surveyed who had a parent with cancer reported levels of psychological distress that were severe enough to merit psychological intervention.

nib foundation Chairman, Terry Lawler said the program will make a demonstrable difference to the health and wellbeing of young people having a parent with cancer.

“The Offspring Support Program represents a commitment from both organisations to address severe psychological distress among young people and provide age-appropriate responses,” Mr Lawler said.

"The multifaceted program aims to significantly improve the wellbeing, resilience and coping mechanisms of these young people, many of whom have had to leave school early to work to provide a support role for the family, meaning they have little or no time for friendships or a social life.

"nib foundation is delighted to be able to partner with CanTeen to roll-out this outstanding program that will assist young people during their time of need," Mr Lawler added.

The counselling service has also begun in two other pilot areas in Victoria and Queensland. If the program is successful, CanTeen will look to expand the program to offer a national service at the end of the three years.

Media Opportunity:

The Newcastle Offspring Support Program will be launched at **3.30pm on Friday 15 April 2011** at Carrington Place, 132 Young Street, Carrington.

FURTHER INFORMATION

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About CanTeen

CanTeen is the Australian Organisation for Young People Living with Cancer. CanTeen's Members are young people (12-24 year-olds) living with cancer, including cancer patients, brothers or sisters of cancer patients and young people with a parent or primary care giver with cancer or has died from cancer.

CanTeen provides Members with a place where they can simply be young people - away from the adult dominated environment of cancer hospitals and treatment regimes. Through its camps and programs, CanTeen encourages its Members to get involved, make friends and have fun!

In the words of our Members, the most effective form of support is from other young people in a similar situation - who have "been there, done that".

For more information on CanTeen please visit www.canteen.org.au

About nib foundation

In 2008, nib health funds established nib foundation – a not-for-profit charitable organisation that will support programs aimed at improving the health and wellbeing of all Australians.

The foundation is funded by a \$25 million donation from nib, which was raised through the issue of new shares at the time of listing nib on the Australian Securities Exchange in November 2007.

Since its establishment in October 2008, nib foundation has allocated more than \$6 million in funding of health and wellbeing initiatives.

For more information about nib foundation visit nibfoundation.com.au