

MEDIA RELEASE

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Organisation: Southern Grampians & Glenelg Primary Care Partnership

Phone: 5551 8471

Postcards help during Drought

Drought Initiative - Post-Card goes Statewide

It was a month before Christmas 2006 and the call went out.....to primary school children to send a card of hope to farmers in drought. Within 2 weeks, 9 primary schools sent 1000 post-cards to local farmers near Balmoral, Casterton, Coleraine, Hamilton and Dunkeld.

The mental health of farmers and their families is of interest to us all. Some farming families will be well resourced to manage during the drought, while others will not. The Southern Grampians and Glenelg Primary Care Partnership (PCP) is keen to ensure all farming families have information about how to look after their mental health, including assistance available from local services and via national telephone services. The PCP aims to connect with local farmers via the 'Drought post-card' initiative.

The PCP's Drought Post-card initiative started with 9 local schools sending cards to 1000 farmers. In June/July 2007, schools from across the state will send cards to 20,000 farmers, involving 15 PCPs. Our local students are again taking part from Casterton, Coleraine, Balmoral, Cavendish, Hamilton and new schools include Portland. The concept has also been adopted by Mensline Australia with a card being sent from children to their fathers in South Australia.

Rosie Rowe, Executive Officer of the PCP says "This is a simple process of the students in local primary schools drawing, pasting or painting onto a post-card. There will be no cost to the schools. Once the post-cards have been designed by the student, they will then be distributed to all local farmers."

"The card includes helpful information for the farmer such as doing something for your health everyday like ringing a friend; exercising; including other people in your day; getting off the farm for a day; and seeking health assistance" explains Mrs Rowe.

She says, "while the main aim of the initiative is to provide health information to farmers, teachers have reported the positive impact for their students. Students have not only enjoyed participating in a simple and positive way to help their community but have learnt how they can look after their own health, such as ringing a friend, being active, listening to music or enjoying a hobby."

One student writes, "Believe in anything and all your dreams will come true. Don't worry, the rain is coming. My Dad works on a farm so I know what it is like. The crops will grow and the cattle will get fat again"

Another writes "G'day mate, I know what you're going through. My Pop is going through the same thing. To get your mind off the farm, go to the beach or go out for dinner. We are thinking of you."

Teachers' reported that students found it extremely valuable to be doing something positive; it built community spirit and some schools received letters of thanks from farmers. It also reminded them to include helpful, relevant information in their school newsletters.

One teacher noted that "It allowed the students the opportunity to grasp the situation and then to do something special to help in a manner suitable for them". Another commented that "Students embraced what they could do for farmers in time of need. "

Further information about this initiative can be found at www.sggpcp.com.au