



A helping hand: Cobram Community Health's Sue Crowther and Andrea Perryman.



Learning: Frank and Grace Diaco were among those that attended the seminar.

Family program update

The benefits of a program held locally last year were highlighted in a return seminar last week.

The Sustainable Farm Families program was initially held in Cobram in May last year.

At this stage, the program was unfunded.

Since then, the program has received funding by the Department of Primary Industries and Department of Human Services and several of the like have been held around the local district.

Last Thursday, the first 'return back' seminar was held.

This day recapped what was learned a year ago, and looked at any progress those involved had made in that time.

Goals included anything from farm plans, to weight loss.

Thursday's session also discussed mental health issues, before splitting the men and women into separate groups to discuss health issues — men discussing women's issues, and vice versa.

Participant Mick Grillo said the program had highlighted means to re-evaluate his business, KNM Berries and Fruits.

"Our business produces strawberries and fruit ... but there has been a disease that

comes up through the ground that has been killing any stressed plants," Mr Grillo said.

"The heat in the soil has put some of the strawberry plants under a lot of stress — they're the ones that are being attacked by this disease ... and there is no way of controlling it."

"I realised the track I was going down was getting me deeper and deeper into debt, and when you get to that stage, you have to get out or restructure."

"I love this game — I love being able to give local residents good tasting sweet strawberries, and I wanted to be able to continue doing that."

He said following the initial seminar last year, he had downsized his operations and looked at other marketing strategies, which had included targetting more of a local market, instead of transporting his fruit to cities.

"The losses aren't as great (now) if the disease comes back," Mr Grillo said.

"I have more control over things, and I'm more hands on."

"Hopefully we will see the benefits (of these changes) in two to three years."



Just chatting: Mick Grillo and North East Health's Russell Maher.

Mr Grillo said the program also made him identify emotional changes.

"It made me wake up to the stress and pressure (I was under)."

"We do get depressed, and instead of hiding it, we need to tell someone about it," he said.

"Without this program, I

wouldn't have seen the forest for the trees."

A Katamatite Sustainable Farm Families program will be held next week (May 26 and 27) in Cobram.

For further information, contact Sue Crowthers at Cobram Community Health Centre on 5871 0900.