



Project targets stigma of farmers' higher suicide risk

THE Ripple Effect project is geared towards changing the way farmers think about mental health, according to National Centre for Farmer Health director Sue Brumby, pictured left.

"People who have had an experience of suicide — they may have been bereaved or

cared for someone — have a higher risk of suicide themselves," Ms Brumby said. "But there is a stigma around that and people don't talk about it and so the ripples are very negative."

The Ripple Effect aims to change the effect to a positive by telling people's stories.

Farmers provide messages of what has helped them, what they have learned or what actions they can take to improve their own health and wellbeing.

The postcards are anonymous and postage is prepaid.

They will be featured on the Ripple Effect website from

April or May next year.

Farmers, as an occupational group, have a suicide rate twice the general population, according to the Centre.

Ms Brumby said some of the factors contributing to the suicide rate include isolation, compounded often by slow in-

ternet connections; the workplace and the home being the one and same; and the relentless 24/7 nature of farming.

To request a postcard go to therippleeffect.com.au or phone the National Centre for Farmer Health on (03) 5551 8533.

MARGARET LINLEY

CHEERS FELLAS: The Gentlemen of Geelong organising team Mick Kramer, Andrew Morrison, David Sharp and Greg Cracknell enjoy a drink. Picture: ALISON WYND



Men's show of strength

MEN walked away from their tractors and desks yesterday in a show of support for men's mental health.

More than 170 members of the Gentlemen of Geelong gathered for the group's annual event at Flying Brick Cider House in Wallington for lunch and a chance to talk.

And, while the event might appear to be just "a day on the turps", organisers said it was so much more with funds raised going to the National Centre for Farmer Health, Headspace Geelong, Lifeline and November.

One of the founding group members, Mick Kramer, said the group's origins had been "tongue in cheek".

"The original idea was that blokes could have one day a year (to be social with each other) because their wives were having one day a week," Mr Kramer said. "We thought we could justify one day a year to get off our tractors."

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The annual event, now in its 12th year, began with a handful of farmers meeting for lunch "just before Christmas" at the Gold Diggers Hotel, another founding member David Sharp said.

"Blokes are pretty hopeless at organising themselves, it's usually the girls who do this," Mr Sharp said. "Men started inviting their friends and it grew."

Discussions between the men at the lunches would turn to marriage breakdowns and suicide and the

focus shifted to how the group members could support each other.

"The underlying thing of it is to show our support, make a day of it and put our fundraising support to men's health," said Mr Sharp, who has experienced the pain of losing a close mate to suicide.

The message coming from the group, according to Mr Kramer, is that men need to prioritise their health and talk.

"We want them to know they can let someone know either when they are struggling or when someone else is struggling, Mr Kramer said.

"We have to keep reminding each other that we have to keep looking out for each other.

"Blokes and families that have good mental health probably don't have domestic violence issues."

Veteran of a decade of annual lunches, Tim Lamb of Stonehaven said the event provided the reason for men to have conversations with

each other about their health that otherwise "no one talks about".

"It gets us talking," the farming contractor said. "It's amazing how many issues there are once you get talking."

By having a men's only event, the talk flowed more easily, according to Quambatook's Greg Knight. "Men feel more comfortable talking to men, that's why things like men's sheds work," he said.

Gentlemen of Geelong lunches have attracted guest speakers, including GPs and Lifeline representatives. Yesterday the director of the National Centre for Farmer Health, Sue Brumby, spoke of a program that encouraged farmers to share their personal stories through a postcard initiative. Last year's event raised \$20,000 with a similar amount expected this year.

FIND OUT WHAT THEY HAD TO SAY: Pages 58, 59



Gentlemen of Geelong guest speaker Sue Brumby with Andrew Morrison.