



The Schizophrenia Fellowship of NSW Inc. is a non-profit, community based organisation that is committed to improving the circumstances and welfare of people living with mental illness, their relatives and carers, and professionals working in the area

Media Release

2 July 2008

Helping Hands Receives Funding

The successful Helping Hands Program based in Nowra is set to continue after it was announced that the Schizophrenia Fellowship of NSW Inc had received a funding commitment from the South Eastern Sydney Illawarra Area Health Service for a further 12 months and a commitment to working with the Fellowship to establish a regular funding cycle for Helping Hands.

Helping Hands is a program that supports over 150 mental health consumers in the Shoalhaven area. The program relieves the pressure on local mental health staff, promotes recovery, reduces relapse amongst consumers, and helps to de-stigmatise mental illness.

The Schizophrenia Fellowship of NSW Inc took over the responsibility from the area mental health service for Helping Hands in 2003 and since that time, Helping Hands has grown and developed considerably to the current point where each week, the program sees around 75 consumers participate in an individual activity with their linked volunteer while over 100 consumers attend group activities. Helping Hands has over 60 active volunteers drawn from all sections of the local community.

Rob Ramjan, CEO, said "Helping Hands is the most cost effective recovery and community development program in NSW, supporting a large number of people with mental illness in the Shoalhaven. We are very pleased that the Area Health Service has recognised its enormous contribution by committing to its funding."

"This program costs about \$400 per consumer per annum and provides at least four hours of support per week for each person," he added.

In recent years Helping Hands has established a groundbreaking partnership with TAFE to include student placement at Helping Hands as a key part of the Mental Health Certificate IV course, thereby ensuring that they get hands on experience during their course.

Another innovation is the creation of the Community Garden in partnership with St Vincent de Paul and TAFE which provides training for consumers in horticulture as well as opportunities for all the participants to work together in the garden which has flourished under their care.

Many mental health consumers in the Nowra and Ulladulla area are benefiting from the work of Helping Hands but demand for the service continues to grow as referrals stream in.

"We look forward to working in close partnership with the area mental health service well into the future," Rob Ramjan said.

"This is a program that benefits everybody, the person with a mental illness, their carers, their local communities and of course it has financial benefit as well as human," he concluded.

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