



Media Release

15 June 2016

The Flying Doctor helps Outback families lift their Personal Performance

The idea of living on the land might seem a long way from the stresses and strains of modern life, but isolation can produce pressures of its own.

Living and working with family in hostile climatic and environmental conditions, coping with financial pressures created by drought and changing market conditions, a lack of access to health services or outside people to talk to can all exacerbate feelings of helplessness and isolation.

These pressures can build into depressive disorders and an increase in alcohol and/or substance abuse which increases the risk of physical health issues. Untreated, these symptoms can result in desperate acts, including suicide.

“This is why the mental health team at South Eastern Section of the Royal Flying Doctor Service (RFDS SE) is running *Performance is Personal*, a workshop aimed at people living in remote communities and stations,” said Judy Whitehead, acting joint-General Manager Health Services at RFDS South Eastern Section.

“For the past two years we have been bringing remote families off their properties for a two day/ one night away workshop. It looks at staying mentally well, managing stress and taking time out for yourself, as well as promoting social inclusion.”

“Although these are essential life skills, time is often a luxury that people on the land don’t have. Removing them from their home environment enables them to focus on the course and creates an outlet for any problems they might be dealing with.”

The need for such initiatives is clear given that the workshop is already over-subscribed and RFDS SE statistics from the second half of 2015 show a 16 per cent increase in patient numbers on the previous year. The 141 people seen by the mental health team (32 males and 89 females) were spread over 16 clinic locations spanning Far West New South Wales, South Western Queensland and eastern South Australia.

“The 75 new referrals is testament to the way the mental health team has been pro-actively promoting mental health and wellbeing and using both on-line media and traditional face-to-face contact to reach out to referrals and do follow-ups,” said Project Manager, Glynis Thorp.

“The use of new media like Skype, Facebook and email has helped to overcome the tyranny of distance still experienced by those on remote stations and any privacy issues people may have about coming to a clinic in person.”

“However, the 3:1 female to male ratio tells us that we still have to persuade men inured to hardship by a life on the land that it is alright to ask for help.”

The *Performance is Personal* workshop aims to give participants the skills to improve their day-to-day life by touching on communication, resilience and how to manage as a family

running a family business. The topics covered include: why your businesses' success is dependent on individual self-management, business interests vs family interests: what's the balance, being selfish vs self-care, separating people from the issues at hand, manage highly emotive states – yours and others, how to have confronting conversations and maintain relationships and well-being trumps everything. There will be optional yoga, meditation and some evening entertainment.

"We will aim to make it an enjoyable social event that gives some hard-pressed people a little breathing space and encourages them to put what they learn during the workshop into practice," said Ms Thorp.

"We see enormous resilience in the bush and we are building that capacity by giving those who live on the land the tools to help them improve communication and maintain those important relationships."

"It also gives the RFDS SE mental health team the chance to build trust and longer term relationships with the participants that will encourage them to reach out to us if they need help in the future."

In an interview with the ABC, previous workshop attendee Paul Martin from Tandou Station near Menindee said he went "...to get a few different insights into professional management, relationship management and succession planning."

Though attending the workshop was difficult, because it meant missing more than a day's work, he said it was great to see younger people there. "They're really taking things into consideration at the right time of their lives so when they get to our age they'll be much better armed to the tools to deal with this."

Workshop trainer, Jill Rigney, who grew up on the land herself, says she wants attendees to walk away knowing that "...looking after yourself is not being selfish."

Event details:

What: Performance is Personal workshop.

When: Starts 9:30am, Friday 17 June, ends 3pm, Saturday 18 June, 2016.

Where: Broken Hill Musicians Club, 276 Crystal Street, Broken Hill.

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For more information or photographs, contact:

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ABOUT THE ROYAL FLYING DOCTOR SERVICE

The not-for-profit Royal Flying Doctor Service has been taking the finest care to the furthest corners of Australia since 1928. The service provides 24 hour emergency cover to 90% of the Australian continent, via a modern fleet of specially equipped aircraft. In the past year, the South Eastern Section conducted almost 5,000 clinics, took over 6,400 telehealth calls, had over 53,500 patient contacts and transported almost 8,500 patients.

