

Margins 2 Mainstream Submission Template [397 words]

HEALTHY MINDS NETWORK

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ABSTRACT

Drought and economic hardship have had an enormous impact on the mental health and wellbeing of people living in rural and remote areas of Victoria. Take a step back in time to the years 2003 and 2004 in the Swan Hill region (north west Victoria) when the community experienced an unprecedented number of suicides...

Failed crops, inability to access sufficient water for agricultural practices and reduced demand for goods and services resulted in a community that was seriously economically and socially disadvantaged. Many people could not afford to repay their bank loans; properties were being repossessed; and families were struggling to afford the most basic of necessities such as food and petrol, let alone “luxuries” such as a new pair of shoes, sports club fees, a haircut or a ticket to the movies. Some families experienced several years in a row of no income, or very little income. From a social perspective, the community also became increasingly isolated. While farm sizes increased in order to be profitable, the size of many rural towns and services available in them decreased, meaning that traditional support networks such as neighbours and friends may have been many kilometres away. Depression was at an all time high and self-esteem at an all time low.

Fast forward to 2008; what has happened to slow this suicide rate and create a better understanding and acceptance of mental illness? Swan Hill Rural City Council and

key agencies in the community called a public meeting in response to growing concern about the suicide rate. 600 residents attended the meeting and agreed to the formation of the Healthy Minds Network, comprising of representatives from a range of community based agencies. This Network has been highly effective in:

- Increasing the awareness of mental health services and support offered in the community
- Destigmatising mental illnesses such as depression
- Establishing and promoting clear pathways to appropriate services

Some of the initiatives introduced by this “whole of community” network which have been effective in reducing the number of self-harm incidents include: men’s health nights; education sessions at sports clubs; education program in schools; development of promotional materials; and the employment of a psychologist to visit schools. The Healthy Minds concept is currently being adapted by many communities throughout Australia. Find out how the principles of the Healthy Minds Network can be adapted to suit your programs and services.

Determinants: Social Participation and Increasing Access to Economic Resources

Methodologies: 3, 4 and 5

Charter Recommendation: “That mental health and wellbeing are the responsibility of the ‘whole of the community’”