



Mallee Track Health & Community Service

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MEDIA RELEASE

16 March 2022

Local mental health support launched

The first phase of the Mallee Track Health and Community Service (MTHCS) Mental Health and Wellbeing Service is in place following the appointment of two Rural Outreach Workers (ROWs) based in Ouyen and Sea Lake.

Renae Bonica and Natarsha Hickey have been appointed to the roles and will travel throughout the catchment.

MTHCS Community and Social Support Manager Nadiene Lynch said this was a major first step in implementing the local program to support people to link with and navigate specialist mental health services.

Ms Lynch said the ROWs could walk beside and sit with people who need support with whatever is impacting their wellbeing.

“This is not counselling. It is a navigation service to help people access the right support in a timely manner. The ROWs will have strong networking and referral pathways with other services,” she said.

“There are many things that can impact wellbeing and increase a person’s susceptibility to mental illness and even suicide in remote areas. Sometimes a friendly person to talk to is all that is needed and at other times, it may be that a more specialist service is needed, but the individual may not know where to start.”

The service is available free for all ages for anyone living in the MTHCS catchment district.

Ms Lynch said the program was based on the Rural Outreach Worker model developed by Edenhope Health Service which had been generous with its support.

“This is a ground-breaking model for our region, especially in providing community-based responses for people experiencing trauma, psychological distress or risk of self-harm or suicide,” she said.

“There is a need for local advocates who are available to chat informally to anyone with worries, by phone or they can visit you at home for a confidential chat and cuppa.

“If someone needs specialist mental health services, the ROWs can help with access and following-up when people are on the road to recovery.

For interviews or further information contact Nadiene Lynch on (03) 5092 1111

“There are crisis services available to locals, but there is a clear shortage of options for preventative and after-care. It is really important for people to get help early when they need it and ongoing support for them to stay well,” she explained.

Ms Lynch said the ROWs would also have a strong role promoting health and wellbeing in the community.

Renae Bonica has worked in various roles at MTHCS for 24 years.

“I love that the scope of the ROW role is so wide and varied and is really about meeting people where they are at and not trying to fit them in a box,” she added.

Natarsha is studying mental health and community services and understands the stoicism of many rural people and how difficult it can be to reach out for help during times of hardship and trauma.

Both Renae and Natarsha have a passion for rural Victoria and understand some of the distance barriers that affect residents when accessing vital supports.

Ms Lynch said anyone struggling or feeling that they need someone to talk to can call or send a text to the Rural Outreach Workers team: Renae on 0429 090 942 or Natarsha on 0492 001 181.

For more information on the mental health program, please contact Nadiene on 5092 1111.

If this has raised issues for you, please call Lifeline on 13 11 14 or for emergency support call 000.

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