



Media statement

Date Friday 25 January 2013

Re: **Advisory committee will open up about mental illness in families**

Contact Darren Gillespie – 0434 327 804; 6213 2208

Destigmatising mental illness is one of the main objectives of a group of children and young people aged 12 to 17 years who have been appointed by the Commissioner for Children and Young People Michelle Scott as one of her 2013 advisory committees.

The group, Y2Y (Youth to Youth), is a youth development program run by Wanslea which provides support and guidance for children and young people of parents with mental illness.

As an advisory committee, Y2Y will directly contribute to the work of the Commissioner throughout 2013 by providing advice on a number of the Commissioner's projects.

They will also make a video that aims to destigmatise mental illness so that young people can speak openly about their families' experiences.

The Commissioner said Y2Y will help her better understand the challenges and needs of young people living in these circumstances.

"Y2Y members regularly speak to other children of parents with mental illness, including younger children, and this will help them in their role of advising me," Ms Scott said.

"It is very important that we hear what young people and their families say about what they require so we can incorporate their views into service design and delivery."

The Commissioner's 2011 inquiry into the mental health and wellbeing of children and young people identified children of parents with mental illness as a priority group.

"My inquiry report called for services to all children and young people, and particularly the priority groups, to be increased and better coordinated to ensure they have the best opportunity for healthy development and, if they do experience problems, receive help at the earliest possible time.

"Community child health nurses, for example, have an important role in early identification of mental health problems in parents and infants so it is vital that we continue to expand the number of nurses as our population and birth rate increases."

The Commissioner said she is pleased that the Mental Health Commission's strategic policy identified that children of parents with mental illness require specialised services.

"What is required now is additional funding for mental health services for all children and young people who are at increased risk of developing mental health problems, including children and young people of parents with mental illness.

The services children and young people require includes:

- education and information for children and young people about their parent's mental illness
- respite services for the family, particularly for children and young people who care for family members
- programs that promote and support positive mental health of children and young people, such as easy access to counselling, mentoring and financial and other support to participate in recreation and social activities
- regular health checks and other services that allow children mental health problems to be identified and treated early
- school-based programs that provide support and flexibility for children and young people in these circumstances.

Family and parent services required include:

- parenting programs specifically designed for parents with mental illness
- mental health promotion and prevention services for pregnant women and new parents
- practical assistance for the whole family during times of illness, hospitalisation and after discharge
- family counselling and support.

The Commissioner has appointed four separate advisory committees in 2013.

The other committees are:

- Katanning Senior High School Student Leadership Team
- Sacred Heart Primary School Year 6 group
- City of Rockingham Youth Advisory Council and Junior Council

ENDS

13/212