

MEDIA RELEASE

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Building Hope in Geelong

In a first for regional Victoria, Eating Disorders Victoria (EDV), in association with Deakin University, is bringing its highly regarded *Building Hope* workshop to Geelong to offer practical help and support for families caring for a loved one with an eating disorder.

The *Building Hope* workshop, run over six weeks, will be presented by Dr Genevieve Pepin and Dr Ross King from Deakin University. It aims to equip carers with the communication skills and strategies necessary for managing difficult behaviours and is based on Professor Janet Treasure's research on the motivational style of treatment. This style builds empathy by promoting understanding and reflective listening skills. It recognises the benefits of consistency, compassion and calm communication when supporting someone with an eating disorder.

The devastating impact of an eating disorder does not stop with the person directly affected; close friends and family members often find themselves overwhelmed by the barrage of emotions associated with an eating disorder, leaving them starved of hope and sanity.

According to EDV's Family Support Officer Helen Franks, "Families are confronted on a daily basis with the physical appearance of a person with an eating disorder, as well as the mood swings and withdrawal from family members, activities and meal times."

"It can be a stressful task to try to maintain a level of normality while attempting to manage the impact of the illness on other family members and deal with feelings of stress and the perceived loss of a child's future," said Ms Franks.

Evidence indicates that those closest to a person with an eating disorder are fundamental to the recovery process. Having overcome anorexia, Emilie believes the unfailing support of her family was a key factor in her recovery. She said, "I could never have recovered without the support of my family. I can't believe how much they still loved me, and saw through my behaviour and appearance." Emilie urges carers to remember, "Although it may seem as if you have lost your loved one to the disorder, they are still themselves, somewhere."

Faye Hayman, a Family/ Carer Project worker in regional Victoria, believes that it is imperative that carers are provided with the support, encouragement and coping skills necessary to bring about positive change. "If left unsupported, carers are susceptible to stress related disorders including depression and anxiety," said Ms Hayman.

While there are successful services available to those with eating disorders in Geelong, carers are left at a disadvantage due to the limited resources designed specifically for them.

"Carers in rural areas are isolated both geographically and socially. There is still a stigma attached to mental illness, including eating disorders. This can add to the stress of carers living in rural areas as they don't have the same option of anonymity as those in metropolitan areas," said Ms Hayman.

Isolation may prevent carers from seeking the help they need. Workshops are designed to decrease isolation and give carers hope. Carers are able to meet others who are going through similar struggles, and receive support and encouragement.

According to a previous *Building Hope* workshop participant, "Talking to other carers who are coping with similar problems and knowing that we are not alone, lightens the load. We need more of these services."

EDV Family Support Officer Helen Franks advises parents, "You are not the cause of your child's illness and don't need to have all the solutions or the ability to fix any situation. *Building Hope* will demonstrate the benefits of being able to take a step back and reflect on what is happening and help you believe in yourself to be a support for your loved one."

Building Hope commences Tuesday 7 July 2009 at Deakin University, Meeting Room, Waterfront Campus, 1 Gheringhap Street, Geelong from 7pm to 9pm (registration at 6.45 pm). Cost is \$30 per person for the six week program. **To register, call Leigh at Eating Disorders Victoria, 03 9885 6563.**

Eating Disorder Victoria's Tips for Carers

- **Encourage the person to seek professional help.** Overcoming an eating disorder can be very difficult without assistance, so accessing professional help is an important goal.
- **Encourage the person to recognise their skills and attributes.** Use your knowledge of the person to encourage them to see the positive effects change can bring and to see the benefits of life without an eating disorder.
- **Try to keep communication positive and open.** The person with the eating disorder is already likely to be over focused on food and weight issues.
- **Mealtimes should not become a battle ground.** Frustrations and emotions need to be expressed, but not at meal times; this is already likely to be a difficult time.
- **Accept limitations and responsibilities.** The support and encouragement of family and friends is vital, however, it is the person with the eating disorder's responsibility to take the necessary steps towards recovery.
- **Separate the person from the disorder.** Remind yourself that the person's behaviour is often more of a symptom of the eating disorder than a reflection of their character.

For further information:

Megan O'Connor, Communications Officer, Eating Disorders Victoria 03) 9885 6563 or 0409 948 049

About Eating Disorders Victoria

Eating Disorders Victoria is Victoria's foremost eating disorder charity and the primary source of support, information, community education and advocacy for people with eating disorders and their families in Victoria.

Support services are free and confidential and include the **Eating Disorders Helpline 1300 550 236**, on-line Chat Room and Message Board, confidential support groups and education programs.