

## Building Hope in Ballarat

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

The *Building Hope* workshop, will be presented by EDV's Family Support Officer Helen Franks and Dr Ross King, psychologist and lecturer with Deakin University. It aims to equip carers with the communication skills and strategies necessary for managing difficult behaviours, and is based on internationally recognised research. The workshop program aims to build empathy by promoting understanding and reflective listening skills. Participants will also learn coping skills, and will gain practice in providing 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.

According to EDV's Family Support Officer Helen Franks, 'On a daily basis families are having to cope with their own confusion and frustration, their lack of understanding of what their child or partner is experiencing, and the mood swings and withdrawal of their loved one from family 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 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.'

Nola Kervarec, Carer Respite Centre Support Worker at Carer's Choice in Ballarat, 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 Kervarec.

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

A support group for family and friends is held on the second Thursday of each month at the Ballarat Community Health Centre, Cnr Queen Street and Dyte Parade, Ballarat (the old Queen Street Primary School) from 7pm. Nola Kervarec is the group convenor. For more information please contact Nola on Ph: 53 337 104 or Email: [nolaK@bhs.org.au](mailto:nolaK@bhs.org.au)

'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.

The fear of judgement and further isolation may prevent carers from seeking the help they desperately require. *Building Hope* workshops are designed to decrease isolation and loneliness and, most importantly, to give carers **hope**. Here, carers are able to meet others who are empathetic with their journey and 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's 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 Thursday 29 October 2009 at Ballarat Health Service, Education Centre, Drummond Street North, Ballarat from 6.30pm to 8.30pm (registration at 6.15pm). 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**

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### **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.