

NEWS RELEASE

Rural Australians urged to 'Help a Mate' to combat mental illness

Imagine you got a call in the middle of the night from a friend or colleague who told you that they were about to end their life.

Would you know how to respond? Noel Trevaskis was confronted with this very issue. Luckily Noel knew what to do and his response helped to save the life of a farmer.

Noel, an Area Sales Manager with Incitec Pivot Fertilisers in South East NSW, is helping to lead a new program across rural Australia designed to help rural communities identify the signs of mental illness and arm them with the tools to help.

Called 'Help a Mate' the program is being launched in October by Incitec Pivot Fertilisers in conjunction with Brisbane psychologist Dr Chris Day. The program will be an online tool kit hosted on the recently launched Farmer Community website. The program has already received support from 2010 Australian of the Year and mental health ambassador Professor Patrick McGorry.

Noel himself battled depression about 25 years ago and attempted to take his own life on more than one occasion.

"The reason I am so passionate about it is that I suffered from depression myself about 25 years ago but at the time I didn't know what was happening to me," he said.

With the support of his family and friends Noel was able to seek help and after seeing the affect that mental illness was having in rural communities he decided to speak out in order to help others.

"I decided to start telling my story to tell people that it is ok to start talking about depression and mental illness," Noel said.

"Men in rural communities are sometimes reluctant to seek help or are unsure where to seek help from."

The Help a Mate program is designed to not only encourage people to seek help themselves but also to provide family and friends access to tools to help when they can see that someone close to them is suffering.

The tool kit includes checklists, videos and a question and answer forum. Dr Day, a clinical psychologist, executive coach, author and public speaker on psychological issues has provided her expertise in defining the resources.

"The forum will be a unique way that a person can anonymously communicate with a trained psychologist meaning that distance to services and geographical isolation are no longer a barrier to help," Noel said.