

Help for carers of ill

Health | Paige Mason

SERVICES are often provided for people suffering mental illness, but two initiatives in Epping aim to also help those who care for their family members.

The Association of Relatives and Friends of the Emotionally and Mentally Ill (ARAFEMI) and the Northern Area Mental Health Service (NAMHS) launched the Caring Together Peer Support Program Phase Two evaluation and the Keeping in Touch with Your Children Menu last Friday.

ARAFEMI executive director, Frances Sanders, said Caring Together aimed to increase carer support because becoming a carer could be a "bewildering and frightening time for family members".

The project, a first in Whittlesea, provides support to people in the early stages of mental illness to help them avoid becoming more unwell.

"People were presenting in emergency or psychiatric and not linking with support services," Ms Sanders said.

Support workers aim to target first-time carers, with research finding half suffer depression and become isolated.

"In somewhere like Whittlesea, distance can be a problem so isolation is



Frances Sanders (front left), Angela Obradovic, Robyn Humphries, Mary Tsourdalakis and Sabin Fernbacher back carers help. N20WP820

greater," she said. The project provides somewhere where carers can be listened to and supported.

A peer support worker is based at The Northern Hospital's Northern Psychiatric Unit.

The Keeping in Touch with Your Children Menu aims to provide ways for parents who are admitted to a psychiatric unit to stay connected with their children to help their recovery and promote family wellbeing.

Phase two evaluation of the Caring Together program found there was strong support for peer mentoring from carers, community and the mental health sector.

"Results indicate that positioning a carer at critical points of contact with mental health support provided early access to information and support," Ms Sanders said.

► For information, phone the carer helpline on 1300 550 265.

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