

21 June 2011

## MEDIA RELEASE

### Giving voice to peer support in mental health

The value of peer support services in assisting Victorians living with or caring for people with a wide range of mental health issues has been captured in a ground breaking Charter and the development of the Centre of Excellence Peer Support, launched today by Dr Rhonda Galbally AO.

The online Centre of Excellence provides a single resource for information, advice, research and support on peer-mentor models to mental health organisations that embark on running peer support services.

Funded by the William Buckland Foundation, this project also provides a dedicated help and information line and enhanced coaching, training and mentorship to support individuals and organisations in adopting peer support in their service provision.

The Charter of Peer Support, written by and for people with the lived experience of mental health issues, advocates for the inclusion of peer support in service provision by government and not-for-profit providers in the mental health field.

“The grass roots Peer Support model has been underutilised and undervalued in the past yet it has played an important role in the support of individuals who have been impacted by events, incidents or issues that have disrupted their lives and wellbeing,” Dr Galbally said. “It’s the first time I have seen the value of peer support clearly articulated and documented in this way.”

The benefits of being able to discuss issues with people who’ve lived similar experiences is the hallmark of Peer Support and is reflected in both the Charter and the information on the Centre of Excellence website [www.peersupportvic.org](http://www.peersupportvic.org).

The Charter includes personal stories from people who have used peer support to recover, gain confidence or overcome issues like social isolation.

Both initiatives aim to help policy makers and service providers understand and appreciate the power of peer support in preventing escalation of mental health issues.

The development of these tools engaged participants of seven specialist state-wide peer support organisations: ARAFEMI, ADEC, Anxiety Recovery Centre Victoria, Eating Disorders Association of Victoria, GROW, PANDA and The Compassionate Friends. These peer support organisations collectively have over 220 years’ experience of providing core, grass roots peer support services.

**For more information or interviews, please contact Ali Morrow on 0419 631 626. Photo opportunities and a case study interview are available.**



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## **What is Peer Support?**

*Peer support services follow the belief that individuals who have lived experience of life issues such as mental health, and/or a life-changing event, an addiction or problem behaviour, can better relate to other individuals trying to deal with similar issues, than those who have not had that experience.*

### **Case study:**

*Tony lost his youngest daughter to suicide in 2005. "Since that time I seem to have become enmeshed in a journey that seeks understanding and healing, not only for me but with and for others who have suffered loss... I have encountered some wonderful support and guidance, most of which has come from 'fellow travellers' who share and understand my lived experience. My own coping has much more to do with this type of support than any other form of help, including professional intervention. I believe it to be extremely important to recognise the value of peer support; the healing power inherent in peer support connections and the crucial protective role that ongoing peer support networks provide."*

ENDS



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