

JOINT MEDIA RELEASE

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NSW FAMILIES AFFECTED BY DROUGHT CONTINUE TO RECEIVE ASSISTANCE

Family Relationship Services Australia (FRSA) and Centacare Bathurst jointly welcome the Federal Government's continued investment in support for families affected by drought, as announced in the Federal Budget last week. This funding supports 25 Family Support Drought Response Teams to continue providing social and emotional counselling to families and ensure they get the services they need.

"The Drought Response Teams have been an excellent innovation in the way that family relationship services are delivered. Support is often provided on-farm, by a qualified counsellor who can respond on the spot to people experiencing stress, anxiety, depression or isolation. A range of flexible support options can be offered, often involving collaboration between local service providers", said Samantha Page, FRSA Executive Director.

"Centacare Bathurst welcomes the Federal Government's decision to extend the funding for drought affected families. In addition to counselling services, the Centacare Drought Response Team offers a number of programs to assist drought-affected families and communities in the Central West NSW", said Robert George, Centacare Bathurst Director.

The following examples of the collaborative work undertaken by Drought Response teams have been provided by Centacare Bathurst:

- Centacare Bathurst produced and distributed a DVD "Taking Heart" which provided information about how to survive in hard times and depicted farming couples discussing the highs and lows of being on the land and the impact of their stress on their relationship. Around 3000 packs were distributed to farmers at the 'front' gate, through field days and local community service agencies. The packs contained the DVD plus information on services available to farming families. The 'Counselling Vouchers' in these packs were well received, prompting farmers to seek assistance.
- Public forums were held across the region with guest speakers like Craig Hamilton who spoke about depression and mental illnesses and Celia Lashlie, who spoke about bringing up boys and men's issues. Over 2000 people attended these forums.
- Centacare Bathurst recognised the impact that stories of 'loss' can have on financial institutions where many staff have to deal with heart breaking stories or decisions. Bank staff were provided with staff training on 'what do I say' to clients in hard times.
- Christmas time was made more enjoyable by the Drought Teams 3 week school holiday program. This activity 'filled the gap' for many children who would have been forced to spend time at home because of financial constraints. The program provided different activities each day, which ranged from pottery making to bush walks and cooking the ever-popular damper over the open fire.

"The team is linking up many people- such as small business operators- who experience the domino effect of the prolonged drought to services which can assist them. The recovery process is long and Centacare commends the government's continued commitment to these communities".

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FRSA is the national peak body for over 140 family relationship and support service providers, operating in more than 600 locations across Australia. For more information visit www.frsa.org.au. Relationships Australia provides services from over 200 outlets across all states and territories of Australia. For more information visit www.relationships.com.au