

Alison Fairleigh

Alison is a mental health consumer advocate and avid user of social media, who lives in the abundant agricultural region of the Burdekin in north Queensland. In September 2008, while Alison was working as Student Services Manager at the Burdekin Campus of the Australian Agricultural College, she was closely affected by the loss of three local men to suicide within the space of three weeks.

Determined to develop a better understanding of the issues surrounding suicide and the effect it has on rural communities, Alison became a volunteer team leader with the local CORES (Community Response to Eliminating Suicide) Program to help educate local people on how to recognise the signs of someone who may be contemplating suicide. From her involvement in this program, Alison began to see the powerful impact negative perceptions about agriculture and farming have on rural people and decided that she could do something about this.

Through the popular medium of social media, Alison created a stage for rural advocacy: co-founding 'RuralMH' in 2010—a platform aimed at raising awareness of mental health issues in rural communities; in 2011 forming 'Farming is the New Black'—aimed at bringing sexy back to Australian agriculture; and founding the 'Great Cafe Challenge' in 2012—a campaign that aims to bring rural and urban communities closer together by asking cafes across Australia to carry weekly rural newspapers for their customers to read.

In January 2012, Alison began work with the Mental Illness Fellowship of NQ Inc. where she is currently the North Qld Regional Coordinator for 'Living Proof'—a mental illness education program reaching into rural and regional schools to help reduce stigma and discrimination; improve mental health knowledge and literacy; encourage early help seeking behaviour; and support individual and community recovery.

