Welcome to the second edition of the beyondblue Rural Womens Bulletin.
This issue features more stories about the extraordinary lives of inspiring women living and working in rural, remote and regional Australia. We received great feedback on our first edition, thank you.
Continued on page two.

In this edition

- Coping with the financial crisis
- Award-winning musician Melinda Schneider
- Meet the woman behind the Mungindi Music Festival
Continued from page one.

The continuing drought, bushfires and floods, combined with the effects of the financial crisis, has not made this summer and the start to 2009 an easy time. The words of Dorothea Mackellar still ring true: I love a sunburnt country … of droughts and flooding rains … for flood and fire and famine…. her beauty and her terror … the wide brown land for me!

Our thoughts and best wishes go out to all those affected by the disasters and beyondblue is now working with the rebuilding agencies, providing practical support to many communities.

beyondblue recently released an envelope-sized information card – Emotional responses after a natural disaster – designed to assist anyone affected by the recent fires and floods. It lists the normal reactions following a traumatic event and signs that may indicate a person should seek professional help. The card includes helpful phone numbers and website addresses. It is available for download from our website or by calling our information line and will be distributed to areas directly affected by natural disasters.

As beyondblue is now well into its ninth year, since establishment in October 2000, this is an appropriate opportunity to thank the women – and men – who have helped us to raise awareness of depression and its impact in rural, remote and regional areas.

Over the past 18 months, beyondblue has worked in partnership with the Australian General Practice Network and 43 Divisions of General Practice in New South Wales, South Australia, Queensland and Victoria, on the Mental Health in Drought-affected Communities initiative funded by the Department of Health and Ageing. We are proud to be involved in this important initiative, which has improved attitudes and understanding of mental health issues in rural communities impacted by the ongoing drought.

Help beyondblue to address depression and anxiety in your community by sharing information or by ordering free resources. You can order online at www.beyondblue.org.au or call the information line on 1300 22 4636.

CEO

“Your support is incredibly important and is changing lives. If it’s by having a chat to your friends, family and neighbours about how they’re managing, or spreading the word about depression, anxiety and beyondblue – it all makes a difference.”

Editorial Contacts

If you would like to submit a story for consideration in the next edition of the beyondblue Rural Womens Bulletin, please contact Jane Gardner at jane.gardner@beyondblue.org.au or call 03 9810 6100.
ELAINE DUNN

Elaine Dunn has been a Community Support Worker for the Ballarat and District Division of General Practice since August 2008. Somehow or other, she works four days a week and with her husband, Robert, runs three farms across 1,600 acres near Lake Burrumbeet – 20 minutes west of Ballarat. They farm 900 acres of wheat, oats and barley and look after up to 6,000 Merino and cross-bred sheep. The couple also has three children who share their love of the great outdoors – Taylor, 11, Sam, 9 and Olivia, 8.

Don’t make the mistake of asking what a typical day involves for Elaine Dunn – there isn’t one.

At any given time, she may be organising mental health seminars, gathering suicide prevention resources, counselling farmers, helping shear sheep, rounding up her ‘outdoorsy’ kids, doing repairs around the farm or reading up on drought policy or best farming practice. A long-time member of her community, Elaine knows what it’s like to feel the flame of optimism flicker and wane with another rainless day and an imminent, bank-interest-payment deadline.

In October 2006, as the drought reached its peak, the Dunn family had no choice but to sell 1,000 of their Merinos for a “pittance”. They had neither the water nor grain to keep them alive and the sheep sold for $2 each. “We had no water,” she said. “It was so hard to tell our children that we’d have to cart water every day because there is no water and the sheep are dying,” she said. “Over the past couple of years, I watched my husband struggle and saw the enthusiasm and fun drain out of him. I was so anxious and focused on him that I didn’t realise I was very stressed as well.”

Fortunately, things are looking up for the Dunn family this year because enough rain fell at the start of summer to sustain their crops. Elaine’s role as a Community Support Worker allows her to connect with people in her community to talk about mental health issues before they get serious.

“One of the towns I am working in has experienced a number of suicide tragedies recently. The people in this town are really passionate about getting more seminars on mental health happening. Some communities are passionate and others are more conservative.”

Elaine says demand for beyondblue resources she keeps in stock is increasing week-by-week.

beyondblue Rural Assistance Kits can be ordered via the beyondblue website www.beyondblue.org.au or on (03) 9810 6100.

“A lot of people don’t realise that it’s okay to ask questions and it’s okay to talk about depression.”
Elizabeth Clark is the immediate Past State President of the Country Women’s Association in Tasmania. She has lived her entire 61 years on a 35-hectare sheep farm, in Cressy, in the northern midlands of Tasmania. Elizabeth still sits on various drought advisory boards and regularly attends beyondblue workshops held in Tasmania to address issues of depression associated with the crippling drought.

When Elizabeth’s mother passed away in 1986, she formed a partnership with her sister and they took over the day-to-day running of the family farm. At first, it was daunting, but with time, confronting the trials and tribulations of life on the land became second nature.

“You come up against challenges every time you go outside the door,” she said. “You might find sheep that have to be attended to and then you might find a broken fence or your equipment might break down.

“I have learned to cope with these problems and not get stressed. As I’ve become older, I’ve realised I have to stay calm because if I don’t, my blood pressure goes up and I get headaches.”

The year she and her sister took over ownership of the farm, Elizabeth was diagnosed with breast cancer. In the 1980s, treatment options were limited and Elizabeth had a double mastectomy.

While Elizabeth didn’t experience depression after her diagnosis, she is aware of how easily it could develop. “I’m absolutely thrilled beyondblue has partnered with the Breast Cancer Network Australia to produce important information and let women who are dealing with a diagnosis know that help is available, because the initial shock of breast cancer can really frighten you,” she said.

Despite her own battles, over the years, Elizabeth has seen depression touch her community as a result of pressures associated with drought, financial difficulties or relationship breakdowns.

“There have been a lot of changes over the years. Within the CWA branch where I live, one of our member’s sons has depression and it’s come about through the drought. The area he lives in has been in drought for so many years now. His mother said he goes to bed and wakes up and looks out the window and it’s still there, it does not go away.

“If anyone has health problems they need to get on to it straight away and if they think they’ve got depression, I would suggest they go to the beyondblue website to access information about what help is available.”

beyondblue and The Breast Cancer Network Australia have produced a fact sheet on depression for women with breast cancer, which is available from beyondblue website, or can be obtained by calling the info line 1300 22 4636.
In 2004, morale in Mungindi was at an all-time low. Businesses were shutting their doors and the serious impact of the 2002/03 drought was hitting home. A steady decline in population and services left many of the 600 residents fearing their community would become a ghost town.

Margaret, who has lived in Mungindi for 23 years, was moved by the resilience of the townsfolk. With a team of 20 volunteers, Margaret organised a music festival to lift their spirits. This was no small feat considering they could not pay the acts and the town has only one motel with six rooms and no public transport from outlying centres. Despite this, 350 musicians donated their time and talent to the festival, which attracted 700 people.

Since then, the music festival has flourished and is now held every two years. What’s truly extraordinary, however, is what grew within the Mungindi community after the bands left town. An impressive contingent of residents began to make their own music. Margaret, 49, voluntarily teaches music to a dozen adults, some of whom were experiencing depression.

“Making music in a group is a great way to re-enter the community,” she says. “It also involves practice and something else to concentrate on rather than their worries. Then there’s the great fun of playing together,” she said. “One of the women who comes along to play says, quite openly, that she was a ‘shut-in’ on her own farm because she had been through some family trauma, but with music, she was able to re-establish herself.

“I think sometimes women don’t pursue their own strengths. We can be defined too much by the role we’re in. Being a farmer’s wife can feel like it’s everything, but sometimes that can’t bring us the happiness we’re looking for, so we need to find our own agenda.”

Margaret doesn’t profess to be curing the ills of her community and is the first to say there is no ‘silver-bullet’ for depression and mental health problems, but she knows what tough times feel like and is applying the same principles that worked for her to her own community.

“I’ve had several bouts of depression over the years. I had to make this incredible adjustment going from the city to the country. Suddenly, at one point, I had small children and was living on an isolated farm. I think, like many people, I felt that lack of joy, a lower level of functioning and I wasn’t coping. I was only just surviving and I had to function because I had children. In the last few years, my daughter got sick with a serious illness and my mother died and I was alone on the farm because we’ve had a really tough time financially. My husband goes away in a drought to work. Last time, he was away for about 18 months. We needed the money and I was here on my own, managing the farm.

“Now they’re talking about recession and an economic depression, which can’t be helpful to people’s outlook and people get frightened of the future rather than looking forward to it.

“I think the amount of depression in farming men is epidemic. Women will talk about it whereas men won’t, which is particularly true in conservative farming areas. But, I do think it’s improving because of the work beyondblue is doing to raise awareness.”


Read more about beyondblue’s Don’t Beat About the Bush! campaign in rural, remote and regional Australia by visiting www.beyondblue.org.au A free DVD on depression in farming communities is also available for order from the website or by calling the information line 1300 22 4636.
Monique Rolfe lives on an old dairy farm named ‘Oliopa’ in Haden, QLD. She is slowly but surely building a cattle stud. The property came with an organic olive farm when she bought it. Monique lives with her beloved Brahman Steer Ginger, Smithfield Blue Bella, Kelpie/Red Jack, her partner Chad and his Collie Higgins. She has worked in the financial services industry for the past decade.

Eight years ago, Monique threw out her business suit and waved goodbye to the bright lights of the city. She married a farmer and suddenly found herself living on a dairy and cattle farm on the outskirts of Brisbane.

Monique had gone from living in Brisbane, Hawaii, San Diego, and Portugal and then Samford and Dayboro on the outskirts of Brisbane, to Haden - Queensland, with a population of 150. Country life was never going to be easy for a city girl, but then, Monique found herself alone in a country town with a divorce to contend with.

“I have been here for three years by myself and at first it was daunting being in a town I didn’t know. I didn’t know then, but looking back, I think I may have been depressed. It was a very stressful time – my best friend died and I was going through my divorce at the same time.”

Monique says while finding mental health services in her area may be difficult, farmers who are used to using the internet to keep up with general farming technology can also use it to access information on available mental health services.

“Most of the time the farmers don’t talk about much except the weather and local news, but the truth is that the drought, along with the financial crisis, is having a big impact on farming families. A lot of farms are being sold and some farmers have large debts. Family relationships are straining because major decisions have to be made and a lot of people out here work without income. It’s a time when families really need to come together and build on their strengths.”

Monique had gone from living in Brisbane, Hawaii, San Diego, and Portugal and then Samford and Dayboro on the outskirts of Brisbane, to Haden - Queensland, with a population of 150. Country life was never going to be easy for a city girl, but then, Monique found herself alone in a country town with a divorce to contend with.

“I have been here for three years by myself and at first it was daunting being in a town I didn’t know. I didn’t know then, but looking back, I think I may have been depressed. It was a very stressful time – my best friend died and I was going through my divorce at the same time.”

To see what health services are available in your area, go to the beyondblue website and click on Find a Doctor or Mental Health Practitioner or call the info line.
“We need to get the message out there that depression is not something to be ashamed of – it’s a part of life, an illness that can be diagnosed. It’s not something you’re imagining and you can’t just have a beer and get over it.”

MELINDA SCHNEIDER

Multi award-winning country music singer Melinda Schneider chose 2008 as her year to begin raising awareness of depression. Melinda has had depression and has been through her fair share of tough times – losing her dad to cancer six years ago and struggling through a complicated divorce after 10 years of marriage. She talks about the issues she has come across while on tour in country Australia.

“As I tour around regional Australia, I get to see some wonderful places and meet some great people. The effects of drought have been devastating, not just physically on the land – but emotionally as well. Women in the country are incredibly strong and are real survivors. People who live in these areas don’t complain much. They’re pretty tough and are good at handling whatever challenges come their way.

I think what beyondblue is doing in those areas is wonderful and it has become a very well-known and much-needed organisation. I have friends who have been clinically depressed and have needed medication. It’s a really debilitating illness and it seems to be becoming more common.

“I want to help get the word out there, that depression is real and if you get the right treatment, it can be beaten.”

For more information on Melinda Schneider’s touring schedule visit www.melindaschneider.com

beyondblue’s interactive Rural Assistance Information Network (RAIN) map is an online resource that lets country people see at a glance the drought-related services available in their region. Go to the beyondblue website and click Get Help, then Rural Assistance Information Network (RAIN) map link.
“Someone asked me how I manage the health and wellbeing of my family and I had to laugh. The answer is: easily, but how do they manage the health and wellbeing of me?”

HEATHER ALLEN

Heather Allen manages the finances for a grain farm near the tiny town of Yuna in Western Australia. She runs the property with her husband Peter and their son, aged 30. Two years of extreme drought has battered their community, but their sense of spirit is stronger than ever. In such isolated conditions, the women in the community have found company and support through the local CWA.

Farming life shouldn’t have come as a shock to Heather, who was born in a remote mining community in Kalgoorlie in Western Australia and raised in the country town of Bullfinch nearby. However, nothing prepared her for the isolation of life on a 4,600 acre property in Northampton Shire. When she moved onto her husband Peter’s farm in 1975, suddenly she was cut off from the world around her – with no power for the first few months, no phone and no near neighbours.

She says 34 years later, life out in the ‘Never Never’ is still tough, but the women in her tiny community have found comfort and companionship through the Yuna Country Women’s Association. Isolation and the ongoing impact of severe drought in 2006/07 has caused hardship for many families in the Northampton Shire. In Heather’s community, many women were left by themselves at the peak of the drought.

“During the droughts, some men went away to the mines. Suddenly, women were living in isolated situations with young children because the men needed to make an income to support the family. I know they do it in the city as well, but in the city you’ve got neighbours right next door – out here, you can be left with children and no one around for kilometres,” she said.

Even when the men are around, women in the area are expected to maintain the status quo and protect the family unit, but have little support for themselves, she says.

If your husband comes in with problems or can’t carry the load of the drought or financial pressures, or the crop is dying, you’re there for him, but who do you turn to at the end of the day?”

She said while there was no doubt the recent drought had caused mental health problems in her community, the biggest problem is not stigma – but access to services.

“If you’re in Geraldton, there is a mental health service, but if you have to drive 100kms to get help and you’re really depressed, it’s probably really hard. Distance is a big problem.”

To respond to the ongoing pressure of the drought and lack of access to services, the Yuna CWA organised a ‘mental health first aid’ workshop in 2007. Heather and around 18 other community members attended. She says since the workshop, the stigma surrounding depression in the community has decreased.

“It’s not the easiest thing to approach a person and tell them they need to go and see someone, but I think mental health issues are becoming more accepted in our community after two years of drought. Most people here have seen someone go down with depression and in many cases, it’s your neighbour or your best friend and not just women, it’s the men as well. When it happens so close to home, people tend to accept that it can happen to anyone.

“We’re very lucky we have a good CWA in Yuna. They also organised a women’s weekend at Horrocks Beach mid-last year for those of us affected by drought. It was truly appreciated and gave us time out to relax and rest.”

If you would like to organise a community forum on depression in your town, order the beyondblue brochure How to Organise a Community Forum from the info line or website.
“We are currently seeing a large number of marriage breakdowns. There is no doubt the financial pressure obviously contributes to that. For example, a two million dollar debt is almost insurmountable, but when you can’t pay your electricity and gas bills and can’t put food on the table, that has an instant impact.”

Kay Matthias

Kay Matthias is the General Manager of the Rural Financial Counselling Service in South Australia. She lives in Adelaide, but spends her weekends on a property in the Clare Valley, right next door to where she grew up, with her husband and their Cashmere goats. Kay is a country girl at heart and spent many years breeding Jersey cattle.

South Australia has the unfortunate title of being the only state in Australia to be completely drought-declared. While some areas of the state have adapted after so many years of no rain, farmers in the south-east of the state are finding it hard to deal with their first drought in living memory.

The Rural Financial Counselling Service SA provides free financial analysis for farmers struggling to make ends meet. Kay, who has been General Manager of the service for two years, says that in the course of their work, they come across clients who are experiencing mental health problems because of the adverse conditions.

“A simple scenario is that we arrive at the property, have a look around to see what the general condition of the farm is and look for anything we can use as a topic of conversation to make the client feel at ease. The kitchen table is usually our office and we talk about all sorts of things – the business, the farm, the weather,” Kay said.

“One of the key things we pick up on is whether there’s any depression. Our counsellors – whilst they don’t provide a mental health service – are very skilled at identifying the issue.

“Often the wife has to go away and work off the farm. They live away during the week and come home at weekends and that adds a huge burden because the father is left at home to look after the children as well as the farm. Conversely, there are lots of men who go away to work in the mining industry which has the same implications.”

The service has had a 62 per cent increase in clients over the past 12 months, with increased debt levels. Kay believes financial pressure and depression often go hand-in-hand.

“We’ve seen a huge increase in depression as well, but interestingly our clients are actually prepared to talk about it now – particularly the men. We think it may be because there are so many more people in a similar situation, they’re more open about it.”

To address the high rate of depression in country South Australia, the Rural Financial Counselling Service formed a partnership in 2007 with Country Health SA. If the client chooses, a mental health professional accompanies the financial counsellor to the consultation. The two work in tandem to address both issues.

If the client doesn’t wish to take advantage of that service, the financial counsellors are equipped with beyondblue packs and the free self-help book produced by beyondblue called Taking Care of Yourself and Your Family.

Kay says the book is an excellent resource and has been well-received, particularly by women.

“We’ve had good feedback about the book, usually from a wife who says ‘I leave it around the house where I know my husband will see it and often I see him flipping through it’.

“The other interesting thing is that a lot of people are actually receiving treatment for depression which is just wonderful. They are also sharing their stories with other men. I’ve been to forums where young men have stood up and said that they have suffered from depression – beyondblue is often mentioned as the place they sought help from.”

To contact the RFCS SA call 1800 836 211 or visit the website www.rfcssa.org.au

To order a free copy of the book Taking Care of Yourself and Your Family call the beyondblue info line on 1300 22 4636 or visit www.beyondblue.org.au
CLARE SHANN

Clare Shann is a psychologist and beyondblue’s Acting Deputy CEO.

Clare oversaw the production of beyondblue’s new resource – Taking Care of Yourself After Retrenchment or Financial Loss. She explains why the booklet was created.

Over the past six months, we have heard an increasing number of anecdotal reports of Australian families who have been deeply affected by the current economic downturn.

Reports from our beyondblue information line staff, workplace trainers and other not-for-profit organisations indicate that people are seeking practical information. People want to know, not only how to manage financially, but how to manage their health and well-being, and look after their families after retrenchment or serious financial loss.

beyondblue Chairman, Jeff Kennett, prompted the development of the booklet, recognising that while there was a lot of information available about how to manage finances during a crisis, information about how these situations can affect people’s mental health didn’t exist. His primary concern was the effect of job or financial loss on the entire family.

To fill this gap, beyondblue has developed a free booklet – Taking care of yourself after retrenchment or financial loss – which is available by calling 1300 22 4636 or by visiting our website www.beyondblue.org.au

People who are going through financial hardship sometimes feel like circumstances are completely out of their control. Research suggests that many people are at an increased risk of developing potentially serious health problems, such as depression and anxiety.

The key to taking care of yourself and your family is learning how to gain a sense of control over those parts of your life that can actually be managed. You can’t control the economy, but there are very practical things you can do to take charge of your personal situation.

This booklet looks at the normal emotional reactions to job changes or significant financial loss and the warning signs that indicate people need to assess the state of their mental health. It is designed to provide user-friendly advice based on the combined expertise of mental health professionals, government agencies and finance industry experts.

Information about available services – including online or phone services – may benefit residents in rural, remote and regional Australia. It also contains some practical work sheets including budgeting and structured problem-solving. Often when you sit down and write out a plan things begin to look a lot more manageable or can assist you to obtain help.

We hope that this publication will be widely used and that it will help families – wherever they live in Australia.
Did you know that under Federal Government expansion of mental health funding, you can get help for depression and anxiety under Medicare? If you qualify for a referral from a General Practitioner, psychiatrist or paediatrician, you could be eligible for rebates for up to 12 individual consultations with a psychologist, social worker or occupational therapist in mental health (more in exceptional circumstances) and up to 12 group sessions each year.

Ask your referring practitioner for more information or log on to www.beyondblue.org.au – click on Get Information, then Download information then click on Fact Sheet 24 ‘Help for depression under Medicare’ or call the beyondblue info line on 1300 22 4636.

For comprehensive information on depression, anxiety, bipolar disorder, related drug and alcohol issues, available treatments and where to get help go to www.beyondblue.org.au or call 1300 22 4636 (cost of a local call from a landline).
Free beyondblue depression and anxiety information available

One million people in Australia live with depression. With the right treatment, most people recover.

beyondblue: the national depression initiative has a range of depression and anxiety information materials available free to Community Support Workers, councils, community groups, organisations and individuals.

beyondblue encourages people to help raise awareness of depression in their communities by ordering, displaying and distributing information in relevant facilities or agencies.

The resources may be of interest to people in a wide range of areas including: Community Support Workers, health promotion officers, health and community services, human resources, youth workers, libraries, leisure facilities, maternal and early childhood services, multicultural programs, seniors and aged care.

- Understanding depression (fact sheet)
- Depression symptom checklist (DL size card)
- Practical ways to help someone with depression (DL size card)
- beyondblue wallet-size information card
- beyondblue rubber wristbands
- beyondblue fridge magnets
- beyondblue A3 posters
- Drought and depression information card for rural people
- Depression in older people (fact sheet)
- Postnatal depression (fact sheet)
- Emotional health during pregnancy and early parenthood booklet
- Taking Care of Yourself and Your Family – a book by John Ashfield
- Stories of hope and recovery (DVD)
- Don’t beat about the Bush! (DVD to raise awareness of depression in rural areas, incorporating the ABC’s Landline program)

beyondblue’s depression and anxiety fact sheets are also available in languages other than English.

beyondblue materials are available to download and print at www.beyondblue.org.au (click on Get Information) or call 1300 22 4636 (local call cost from a landline).