

FEELING DOWN ON THE FARM

*Mental Health
in Rural Taranaki*



Taranaki Kowhaiwhai panel - The Hammerhead shark, Mangopare - 'keep positive, see it through'

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Rural Taranaki

Acknowledgements

Contributors...

Especially those sharing their stories in order to help others. Your courage and practical experiences are largely what this newspaper is all about.

Inspired by...

The 2010 Southern Rural Life and Courier Country publication "Down on the Farm". Our grateful appreciation for their willingness to share in the success of their format.

Sources...

This project was initiated by local farmers, the Taranaki Rural Support Trust, Like Minds Taranaki and a number of private and professional people with close ties to the Taranaki rural community.

Funding/Sponsors:

- TSB Community Trust
- Taranaki Electricity Trust (TET)
- Taranaki Rural Support Trust
- Like Minds Taranaki
- Farmlands
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This publication is available online at:
www.likemindstaranaki.org.nz



Project Introduction

By Gill Evans

"Feeling Down on the Farm" was inspired by the successful 2010 "Down on the Farm – Depression and Mental Health in the Rural South" publication which was the brainchild of Yvonne O'Hara, Southern Rural Life reporter and NZ Mental Health Media Grant recipient.

Urenui farmers John and Linda White were so impressed with the rural south publication they initiated the writing of this Taranaki version featuring our farmers, their stories and where and how to get help locally.

Representatives from the Taranaki Rural Support Trust, Like Minds Taranaki,



Gill Evans

Federated Farmers, Rural NZ Women and Dairy NZ joined John and Linda White to produce 12 000 copies of this publication for distribution to all Taranaki rural post box holders, libraries, GP's and major service providers. It is also available online at www.likemindstaranaki.org.nz

This feature outlines many of the causes, symptoms and concerns of stress, anxiety and depression among farmers, their staff and organisations associated with Taranaki's rural sector.

Its key objectives are to:

- Raise mental health awareness among farmers, their family/whanau, their friends and neighbours and the wider rural community;
- Convey the importance of seeking professional help - the sooner the better;
- Reduce the stigma and discrimination associated with mental illness which

so often prevents people from seeking professional treatment and support;

- Decrease the high incidence of suicide in our rural community; and
- Provide information on what and where services are available and how to access those services.

In New Zealand there is almost twice the number of suicides as road deaths and in Taranaki, the person most at risk of completing suicide is a middle aged farmer with experience of mental illness. This situation has to change.

This publication is produced by farmers for farmers. The key message is seeking professional help for mental distress is a strength not a weakness.

Special thanks go to Gordon Hudson for his dedication in ensuring this project came to fruition.

Taranaki Rural Support Trust

By Graeme Hight

The Taranaki Rural Support Trust is proud to be associated with this initiative.

Our involvement in this publication is part of the Trust's work to be available to assist rural people during their financial and personal difficulties as well as during adverse weather and environmental events.

"Feeling down on the Farm" is about raising mental health awareness in rural Taranaki and it is about recognising and accepting in times of stress, many of us may require medical and/or counselling support – and the sooner this is sought, the better the chances of an earlier and more successful recovery.

In 2011, 24 farmers completed suicide in New Zealand and it is known that the more isolated a person becomes the more likely

they are to complete suicide when they are depressed.

Many of us know of people in the farming community who have taken their own lives, yet most seem prepared to sit on their hands rather than helping prevent further loss of life and the devastation of farming families.

This publication is to inform farmers, their families and their communities that there is support out there. There are neighbours, friends, relatives and professional people who care and who can help when you feel depressed and cannot find a way through your problems.

We would like to thank those people who



Graeme Hight

had the courage to stand up and tell their stories about what they went through in dealing with depression.

We especially thank John and Linda White, farmers at Urenui and Gordon Hudson with the team at Like Minds Taranaki who have been the driving force behind this publication.

Grants from the TSB Community Trust and the Taranaki Electricity Trust (TET) have made this publication possible.

We express our appreciation to all concerned in publishing an excellent, easy to read reference.

Graeme Hight
Chairperson
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Like Minds Taranaki

By Virginia Winder

Like Minds Taranaki is pleased and proud to be associated with this initiative – "Feeling down on the farm".

We are part of a national programme – the "Like Minds Like Mine" campaign to promote mental health, demystify mental illness and to counter stigma and discrimination wherever and whenever it occurs.

In Taranaki we have paid particular attention to ensuring the rural sector is an important part of the everyday work we do. For this reason, our Rural Coordinator, Gordon Hudson has been an integral part of this production.

Like Minds Taranaki acknowledges

farming involves fulltime 24/7 live in commitment in often challenging and sometimes stressful conditions, many of which farmers have little control over. We also appreciate when times are tough in the rural community, for whatever reason, stresses and anxieties can escalate and too often, rural men in particular fail to get appropriate help to manage their distress.

Much of this reluctance may be due to the stigma and discrimination associated with mental illness. Some people, especially



Virginia Winder

men, think the perceived shame they may feel by seeking treatment for their mental distress is worse than the symptoms of their distress.

Our hope is the personal stories and information in this newspaper will encourage more people to seek help for their distress sooner than later. In doing so, the chances for their recovery will be better for them and the people who care about them.

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Why is the mental health of farmers at risk?

Almost half of New Zealand will experience mental illness at some time in their lives and one in five New Zealanders have a mental illness at any one time.

Recent studies also indicate there is no difference between rates of mental illness in rural and urban populations

Judi Clements, Mental Health Foundation chief executive officer, says the belief rural folk 'look after their own' is often just a myth.

Many rural communities have been decimated in recent years with educational, commercial and social service closures resulting in the loss of many traditional meeting places.

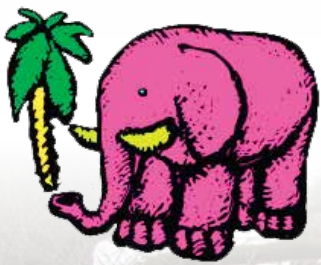
The widespread use of cellphones and emails also means farmers get less face to face contact with professionals so it's not surprising increasing numbers of people in rural communities are feeling socially isolated.

With less opportunities for a social chat unshared problems become stressful, cause anxiety and sometimes depression.

Harvey Leach, Taranaki Federated Farmers president, says many farmers are buckling under the pressures of high debt, fluctuating financial returns, compliance requirements, increasing workloads, extreme weather conditions and long hours in isolation.

Excessive stress on the farm can be likened to 'the elephant in the paddock' It is an issue everyone knows is a major concern but until recently it hasn't been openly spoken about.

The elephant in the paddock...



Harvey Leach - Chair
Taranaki Federated Farmers.

"We need to change our thinking about our mental health. Just as we see our farm advisor for help on the farm we need to see our doctor or another health professional for help if we are concerned about

Suicide – a permanent solution to a temporary problem...

A Ministry of Health/Taranaki District Health Board regional health needs assessment found the person most at risk of suicide in Taranaki was a middle aged, rural based male with a mental illness.

Gordon says despite what can be a perception of isolation, it is important the rural sector know there are support services available.

He says in addition to GPs and a full range of health professionals many of the organisations supporting rural communities are getting involved in the mental health wellness of rural people.

"For the first time male dominated organisations such as Federated Farmers, Rural

promotion and awareness, a growing concern for New Zealand's high suicide rate and from high profile advocates such as the chief coroner Judge Neil MacLean and Sir John Kirwan.

Graeme Hight, Taranaki Rural Support Trust chairman, says the efforts of successful farmers in the region coming forward to share their personal experiences of mental unwellness is helping raise mental health awareness and opening discussion on suicide prevention.

"Rural people are beginning to take a much keener interest in mental wellness, taking the time to learn a little more about their own mental health, watching out for their family and friends and taking the time to 'look over the fence' and check out how their neighbours are getting on.

"A sort of 'neighbourhood mental health watch' if you like," says Graeme.

When times are tough, knowing that you need to care for yourself and for those that matter to you and knowing that they in turn are looking out for you and yours are essential ingredients for surviving – and thriving.

But as Urenui farmer Linda White has observed, people don't always know when mental illness will become a major issue and when it does, too often people do not know when and where to go for help.

This newspaper aims to help provide information to change this situation.

"Seeking professional help about our mental health is a strength – not a weakness"

our mental health.

"Seeking professional help about our mental health is a strength – not a weakness" says Harvey.

Gordon Hudson, Like Minds Taranaki rural and elderly coordinator, says many rural people feel that the stigma and discrimination associated with mental illness make it difficult, particularly for men to seek professional help.

"But failing to seek professional help for mental distress can be a costly mistake. Stress, anxiety and depression if left untreated can lead to suicide," says Gordon.

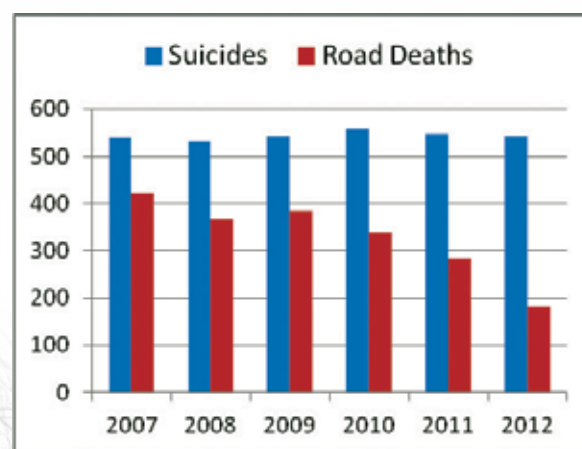
In fact the rural sector has a disproportionate number of suicides with 15.9 rural deaths per 100,000 people compared with a rate of 10.8 in urban areas.

Every second week in New Zealand a farmer completes suicide. And this farmer is usually a male.

Support Trusts, Ag Research, Dairy NZ, Farmsafe, Ministry for Primary Industries, Fonterra and vet groups are taking a keen interest in stress in rural communities, as this responsibility can no longer be left to rural communities alone," says Gordon.

Much of this new interest he believes arises from increased mental health research,

NZ Suicides vs Road Deaths



Sources: NZ Suicides – Office of the Chief Coroner
Road Deaths – Ministry of Transport website

Q&A

What is stress?

A simple definition of stress is...the body's reaction to things that happen to you.

Stress can be both positive and negative.

Positive stress can be an important and powerful motivator. It enables us to take pleasure in challenges.

Bad stress (distress) is when events make us feel uncomfortable and not in control – leading to poor concentration, poor decision making and deteriorating relationships.

The danger lies in too much stress over a long time.

What are the warning signs?

These can include:

- Feeling overwhelmed and unable to cope.
- Lack of interest in previously enjoyable activities.
- Lack of energy and failure to complete tasks.
- Isolating behaviour and/or withdrawing from family/friends and events.
- Not collecting and/or reading mail.
- Not answering the door or returning phone calls.
- Mood swings.
- Going 'underground' not communicating.
- Sweating about the small stuff.
- Inability to concentrate.
- Continuous feelings of anxiety and tension.
- Not remembering things that you normally would.
- Difficulty in making sound choices.
- Significant changes in normal sleeping and/or eating patterns.
- Increased risk taking behaviour eg. alcohol/drug use, gambling.
- Physical signs such as shortness of breath, indigestion, dry throat/lump in throat, and muscle tension.

Q&A

What can cause stress in the rural sector?

- Work load – too much to do in too little time.
- Financial pressures and uncertain incomes.
- Adverse events – farming and personal.
- The weather – not doing what is needed.
- Livestock wellbeing.
- Unfair and/or unequal returns on the market.
- Geographic isolation from most services.
- Relationship issues with boss, staff, lenders, neighbours and family.
- Never ending hours of work.
- Feeling under-valued and/or isolated.
- Bullying and/or harassment.
- Ever increasing compliance costs.
- Poor communication and role expectations.
- Juggling work and home life.
- Technology – so frustrating when not working effectively.
- Unreasonable personal pressure and/or goals.

Getting Through Depression

Paul Bourke

Life's challenges can adversely affect anyone, anytime and anywhere says Paul Bourke speaking from experience.

Paul, who was born and bred in Pihama and dairy farmed there for over forty years, says he thought he was strong enough to handle all the challenges life threw at him.

The 62 year old says he's had a good balanced life, worked hard, raised a family of five and been involved in a range of community activities over the years - on school boards, farming bodies, the rugby club and church. But about 10 years ago he found himself in this rut.

"I'd been in this rut for so long I knew if I didn't do something different I was just going to stay there...I realised I needed to get some help."

He found he had depression but initially didn't really know what that meant.

The Big Black Hole

Paul now describes depression as a big, deep dark horrible place to be.

"But as horrible as it is when you are there - that is where you feel you belong - that's your territory. You can see the light way up there but you can't get to it because you can't find the ladder."

He says a lot of it is just negative thoughts about yourself, a continual degrading beating up of yourself and you end up with low self esteem.

"You find you are more comfortable in your own company so you isolate yourself - withdrawing from activities and the community."

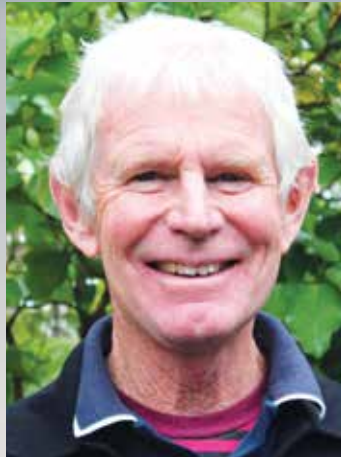
Paul went to counsellors and tried anti-depressant medication but found hypnotherapy was the most effective treatment for him.

It took Paul eight years to get out of his depression and he can now say he is comfortable with where his life is at.

Community Awareness

As result of having been through these challenges Paul wants to use his experience to help others.

He says the average person doesn't understand the thought processes that go on around



Paul Bourke

depression and mental illness. They especially don't understand the negative thoughts and therefore don't know how to deal with people who are depressed and tend to ignore them.

Paul wants more community awareness and knowledge to help others on their journey of pain.

"It's about giving people in the community some skill to help them be aware of some of the symptoms and to be able to assist in the first instance."

In Australia they have been running mental health first aid courses for about 11 years and over 200 000 Australians have attended the programme.

These courses teach people how to listen, how to keep the conversation going, to ask open ended questions and to keep their ears open.

"A lot of it is about taking the time to sit down and listen and just letting a person tell their story."

"And if you are going to give someone your time you need to have big ears and a little mouth and be prepared to allow the person to tell their story as many times as necessary."

Why Is Depression such an issue in the Rural Community?

Rural communities have changed over the years. While farming has always been quite an isolated career or workplace, with most working by themselves or in very small teams, there used to be a lot more community involvement.

"Now contractors do a lot more work on farms and we don't help our neighbours in the

same way we use to.

"There aren't the community working bees at schools and sport clubs. These days you pay for someone to come in and do the job."

The loss of many of the rural schools hasn't been helpful either says Paul.

"The principal of rural schools is like the village mayor - they are the coordinators of so many community activities - calf days, sports days, a whole range of activities that keeps the community connected."

Today there are fewer opportunities for rural communities to meet and talk with each other and share their problems.

"Nothing beats face to face. Women will talk anywhere anytime but guys will only talk to one another when you stand with them."

Farming is also a stressful environment to work in - it comes with big financial pressures and big expectations. Everyone is farming more intensely so the climatic and financial pressures impact more quickly and to greater extent.

"We're all doing a lot more than what our parents did. We've got better milking sheds, more reliable equipment and better systems but there's greater pressure to do better and it amounts to more stress."

Rural people also have less access to social services and despite better roads and vehicles - distance is still a big burden for some people.

Act without Judgement

Sometimes when people are immersed in their place of pain they need help with basic decisions on the day to day management of their lives.

Paul reminds people to act without judgement and to use commonsense when giving any advice.

"The person who is hurting hasn't lost their farming skills but may have temporarily lost the ability to use those skills while they are in the depths of depression."

Ask How People are Feeling

Everyone asks the 'how are you?' question but this is just superficial and doesn't get the real answers says Paul.

"We need to ask 'how are you feeling?' and to listen to the answer."

He says sometimes it is easier for someone outside of a person's family, social or work environment to ask the important questions.

Therefore it is important that each community has someone or a group of people with the life skills and knowledge to help others in need.

Community Helping Community

Paul feels strongly that the Australian based programme which now operates in 22 countries has a place in our community.

He brought the mental health first aid courses to Taranaki in 2007 and then again with the help of the Taranaki Rural Support Trust in 2011.

"I think we need to rubber stamp the Australian programme and the appropriate health authority needs to take it on board and get it out in our community."

"This is about community helping itself. There needs to be more help at a community level and a lot of that help is just knowledge."

"The Taranaki Rural Support Trust already has a network that could be further developed and utilised. Each one of us at the Trust has some skills and can be a point of contact."

How Can You Help?

- Look out for the person who starts isolating themselves from their community, who stops participating in activities.
- Take the time to sit and listen.
- Be supportive, patient and encouraging.
- For those in depression - be prepared to ask for help.
- For most people the best counsellor is someone you trust - it doesn't have to be a qualified person - it just has to be someone who can sit and listen and be prepared to keep listening.
- It is a long journey - don't expect miracles overnight.

Breaking Down Barriers

The stigma and discrimination associated with mental illness is one of the biggest barriers stopping people, particularly men, from seeking professional treatment.

Mental illness can affect anyone at any time regardless of age, culture, income or gender.

Everyone experiences tough times in their life. And most of the time most people get through these without too much difficulty.

But sometimes some people struggle to get through these periods. The problems become stressful causing anxiety and depression and result in an inability to find solutions.

This may seriously impact on their physical, emotional and mental health as well as affecting their relationships and ability to work.

Mental illness is far more prevalent than many people think...

The New Zealand Mental Health Survey 2006 found:

- 46% of NZs experienced an internationally recognised mental illness at some time during their lives;
- 21% had experienced a mental illness in the year prior to the survey;
- 30% of people who had experienced mental illness in the past year were Maori.

Gordon Hudson, Like Minds Taranaki rural and elderly coordinator, says with such a high prevalence of mental illness in New Zealand you may think we would understand it a great deal better - but this is not the case.

"Unfortunately our combined fear and ignorance creates an alarming degree of stigma and discrimination about what mental illness is and how it can be best treated," says Gordon.

He says this societal and/or self stigma often creates feelings of low self esteem, reduced confidence and even shame and at its worst may lead those who need help the most, towards social isolation, depression and suicide.

This in turn may prevent a person from seeking appropriate mental and physical health care, employment, closer relationships or independent living.

"It is the prime reason why many people, particularly men do not seek treatment" says Gordon.

One in three people, predominantly men, do not seek professional help for their mental health condition. These people typically continue to struggle on their own - often camouflaging their illness with alcohol and other substances and may become socially isolated.

As Sir John Kirwan says, depression is very real, very tough, but there is a way through it.

But to get through it you need some understanding of mental health - your own, and that of your families and friends.

Gordon wants to reassure people a diagnosis of mental illness does not say anything about a person's capabilities, personality or future.

"The vast majority of people who have some kind of mental illness get better, hold down jobs, make good partners and parents, are not dangerous and have a great deal to offer their community.

"In fact, the very act of dealing with a mental illness often gives people an extraordinary sense of character," says Gordon.

Mental illness can affect anyone, anytime... what you do may make the difference.



Gordon Hudson

Mental illness can affect anyone, anytime... what you do may make the difference.

- **Learn a little more about mental health and mental illness.**
There are many simple ways to gather information about mental health. An easy source is www.likemindstaranaki.org.nz. Learn to differentiate between facts and fiction - between what is real and what is myth.
- **Educate others.**
Take opportunities to inform others about taking more positive attitudes to people who are mentally unwell.
- **Focus on the positive.**
People with experience of mental illness have many other aspects and skills that define who they really are.
- **Support people.**
If you know someone with experience of mental illness - provide the sort of support you think you would want if that person was you.
- **Include everyone.**
Accepting someone with a mental illness also means including them in your life - helping them stay connected with their community.
- **The ABC of mental health.**
Is being **Accepted**, feeling as if you **Belong** and feeling **Connected** to your family/whanau, friends and wider community.
- **Be aware of your own attitudes and behaviours.**
We all develop different attitudes and behaviours based on our own upbringing and some of these may need revisiting. Becoming more aware, more accepting and more supportive of people who experience mental illness is a great start.
- **Take some care in choosing words.**
Try and use more accurate and sensitive words when speaking or referring to someone with a mental illness.

Q&A

What can you do about Stress?

If it is not possible to remove the cause of stress - **learn to manage your body's reaction to stress.**

- Acknowledge that you are stressed and/or depressed - while we deny it - we cannot act on it.
- Give yourself some breathing/thinking space.
- Start talking to someone you trust about what is distressing you.
- Discuss problems with your partner and share the load.
- Work out a plan to minimize what is stressing you the most.
- Try to find a solution to problems or conflict in your life.
- Eat well, exercise and get sufficient sleep.
- Take some time out - ideally away from the farm.
- Treat yourself - do something fun with friends/family.
- Talk to your GP: they will know options that may be of help to you.
- Take hope. You are not alone. You will get through this.



Q&A

Depression

Too much stress and anxiety can lead to depression.

What are the signs and symptoms of depression?

Physical:

- Changes in normal sleeping and/or eating patterns.
- Headaches and unexplained other aches and pains.
- Stomach disorders.
- Feeling tired with little energy.

Behavioral:

- Diminished interest in, and enjoyment of, previously enjoyable activities.
- Difficulty in concentrating, making decisions and doing things that need doing.
- Mood swings.
- Alcohol and/or drug misuse.

Emotional:

- Feeling down, apathetic, irritable, pessimistic, angry, guilty, anxious and empty.
- Feeling hopeless, helpless and worthless.
- Thoughts of death and/or suicide.

If some or all of the above go on for more than two weeks – seek help.

What are the risk factors?

- Family and personal history of mood disorders.
- Misuse of drugs or alcohol.
- Chronic health problems such as cancer or heart disease.
- Separation or divorce.
- Major life changes.
- Work stress.
- Retirement.
- Unemployment.
- Financial difficulties.
- Suicide.

There is a way through...

John & Linda White



John and Linda White

Urenui dairy farmer, John White has come a long way in the 12 months since he first told his story of depression and attempted suicide.

With articles in various publications, an appearance on TV3 news, presentations at the Taranaki DHB, WITT and field days as well as instigating this publication John and wife Linda are actively promoting mental health awareness and suicide prevention in rural Taranaki.

They want to normalize conversations about mental illness and believe if there were more opportunities for rural communities to meet and talk about their problems and offer support to one another it would help break down the stigma associated with people's experiences of mental illness.

When depression can get to be too much

Looking back John says he can see when the wheels started to fall off, but at the time he didn't realise it.

The pressures of long hours, physically demanding work, constantly worrying about production, animal health, compliance issues, cash flows, high debt levels and living on the job 24/7 had taken a toll.

"My life had spiraled down into sheer hell for me. I wasn't sleeping. I wasn't eating.

I couldn't finish anything I started and I was stressed by everything around me."

As a farmer John would see a problem, analyse it, sort out a solution and fix it.

But here was an illness he couldn't fix and not being used to asking for help he struggled with it for a number of years on his own.

Professional help

Despite his reluctance to seek help John now sees the medication, counseling, ECT and stays in the mental health unit have all helped on his continuing journey to wellness.

But while the mental health service provided the necessary support for John there was nothing for Linda and the family.

The families, says Linda, are the ones who will have the biggest impact on a mentally unwell person's recovery but to do this the family needs the knowledge and tools to help with that recovery.

To help achieve this John and Linda now give presentations to TDHB mental health staff and to WITT students in mental health, social work and nursing so they have a better understanding of how they can help support the family as well as the mentally unwell person and the importance of keeping the family involved.

Having Support is Important

"Linda played an important part in my recovery. She made a real effort to normalize our lives and having that positivity and happiness around me was really important."

Their four now adult children have also been very understanding, supportive and accepting of John's illness and are proud of what he is achieving.

John still feels guilty about the effect he believes his illness has had on his family but Linda says she and the kids don't see it that way.

While she admits it has been a huge learning curve and a struggle at times she also believes the experience has enriched their lives.

"The kids are now more intuitive of mental illness, they know what to look for and are an asset to the people around them. I'd like to think we all are," says Linda.

Some in the community made an effort to stay in contact and tried to help where they could says Linda.

"That daily contact by someone, just a text or phone call was so important and made a really big difference."

But many of the people the Whites considered close friends didn't stay in touch. This they believe was mainly due to a lack of knowledge and understanding.

Unfortunately, explains Linda, if people are reluctant to talk about mental health and don't know how to deal with someone who is ill they tend to avoid them but this only increases a person's self stigma and isolation.

Sharing their story to help others

John and Linda say the biggest benefit of sharing their story is providing an opportunity for others struggling with depression to talk about it and not feel ashamed.

Telling his story hasn't got any easier for John but he does it in the hope it will encourage others to get help.

Having been inspired to speak out by what they read in the Southland publication Down on the Farm they initiated getting this Taranaki version published.

"It hit our hearts, we related to the stories and knew that other farmers would read it and see themselves in it too."

Looking after himself

John admits the first thing he had to do was come to terms with living his life with depression.

He says it became clear the balance between farm, family, and personal time needed to change and he needed to find enjoyment again both on and off the farm.

"The farm needed to be restructured to account for my depression so we put a lower order sharemilker on the farm and that's been really important. It's allowed me to step back a little - I have choices which is good."

It is the little things that he values - now he can come in and enjoy a cup of coffee, be 'present' and have a chat instead of constantly worrying about what he needs to do next on the farm.

They have hosted weddings for two of their daughters on the farm and for the first time in 28 years of farming John left the farm during calving to visit his Nelson based daughter and new born granddaughter.

The last couple of years he says have mainly been about forcing himself to do things and getting the confidence from that to do the next thing.

"It would be easier to not do them but I know that won't achieve anything and I can now see I will feel better about it afterwards."

Linda notes the significant change in John's perception - he can now see ahead to the positives and recognise the benefits of doing things.

John still has to take medication, he'd love to stop but knows from experience he's not ready for that yet.

But he has taken ownership of his depression and put a plan in place to tackle the issues. His plan includes:

- Getting up in the morning and going out to do something on the farm.
- Teaching himself to enjoy the farm work.
- Taking time out and enjoying the moment instead of worrying about the farm.
- Going off the farm when possible.
- Recognising despite his social anxiety he needs to put himself in social situations in order to get better.

"At the moment I am quite happy with how it is working. Even though it's not easy - I can do it and being positive about the fact that I can is good."

"There are still days when life is a struggle and we are not totally in the clear but we feel we are well on the way in this journey. We have come to realise that there is a life with depression - there is a way through. There is HOPE."

Managing Financial Stress

Glenys Schreiber, a chartered accountant at New Plymouth's EFS Accounting Ltd with over 20 years experience and 26 years farming experience, shares her advice on successfully managing financial stress.

Good communication with your accountant, banker and lawyer is the key to making sound financial decisions and managing cashflow through the difficult times.

Glenys says financial pressure can occur for a number of reasons including climatic conditions, market collapses, below par farm performance, relationship or health issues, high debt levels or



Glenys Schreiber

overspending.

She says while some factors are beyond the control of the farmer, they can be effectively managed with careful planning, realistic budgeting and regular monitoring.

"When farmers become concerned about their cashflow position, it's important they reach out to their accountant and banker immediately.

"Budgets should be prepared, spending revised and arrangements made for additional funding in advance.

"Procrastination can be costly and lead to unnecessary stress," says Glenys.

She emphasizes budgets are only as good as the information they contain and how you use them. So it is important to:

- make sure the figures are achievable;
- monitor actual income and spending regularly to ensure cashflow stays on track; and
- update the budget as variables change.

Budget preparation does not need to be a costly exercise says Glenys.

- Most accounting software has budgeting capabilities that produce useful reports.
- Banks will generally prepare budgets for free and liaise

with your accountant during the process.

- If your accountant prepares your GST, ask for the budget data to be entered and the relevant reports produced.

"Use the budget as a tool to achieve your financial goals rather than just burying it in the bottom drawer.

"And if you have difficulties

front can prevent unnecessary costs trying to correct the situation later.

"It is also important that your accountant reviews your tax position throughout the season so there are no hidden surprises at the end and tax payments are planned."

Glenys advocates using the free financial resources available

"Procrastination can be costly and lead to unnecessary stress," says Glenys.

understanding the reports seek clarification from your advisors - that's what they're there for," says Glenys.

Glenys also says having a good relationship with your accountant can help to identify problems early.

"It is often through casual conversation that issues and future plans are raised and this is where your accountant gets the opportunity to add some real value."

Glenys cannot stress enough the importance of talking to your accountant before undertaking a major investment or change to your farming practice.

"Getting the right advice up

such as on-line banking, payment predictor, Dairy NZ website and PAYE calculator to assist with the day to day financial management.

Finally if doing the paperwork is not your forte or you simply don't have the time, consider outsourcing your GST and PAYE to your accountant while you concentrate on the more important aspects of running your farm.

"Late filing and payment penalties can be harsh, particularly with PAYE, so utilising your accountant may make economic sense and remove a burden."

Q&A

How do I reduce feelings of depression?

- Try to tell someone how you are feeling.
- Talk your worries over with someone whose opinion you trust.
- Take some breathing space so you have the time to start sorting out what is stressing you.
- Try to adopt a more positive attitude. You can't control all the things that happen to you but you can control how you react to them.
- Identify what you can change to ease your depression and accept what you cannot change.
- Limit your expectations and set goals that can be achieved.
- Value your 'real' treasure: family/whanau, friends, health, achievements, -these are what count.
- Take a break - step out of your normal routine for a few days or hours.
- Try to look after yourself eat and drink sensibly and get enough sleep.

Keeping on Top of the Finances

Linda White is the fourth generation of her family to farm their 180 ha property at Urenui. She and husband John have shared the running of the 580 cow dairy farm for the last 23 years.

The budgeting and financial side of the business was mainly

"If you're under stress it becomes increasingly more difficult to concentrate on the cash flow and budgets and sometimes farmers even put their heads in the sand and don't take responsibility for their finances and the farm business can slowly unravel," says Linda.

In times of stress on the farm she says the first thing to suffer is usually the finances.

John's responsibility until six years ago when John became mentally unwell and Linda was dumped in the deep end.

Linda shares her advice on keeping on top of financial management on the farm during adverse circumstances.

She says it is inevitable that sometime during your farming life stress, burnout or anxiety may turn into depression and lead to life changing farming decisions.

In times of stress on the farm she says the first thing to suffer is usually the finances.

During such times Linda says having sound financial help is crucial to running the business.

- Either partner may need to take things in hand and call upon their accountant, bank, farm advisor or a financial advisor for help
- This may be a temporary measure but it is important to act quickly before things get out of hand.
- Once the stresses come off the farmer they will see more clearly and be able to take the reins again.



Linda White

- They need to be reassured this is not a failure but a necessary short term step to maintain the business.

Linda says when financial pressures come on there are several choices that may be taken.

- Your stock and station agent, trading companies and other businesses may allow you to defer payments for a short time.
- You can work closely with your bank, ask for them to

look over the accounts and increase your overdraft if required.

- Mortgages can be altered as necessary.
- Accountants can assess tax situations.

Linda advises the most important thing is to be open and honest with all of these people and institutions.

"Remember it is important that rash decisions are not made until you are in the right head space.

"After all you are just struggling for the moment and hopefully when the stress and pressure comes off you can address things more fully," say Linda.

She also advises fellow farmers to ensure all stock are well looked after. Call upon a neighbour, the local discussion group, vet or the Taranaki Rural Support Trust for advice and support.

"Remember you are not alone, there is always help at hand, you only have to ask, or if offered take it. This is just a temporary measure."

Where do I go to get help if I am depressed?

If you think you are depressed, the best place to start is by discussing this with your doctor or health professional. Ask for a check up to see if there are physical problems or medicines causing your depression. Your healthcare professional can help you get the right treatment for you.

- Medication may help.
- Professional mental health support from a counsellor or psychologist may also help. Discuss this option with your GP.
- Take time to learn more about depression.
- Learn to watch out for your particular symptoms and triggers and how best to manage these.
- Keep reading, keep learning, keep informed and try to remain positive about getting through your depression.



Q&A

Suicide

What are the signs that someone may be suicidal?

Warning signs may include:

- Ongoing depression and withdrawal from people and activities.
- Frequent negative comments about self – eg: I'm no use to anyone.
- Talking, writing or thinking about death, dying or suicide.
- Seeing no future in the future.
- Giving away previously valued possessions.
- An unexpected interest in wills and insurance.
- Rage, anger, seeking revenge.
- Feeling trapped.
- Having feelings of hopelessness and helplessness.

The presence of warning signs does not necessarily identify when, or even if, a person will attempt suicide.

Suicide risk can vary day to day or even hour to hour.

Any thoughts, talk or writing about suicide should be taken seriously.

Dealing with Grief

Nicola Luxton

In April 2010 Manutahi dairy farmer Mike Symes, 36, took his own life, he is survived by wife Nicola Luxton and three young children.

"It is so difficult to understand how someone with so much going for them – a loving young family, a great business and a great life – can get to a place so dark they believe suicide is the best option for their family," says Nicola.

Nicola is sharing Mike's story in the hope talking about it will help remove the stigma associated with mental illness and suicide.

She believes the traditional kiwi male culture of not talking about things like mental health and not wanting to seem weak has to change.

"I would like people to be able to ask for help easily, to be able to go to the doctor as if they had a broken arm and not have any stigma holding them back." Mike was an intelligent, witty and caring person who despite being socially anxious was genuinely interested in people. He would talk to anyone especially those who might be on the outside and Nicola particularly admired that about him.

"He certainly wasn't the sort of person you would think would have a mental illness but I guess that is often the case." Mike was the eldest of three brothers. In 2005 his youngest brother Tony took his own life in Australia – four days before Mike and Nicola's wedding at which he was to be a groomsman.

Nicola believes Mike took on a lot of the blame and responsibility for his death. "It's difficult to know what causes a suicide – there are often a lot of contributing factors – but I think that his brother taking his own life was one of them for Mike."

In 2007, a week of sleeplessness and socialising prior to an event lead to a depressive episode. Mike became paranoid and in his head, he thought he had done something terribly wrong. "He

was absolutely convinced that people were talking about him."

"New Zealand's binge drinking culture is also an issue with depressive illness. Mike wasn't an alcoholic by any means but he would drink a lot in social situations and I believe he used it as a crutch for his social anxiety."

"Alcohol affects your brain function and it certainly didn't help Mike – so it was a contributing factor."

Back at home the paranoia continued. Mike was diagnosed with depression and anxiety, his doctor put him on anti-depressants and he started seeing a counsellor.

In hindsight Nicola now recognises Mike experienced ups and downs but at the time she thought that was just who he was.

"We wonder now if he had manic depression but he wasn't diagnosed with that."

Mike improved, weaned himself off his medication and stopped seeing the counsellor. He then made the decision to convert the family sheep and beef farm to dairy.

Mike thrived on the dairy conversion project but in April 2010, towards the end of the farm's second dairy season, he came under a number of different pressures.

There were ongoing mechanical issues in the milking plant and the farm started receiving grades from Fonterra. "The automated phone calls that come with a grade were happening almost every evening over a 10 day period. Mike would go to milk and the plant wouldn't start, it was just constant. Mike's paranoia kicked in again."

"He was absolutely convinced there was something terribly wrong not only with the cowshed but also with our cows – he thought they were all going to die."

Financial pressure in a year with a low forecast payout, losing a valued staff member and a significant drought were also contributing factors.

Nicola says a healthy person would have dealt with each of these pressures working through them one by one but it all just got on top of Mike. "It just seemed like everything collided to make things really tough for him at that time."

"He got himself in such a hole he couldn't help himself. As a partner it is very difficult, you don't see the incremental changes and I didn't realise how sick he really was."

It became increasingly more difficult for Nicola to get him to go anywhere or to talk. Two days before he died she did get him to the doctor and he was put back on anti-depressants.

Nicola was eight months pregnant with their son at the time, her first concern was for their three year old daughter and how she would tell her that her much loved Dad had died.

"When someone close to you dies there are just so many emotions you go through – that grieving is complicated by suicide – there's so much blame and so much guilt and you have to work through all of that – it's a hard journey."

Nicola says the support of family and friends who invited themselves round to talk, bring meals and spend time with the kids was critical.

"If I hadn't had that support I could have sunk down in that hole too – it was, and still is, just so important."

After Mike's death, she spent time away from the farm with family in London and Wellington. A Bereaved by Suicide course she attended in Wellington was a real turning point.

"Having validation of all those emotions and feelings and to know that they were normal allowed me to find the strength to move forward."

Returning to the farm, which had been looked after by a sharemilker, was an important step for Nicola and the children. "Mike's parents and brother are the closest thing the kids have to him so for them to have that relationship is so important."

Nicola says right from the start she wanted people to know



Nicola Luxton

Mike had taken his own life and believes not being open about it just adds to the stigma. She found it upsetting when people didn't talk about him and in her mind the silence was because it was a suicide.

"I want to make him as real as possible for the kids. I want them to know the clever, funny and loving person that he was as much as possible and you can't do that by not talking about him."

"I want the kids when they are older to be able to be matter of fact about how their father died just as if he had cancer or a heart attack. I don't want there to be any stigma associated with it. Mike and Nicola now have a third child, an eight month old daughter. They had been through the IVF process to have their son and there was still an embryo in storage when Mike died."

"I couldn't throw it away or give it to anyone else, it was part of Mike. If he'd been here we would have used it so I wanted to give it that chance and what was meant to be would be." "It is just so amazing to have her here and thank goodness she looks like her siblings. I was worried she wouldn't and how would I explain that – but they're like three peas in a pod."

"Life is still a challenge but it gets less so each day. Three years on people think you are OK and most of the time you are but it's still really important to have that support when you need it."

Stress Impacts on Others



Mike Davey

For every person dealing with a mental illness, so too are their family/whanau, friends, neighbours – indeed all the people that person associates with.

So when a farmer or rural worker becomes mentally stressed or depressed – a lot of other people are also affected.

Relationships are often the first to feel the strain and it's not just our relationships with family, friends and employees/ers. It can also affect our relationship with support services – the people that help the farm function – the bank, the accountant, the farm advisor, the vet, farm suppliers, stock and station agents.

Most people providing support services to farmers are acutely aware that farmers and their teams may be under considerable strain – be it financial, farm husbandry or health and they are often the first to offer to provide support.

Ravensdown sales manager Mike Davey believes stress is very much a part of modern farming.

"We are a 100 percent farmer owned company so our team understands the stresses farmers and their families face.

"When times are tough for farmers they are tough for all of us in the business of supporting farmers as well. So we try to work with farmers to accommodate their particular situation. It's personal, and we respect this," says Mike.

When farming is tough going – the going gets tougher for others as well...

When farm finances are tight – spending cuts are made. These spending cuts are often the

very life-blood of other peoples businesses. Their livelihoods and that of their staff are often at stake and they too need to feel and receive the support of the whole sector.

Often their jobs are difficult, even in good times. Having significantly reduced income in an environment of rising costs leads to the same sort of cash flow difficulties farmers have.

When things become stressful for businesses supporting farmers it is important for them to remember they are not alone – there are a myriad of support services available. So these businesses need to make sure they also get the support and care they need.

Usually the sooner a problem is recognised, the easier it can be addressed and the more likely the desired outcome is achieved.

stress of loss of income," says Richard.

And spare a thought for Veterinarians

A clear example of where farmer stress carries through to other occupations is the veterinarian profession.

A recent study in the Australian Veterinary Journal revealed vets are four times more likely to complete suicide compared to the general Australian population and other Australian research showed there are higher rates of suicide in rural vets compared to those in urban areas.

The NZ Vet Council's chief executive and registrar Janet Eden believes it is likely similar results would be found among New Zealand vets.

A survey in the NZ Veterinary



David Lilley

emotional and financial pressures on farmers. But notes it can also be stressful for vets dealing with individual or herd health problems to meet both the client's and their own expectations.

The NZ Vet Council has taken measures to increase mental health awareness and to support the management of stress and depression among their members. To facilitate this a stress free helpline service has been established.

However, Carol Galloway, psychological services national service manager, notes although vets do use the service, callers usually only do so when at crisis point which is concerning.

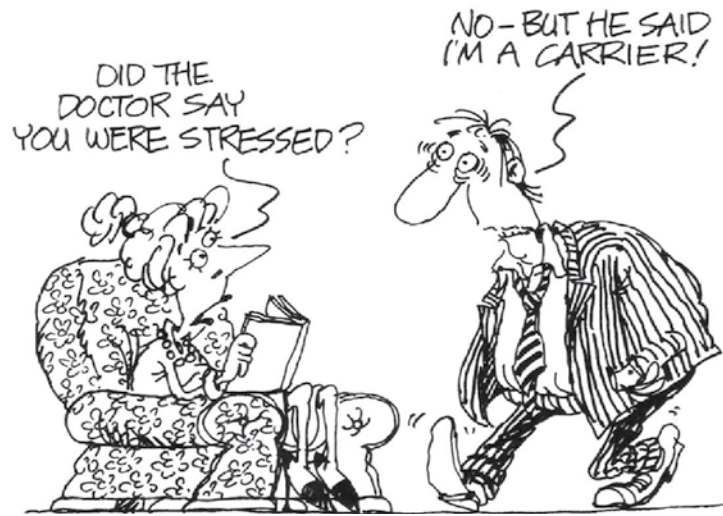
But not all rural support services have such professional back up for advice and support for stress and depression.

Looking out for each other

Before retiring as president of the Taranaki Federated Farmers, Peter Adamski took every opportunity to promote the need for farmers to look after their mental health and that of their family and friends.

He recommended farmers made the time and effort to watch out for each other. A message that could well extend to looking out for the mental wellbeing of all people associated with the rural sector.

A form of 'rural mental health watch' type idea to increase awareness, understanding and concern for each other.



Income Protection

Many shy away from income protection insurance because they believe ACC will provide them with 24 hour, seven days a week, no fault comprehensive injury insurance cover.

But ACC cover does not usually accept mental illness as an injury and the recovery costs for a mental illness are often far more than those for a physical disability.

Taranaki based ABACUS Group director Richard Toon says about 33 percent of their claims for income protection are the result of mental distress.

"Getting the right cover for income protection is not only necessary for the self employed, it is vital.

"The last thing you need while trying to recover is the added

Journal cited hours worked, client expectations and unexpected outcomes as the greatest source of stress for members of the veterinary profession in New Zealand.

In addition to these stressors vets have to contend with the often poor weather conditions, working with precious, sick and unpredictable stock, and regularly trying to work miracles at minimum cost.

Vets can be farmers' best friends, but the unpredictable nature of much of their work means their relationships with farming clients can be tenuous – there is always the fear of not meeting expectations, of complaints and even litigation.

Dave Lilley, director Okato Veterinary Clinic says vets are very aware of the physical,

Q&A

Suicide

What do I do if someone feels suicidal?

- Take their thoughts and feelings seriously without being judgmental.
- Keep talking with them and listen to them.
- Ask them directly if they are thinking of killing themselves.

If yes... ask them if they have a plan.

If yes... ascertain how advanced their plan is.

If advanced... call the TDHB Crisis Team.

- Remove any obvious means, eg, medications, poisons, weapons.
- Keep yourself and them as safe as possible.
- Call 111 if you feel there is a danger to the person or yourself.
- Stay with them until help arrives.
- Consider taking them to the TDHB Crisis Team or the Emergency Department yourself.
- If there is no immediate threat of suicide encourage them to visit their doctor, counsellor or other healthcare professional.
- Encourage the person to think of some positive aspects of the future – something to look forward to, a sense of hope.

If someone can see hope in the future – suicide is preventable.

Suicide prevention is not just about preventing the person from dying; it is about convincing the person there is a reason for living.



Q&A

How can I be a good listener?

- Be an 'active' listener – attentive, focused, encouraging and empathetic.
- Let the person get their feelings out.
- Show you have heard and understood by reflecting their feelings back to them eg. "You sound pretty annoyed."
- Ask questions to make sure you have understood their concerns.
- Be non-judgmental.
- Put aside your own problems while you listen.
- Encourage the person to keep to the subject rather than digressing on to non-related issues.
- Try not to advise the person instead go over possible options for the person to choose from.

Conditions can be Managed

Ken & Sue Ballantyne

Aria sheep and beef farmer Ken Ballantyne has a shadow following him and it will be there for the rest of his life.

Six years ago Ken was diagnosed with bipolar disorder and depression, something that had dogged him most of his life.

Both conditions are now under control with medication, but before his illness was recognised he attempted suicide.

Ken and his wife Sue Ballantyne were the Horizons Region Supreme Winners of the Ballance Farm Environment Awards in 2010 for their 550ha property between Te Kuiti and Taumarunui.

To the outsider, Ken had a top performing farm, no debt, a loving family and appeared to have no worries.

But appearances can be deceiving and Ken is happy to talk openly about his conditions and his suicide attempt in an effort to help eliminate the stigma attached to mental illness.

"If I can help one person, I'll have achieved a great deal," Ken said.

He said when he was in the 'deepest darkest hole of depression' he was sure his family and friends would be better off without him.

"In my case it couldn't have come closer but now that I am better I realise that I would have ruined their lives also, if I had taken my own."

He said everyone suffered 'ups and downs' from time to time. However the symptoms of severe depression included lack of sleep, weight loss and waking up in a hot sweat.

Depression sufferers might find it hard to face other people other than their immediate family and they lacked motivation, he said.



Ken & Sue Ballantyne

Photo: Ballance

"You just want to hide from the world by sleeping and you can't get out of bed to do anything."

"If you know anyone with these symptoms or someone that has had a complete change of character, talk to them, and encourage them to get help."

Ken said with the right help, most depression sufferers do get better and could lead normal lives.

"I will forever be grateful to my wife and family especially."

"It is not easy on the immediate family but I know that my children have learned from watching their father suffer from depression and it has given them a better understanding of mental illness and made them better people for it."

"I am also forever grateful to the mental health system in New Zealand for getting me well."

"The doctors, nurses and mental health workers do a wonderful job for very little recognition."

He has told his story publicly several times since winning the Farm Environment Award and he has received support from neighbours, family and friends.

However, he said some people could not face him after his suicide attempt.

"People don't want to talk about it."

"Eighty percent of people would cross the street to avoid you."

"You can't blame society for not wanting to be interested as it is hard to understand unless they go through it themselves."

He is more aware than ever of managing the conditions, including eating and sleeping properly, taking the prescribed medication and he also receives counselling when necessary.

"I used to drink a bit, but I have now given up alcohol as it is a depressant."

"It makes you feel good short-term but all it does is hide reality."

The couple still work hard but make sure they take time out for themselves – including the occasional overseas trip.

"My wife Sue really looks after me well."

M"When you are working by yourself, as many farmers are, it is important to get off the farm – go to the beach or play sport."

He has been a volunteer rugby referee for 25 years.

During one depression episode he stopped his involvement in the sport.

"I isolated myself, and it was the worst thing I did."

"Don't forget about you. It is important to keep well. Think of the future and enjoy life now, too."

Ken shares his story in the hope that people will realise that they can get better and achieve things in life despite depression and bipolar disorder.

This article is reprinted here from the 2010 Southern Rural Life and Courier Country publication "Down on the Farm" with the permission of Ken and Sue Ballantyne, reporter Yvonne O'Hara and editor Stu Oldham.



Managing Stress... What can we do?

Stress is a state of arousal experienced when we are under some sort of pressure.

Sometimes the stress is caused by circumstances, sometimes by others and sometimes by ourselves.

Stress is a natural occurrence in life. Not all stress is bad. Everyday stress is necessary for growth and development.

Most people enjoy being stimulated or challenged. The danger lies in too much stress or prolonged stress. At first we may become tired and irritable but if the stress continues and it is not dealt with effectively the result can be physical and mental ill health.

Stress tolerance is an individual thing. What one person may experience as 'energizing', another may find stressful. Your capacity to cope with stress changes at different times and stages in your life.

In some instances you may be able to remove the cause of stress. However, it is not always practical to change your workplace, where you live, or your relationships. But you can manage your body's reaction to stress by learning new ways to manage or cope differently.

New Plymouth based counsellor Beth Pottinger-Hockings, who has a farming background, says she finds one of the biggest stumbling blocks in managing stress is people not believing they have choices.

"This is very disempowering and means helplessness can take over.

"While it is easier said than done, people need to take control and reclaim their power over the situation rather than let outside circumstances take over. This change of perspective is deceptively simple and can be very powerful with any form of recovery," says Beth.

"It's not the stress that kills us; it is our reaction to it."

Hans Selye, pioneer stress researcher.



Beth Pottinger-Hockings

Some things that we can do that may help...

Talk about your worries...

Spend time with someone you trust. Talk to a friend, partner, parents, counsellor, kaumatua – someone whose opinion and support you respect.

Limit your expectations...

Prioritise what needs to be done and use your energy to do the most important and possible tasks. Be realistic, realise and accept your limitations.

Remember the Serenity Prayer...

*God grant me the serenity
to accept the things I cannot
change;
courage to change the things I
can;
and wisdom to know the
difference.*

Set goals that you can reach – and don't beat yourself up if you don't reach all your goals. There will be another time.

Organise your day and work habits...

Trying to do everything at once can be overwhelming. Plan to do what you can – when you can.

Getting up 5-10 minutes earlier to avoid starting the day in a rush and breaking down larger projects into manageable

Avoid confrontations...

Negative emotional thinking can be very exhausting. Try to find a solution to conflict. Learn to be assertive without being aggressive. Try cooperation rather than confrontation. Try not to harbour or cultivate grievances.

Sleep well...

Possibly the hardest thing to achieve – yet the most important. Find out what works best for you to help clear your

"It's not the stress that kills us; it is our reaction to it."

smaller tasks helps to best manage your time. Spending a few minutes at the end of the day to prepare for the next day helps gain more control of your work life.

Make time for recreational exercise...

Do something you enjoy doing, particularly if it involves exercise – walking, jogging, hunting, fishing, cycling – whatever – make time to do it – and enjoy it.

Take time out...

Some people find it too 'difficult' to take time out for a bit of a holiday – but making the effort to take a break may work wonders for you and yours.

Eat well...

When we are stressed or depressed – eating well is not always a priority – but doing so keeps up your energy levels and helps maintain you both physically and mentally. Try not to fall into the trap of over eating or drinking foods which add to stress/depression levels – such as coffee, alcohol and soft drinks.

head and prepare you for sleep – it may be walking, reading, thinking positively. Keep regular sleeping hours and 'tune out' negative and distressing thoughts in favour of positive thoughts.

Most of all – feel better about yourself...

Identify what you do well, recognise your qualities, acknowledge past successes and work at thinking and being positive about your ability to manage and get through both good and not so good times.

Q&A

How can neighbours and friends help?

Family, friends and neighbours are often the best people to assist – simply because they are, hopefully, closer to the person who may be under stress.

Ideally, if you are aware that your friend or family member may be having a stressful time or they seem a bit depressed – then:

- Have the courage to raise your concerns with them.
- Try to involve their partner or family/whanau.
- Have the time available to listen carefully, in a non-judgemental manner, to their response and actions.
- Listen carefully and encourage discussion and opinions.
- Show you have understood what you are being told by reflecting back and acknowledging their feelings and ideas.
- Try to identify the things that could be of concern to them such as financial management, animal management, staff management, relationships or health.
- If necessary urge them to book a double session with their GP to talk about how they are feeling. GPs are generally able to provide appropriate medication and to refer to a counsellor.
- The GP may believe the person needs a referral to the Taranaki DHB Mental Health & Addiction Services.
- Always follow up with a visit or a phone call as to the person's progress. This gives you an opportunity to confirm your support.



Q&A

How can I work out if a doctor or therapist is right for me?

Choosing the right doctor and/or therapist can be a difficult process – but it is important you find one who will best meet your needs.

- If you are happy with your GP – stick with them.
- If you are not happy with your GP or you do not have a GP – the best thing to do is ask around your family and friends to see who they recommend.
- Ideally your GP will recommend a suitable practicing therapist who will meet your needs.

Choosing a doctor or therapist

If you need to find a doctor or therapist yourself some things you may like to consider are:

- What training and experience do they have?
- Do they have a manner you feel comfortable with?
- Do you feel confident about them as a person and as a practitioner?
- Do they listen to what you have to say?
- Do they ask you questions?
- Are they caring and empathetic?

If you feel the practitioner you have selected or are recommended is not compatible – you have the right to choose another person or service.

If you do feel your GP or therapist has been particularly helpful – recommend them to others.

Your Doctor is here to help

If you or someone close to you is feeling overly stressed, overly anxious or depressed, it is important to seek help. Your GP is often the best place to start.

Each year around one in every five people in our community will experience some sort of mental illness. It is particularly common among people who work on farms or in a rural environment due to the isolation and financial stresses such as the recent drought and the tainted milk Fonterra scare.

Doctors Abigail Poole and Janita Terblanche, GP liaisons for Midlands Health Network, say coping with a mental health issue not only creates psychological, social and financial challenges for a person but can also increase their risk of physical illness.

"In our busy daily lives, especially for those people working in a rural setting, we often focus on our physical health and forget about the

importance of our mental health, says Dr Poole.

She says it is essential to remember mental health and physical health go hand in hand and to not let problems get out of hand.

"Depression is not an illness that you can 'staunch' your way through. Asking for help is a sign of strength.

"If someone you know is having difficulty sleeping, feeling sad, feeling angry, feeling

you to the right services and get you back on the road to recovery as quickly as possible," advises Dr Poole.

When contacting the medical centre, the GP may request a slightly longer appointment to allow enough time to discuss the problems the person may be facing. Many people bring along someone they trust to the appointment to make sure they have support during and after the visit.

or addiction concerns," says Dr Poole.

Depending on the person's needs, the GP may refer them onto another qualified and experienced mental health professional in order to reach the best possible outcome.

"A referral to another mental health service is completely confidential and is treated like any other referral for a health issue," says Dr Poole.

Local mental health services can be accessed through medical centres throughout Taranaki and some of these are funded options.

The Pinnacle/Midlands General Practice Network strongly supports the work Like Minds Taranaki is doing around helping people with mental illness and reducing the barriers to a person's recovery.

For more information on medical centres in your area go to www.itsmyhealth.co.nz

"Depression is not an illness that you can 'staunch' your way through. Asking for help is a sign of strength".

stressed or anxious or is having frequent arguments with close family or friends you need to give them the heads up that it is time to ask for help.

"A timely visit to the GP can get you the right support, direct

"GPs are well connected with other health care professionals working in the community and there are many specialist support services available to help people with mental health

How can Counselling Help?

South Community Mental Health team clinical psychologist Drew Hignett who was born and raised on a dairy farm in central Taranaki helps answer the 'How can counselling help?' question.

Drew says several factors contribute to the difficulties people, especially farmers, face in getting counselling help when it is needed:

- there is the well known stigma factor;
- limited low cost options;
- accessibility issues - getting away from the farm to see someone; and
- a lack of confidence that counselling will be effective.

He says while mental health issues are not unique to farmers there are few things that contribute to their struggles.

"Men in general have difficulty asking for help let alone male farmers who are socialised into fulfilling the stereotype of being a 'carry on, staunch, can do type'."

In addition he says these days farming is more about running a business and with that comes the stress of maximising output with available resources.



Drew Hignett

"Gone are the days when you slip on the gummies and slap on the 'she'll be right' outlook."

How can counselling help?

One of the main issues with the mind when it is under stress is that it becomes difficult to maintain more than one perspective on both internal and

external problems.

In other words, says Drew the emotional states resulting from stress be they anxiety, depression or anger create a barrier to solutions, problems solving and possibilities.

"Counselling can help people view their situation from a different perspective and offer a safe place to reconnect with

their ability to solve problems and realise the different options they may have," says Drew.

Drew says the medication vs counselling debate is influenced by the condition a person is struggling with.

"If stress is the primary difficulty then counselling may help to put a person's experiences in context without the need for medication.

"However, if a person's distress levels are so high that they cannot even start to discuss their experiences then medication can help to reduce distress to a point where talking about things is possible and often effective."

Drew says he always advises people to seek help earlier rather than later if they want to try therapy over medication.

"In some cases there is a need for both but the longer a problem is left the more time the mind has to develop a sense of permanency around the problem and this can be very convincing for many people who have experienced anxiety or depression."



The Rural Health Alliance Aotearoa New Zealand

A new unified voice for the health and well-being of rural communities has been formed.

Rising pressures on farmers and statistics that show depression is a real issue in rural communities has prompted rural organizations to get together to find real solutions.

The Rural Health Alliance Aotearoa New Zealand (RHAANZ) was established in

March 2013 and brings together health, social and political agencies with a rural health focus to provide a unified voice and resource to find solutions for the health problems facing rural communities. The new coalition will explore the development of a rural health policy.

Health has been defined as more than the absence of illness. It is a process of engaging social, mental, spiritual and physical well-being.

The Alliance has agreed that

securing equitable and effective access to health care services – particularly primary health care services – reducing poverty levels and improving health literacy within rural communities are central to achieving this goal. In addition, improving ease of access to services such as after-hours, mental health and maternity are also seen as important underlying factors to address.

The coalition wants to raise awareness of anxiety and

depression in rural communities and to reduce the stigma and discrimination associated with mental illness as it is stigma that often prevents people seeking help when they need it.

It is expected the coalition will forge stronger partnerships between affiliated organizations – partnerships that will lead to better outcomes for those suffering from severe stress, anxiety depression and suicide.

Chairperson Dr Jo Scott-Jones
Rural GP Opotiki

Q&A

Accessing Taranaki District Health Board

The TDHBs Mental Health and Addiction Service deals with people experiencing acute mental health issues.

- Access or referral to Mental Health services occur via the Crisis Team or Emergency Department following assessment by a clinician.
- For access to Alcohol and Drug Services self referrals are accepted. This means people in need can walk into the reception and they will be seen by a duty counsellor.
- People experiencing mental distress are urged to see their GP and/or counsellor before their distress escalates and the sooner the better.

Is someone in immediate danger?

Yes: Call the Police. 111

Is your need urgent?

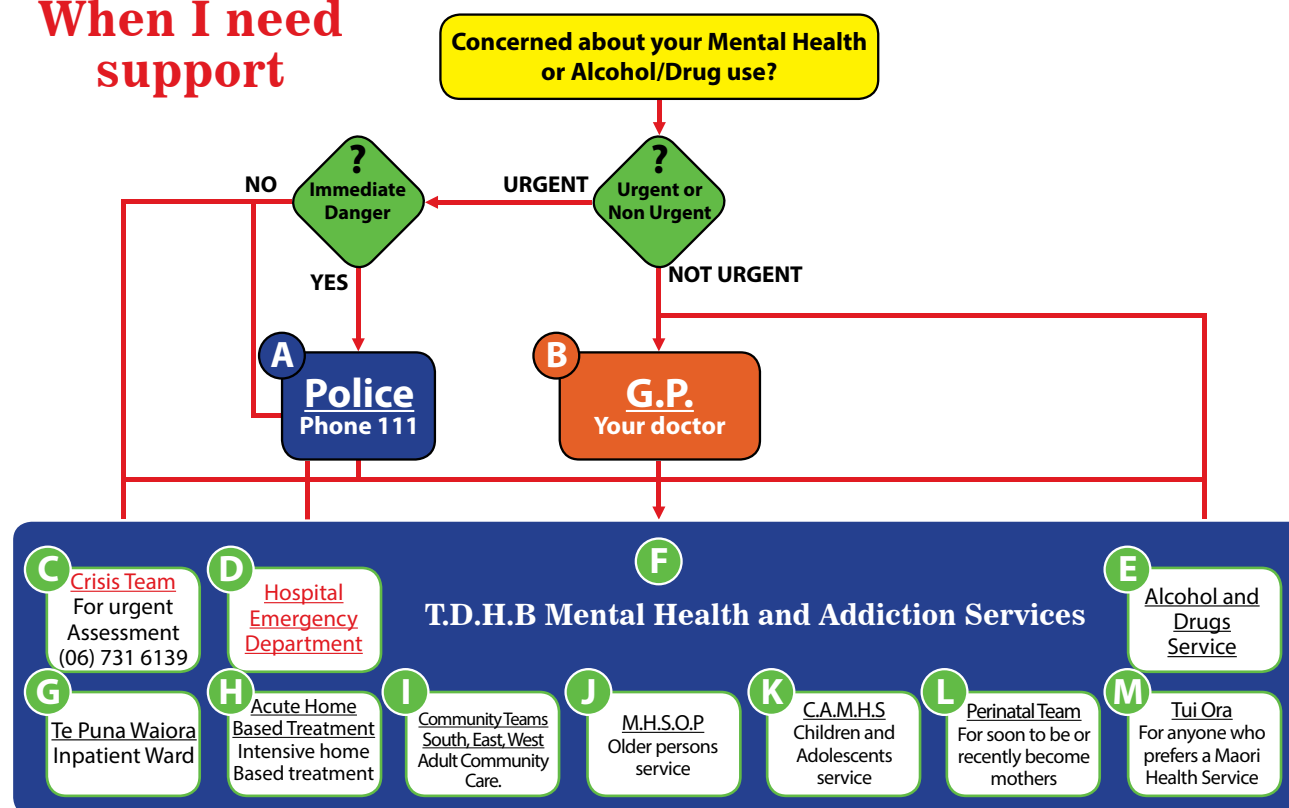
Yes: Telephone the Crisis Team (06) 731 6139 or go to the Emergency Department.

No: Make an appointment with your GP, or if your concerns are about addiction, you can go directly to the Alcohol and Drugs service.

Wendy Langlands - Manager Mental Health and Addiction Services.

Accessing Taranaki District Health Board Mental Health and Addiction Services

When I need support



A The Police should always be your first call if anyone is in immediate danger. They can respond faster and if necessary they can detain people for their own, or others, protection. Once they have the situation under control the Police will contact the Crisis Team.

B Your General Practitioner (GP) can treat most mental health and / or addiction issues. They have access to specialist advice and support if they need it or can refer people to hospital Mental Health and Addiction services.

C The Crisis Team are a mobile team who carry out urgent assessments. They may arrange admission to Te Puna Waiora, refer people for further specialist mental health assessment or to the Alcohol and Drugs Service. They may also refer people to their own G.P. or other community supports for follow up.

D The Hospital Emergency Department is a safe place. They can arrange for an urgent assessment to be carried out by the Crisis Team.

E The Alcohol and Drugs Service is a 'walk in' service, just walk into reception and you will be seen by a duty counsellor. You can also be referred by your G.P.

F T.D.H.B. Mental Health & Addiction Services includes a range of specialists who carry out more detailed assessment and will either refer you to a specialist team or back to your G.P. for medical care.

G Te Puna Waiora, 'Spring of Healing Waters', is the inpatient unit for people when they need a high level of care and observation.

H The Acute Home Based Treatment (A.H.B.T.) team can provide a high intensity level of support in your own home.

I The Community Teams (South, East and West) provide specialist support for adults.

J The Mental Health Services for Older People (M.H.S.O.P) specialise in the needs of people over 65.

K The Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (C.A.M.H.S.) specialise in the needs of children and young people.

L The Perinatal Team work with new and expectant mothers.

M Tui Ora provide services to anyone who would prefer Kaupapa Maori health services.



Q&A

Key Facts about Tui Ora's Services

- Offers mobile services.
- Employs a range of staff – everyone from consumer advocates and nurses to social workers and kaumātua or kaiāwhina.
- Works with all age groups.
- Main offices are in Hawera and New Plymouth but staff work from other sites.
- Brings a cultural perspective to its work, tailored to any ethnic group. This means it takes a wider whānau-centric or holistic view.
- Its support is practical and wide-ranging – everything from facilitating peer support groups to helping sort out money matters.

Contacts:

New Plymouth:
36 Maratahu St.
06-759-4064
www.tuiora.co.nz

Hawera:

164 Princes St.
06-278-6603

A Maori Perspective - Tui Ora Ltd

Knowing where to go when mental health issues strike is sometimes the hardest thing. Sarah Foy profiles Tui Ora Ltd, a Taranaki-wide organisation that's setting itself up to be the first point of contact for anyone, anywhere in the region.

Mihi Kahu has a dual role as a support service coordinator and a consumer advocate for Tui Ora Mental Health & Addition Services, based in South Taranaki. Her own experiences of mental illness is an added advantage as she has been able to use that experience to support many others.

She's put them in touch with agencies and organisations, helped set goals, facilitated peer support groups, talked family

Mihi has a background in business and has worked in management since the early 1990's, which made disclosure difficult. "With me, it was my own stigma about acknowledging it. I didn't want to tell people, but actually the best thing was letting others know."

Tui Ora works within a kaupapa Māori framework, and uses a number of models. However anyone can use its services, stresses Mihi.

"People don't need a diagnosis. It's any stress they are under that could potentially lead to a mental health disorder. Capturing the opportunity and helping that person early on – that's what we can help with."

"Within our organisation any door is the right door. We're happy for people to make contact with us directly, whether they're an individual, whānau or friend."

through factors associated with illnesses and been a listening ear – for anyone.

"My world fell to bits," she says, describing her brush with depression some years ago. At the time getting help didn't seem an option.

"Even if we are not the right organisation, we will know who can help."

Tui Ora clinical team leader Bruce Jackson says issues affecting rural communities often centre on isolation and knowing whom to turn to. "We



Bruce Jackson

know that people don't access services early, and if they do, they're often waiting until a first visit to their GP.

"Within our organisation any door is the right door. We're happy for people to make contact with us directly, whether they're an individual, whānau or friend."

As well as employing consumer advocates, Tui Ora has nurses, doctors, social workers, vocational workers, kaumātua and kuia.

Across the organisation different disciplines work together and take a holistic or whānau ora view of a person's health and wellbeing. Many staff help clients 'navigate' through

the health system, breaking down jargon for them.

Within mental health there's an acceptance of a variety of models or ways of dealing with illnesses, says Bruce. Medical input is but one element. Understanding how factors such as spiritual, mental, financial and family also impact on recovery.

Mihi says every person and situation is unique. Cultural details can make a difference so she carries out research before engaging with people. She also checks to see if they want whānau involved. Usually it's better if close family or friends are aware – but the person makes that choice.

Her approach is positive. "It's solutions focused. We set goals and work through them. It might take a year to achieve that and it might be step by step. At that point I could be there for a phone call or I might need to be back in their life." Either way Tui Ora reaches out, keen to let rural people know it can help at any level, through any door.



Keeping your Farm Team Fit and Healthy

Keeping young workers mentally and physically healthy is a challenge for employers especially during busy times like the spring.

Katrina Knowles from Dairy NZ says farmers grow and nurture their stock to get the best from them and they need to do the same with young employees to ensure they remain physically and mentally strong and resilient.

Katrina recommends the best way to achieve this is to sit down with your employees and brainstorm the kind of workplace you all want to be part of.

Set the Ground Rules

As a team work out the key behaviours everyone needs to demonstrate on a daily basis.

Possible behaviours may include:

- Honest and open communication,
- Treating others with respect and understanding,
- Doing our job well,
- Being committed to safe work practices,
- Resolving problems promptly,
- Showing up on time,
- Chipping in when needed,
- Taking care of property and equipment, and
- Respecting and caring for stock.

Give Feedback

Katrina also suggests farmers undertake regular reviews with their employees to keep the lines of communication open.

Positive or corrective feedback is important to keep staff motivated and should be given as soon as the behaviour is observed.

Sleep is Vital

Everyone needs sleep for physical and mental restoration. Inadequate sleep can cause a lot of problems for staff and their employers.

"When staff get tired mistakes are more likely to happen so make sure you encourage them to develop good sleep patterns and roster a late start at least once a week to allow them to have a sleep in," says Katrina.

Feed them Well

Irregular, unhealthy eating and insufficient food is common among young farm workers so it is important to ensure young staff eat well.

Some strategies for better nutrition include:

- Snacks during milking, large breakfast, large lunch, small dinner.
- Supply capped water bottles and real fruit juice instead of soft drink.
- At busy times, consider supplying at least one cooked meal a day as well as snacks for young staff living on their own.

Manage Busy Periods

During calving and other busy times it is important to plan and organise in advance to improve health and safety and help reduce stress.

- Arrange casual help to relieve fulltime staff.
- Plan the roster with a late start for young staff mid-week to let them have the extra sleep needed to keep them fit and healthy.
- Encourage team concern for each other.
- Keep a close eye on staff, if someone is not coping send them home for a rest.
- If staff have small children plan longer lunch breaks to allow them time with family.
- Have a shared breakfast or lunch meeting at least once a week for team building.

Coach and Nurture

Katrina says we have all had a first job where learning the simple things was a challenge, nurturing and coaching young people through this experience can be extremely rewarding.

Good work environments nurture healthy happy staff who will work and learn at a much better level than those who are not enjoying their role.

Katrina Knowles

Regional Leader - Taranaki Dairy Nz



Taranaki Rural Support Trust

The Taranaki Rural Support Trust is part of a nationwide network which in the past has mainly been concerned with supporting fellow farmers during and after adverse weather or environmental events.

Tataraimaka dairy farmer and recently appointed Taranaki Rural Support Trust coordinator Louise Thompson says these events can come at significant personal cost in the form of undue stress, anxiety and depression.

This publication is therefore part of the Trusts initiative to

also be available to assist rural people during their financial and personal difficulties

Trust members are local people who have themselves faced the challenges rural life brings and are prepared to share their time and expertise in times of stress says Louise.

"Trustees are trained to help rural people firstly by being there, secondly by listening and thirdly by offering suggestions for referral to appropriate expertise – be that professional accounting, advisory, advocacy or health services," says Louise.

The Trust liaises closely with

a range of local, regional and national agencies that can assist farmers in times of personal need.

"We want to help raise mental health awareness so that rural people realise in times of stress, many of us may require some support."

Louise says this may be just having someone to talk issues through with or may require medical or counselling support and emphasizes the sooner people ask for help the greater their chance of a successful recovery.

She advises fellow farmers to take time to look after themselves, their family and their team and to look over the fence to check out how their neighbours are faring.

"If you need help please ring the Trust don't leave it until problems become insurmountable. Together, we can work through the issues."

For free and confidential assistance contact the Taranaki Rural Support Trust on 0800-787-254.



Louise Thompson

Supporting Families Taranaki



Catherine Heaven

Supporting Families in Mental Illness, (SF), offers a free confidential, mobile service which supports families/whanau and carers of people experiencing mental illness and/or drug and alcohol issues.

We have two family support workers. They are contracted by the Taranaki District Health Board to work with families in the community from Mokau to Waitotara. We have offices in New Plymouth and Stratford.

Our family support workers are skilled professionals who assist families with support, information and education on mental illness. As well as support groups, SF offers strategies for coping and dealing with day to day living, problem solving, conflict resolution and grief. We can also offer advocacy at appointments with health and government agencies and can refer to other specialised support services as required.

Contact Supporting Families Taranaki:

Level 3, Devon Centre, 44 Liardet St,
New Plymouth
Tel: 06 757-9300
Email: sftaranaki@xtra.co.nz
www.supportingfamiliesnz.org.nz

Touched by Suicide

Touched by Suicide offers care, support and confidentiality amid the turmoil of grief to people who have been bereaved by suicide.

Supporting Families Taranaki manages two Touched by Suicide support groups, one in Hawera and one in New Plymouth. These groups meet monthly with a trained facilitator in a safe and confidential environment to provide support and understanding on issues that have been troubling members.

Many people find it a great help to know they are not alone and that suicide is a difficulty faced by many families in Taranaki.

The groups are open to everyone aged 18 years and over who has been bereaved by suicide. This includes parents, siblings, partners or friends – indeed anyone who thinks the group may help them through the grieving process.

Contact facilitators through:

SF Taranaki – 06-757-9300
Victim Support – 06-759-5519
Like Minds Taranaki – 06-759-0966

Taranaki Suicide Prevention Coordination Group



Fi Szpetnar-Perez

is a group of individuals and organisational representatives committed to working together to reduce the rate of suicide in Taranaki.

A key aim of the group is to get the community talking and engaging with

the issue of suicide prevention. One way of achieving this is through organising high-profile activities for the annual World Suicide Prevention Day. Another focus for TSPCG is increasing the availability of suicide prevention training in our region.

Chairperson Fi Szpetnar-Perez is a dedicated volunteer who has experienced the loss of her husband to suicide. She says that true suicide prevention is about developing resilience in our youth and a foundation of good mental health.

"It is a societal problem. It has to be a societal solution - not a government one."

Contact:

Fi Szpetnar-Perez at
Email: tspcg@hotmail.com

MATES Men's Network

Mateship is a basic human trait, whenever people are in need they rely on their friends, their best mates. Yet many men have isolated themselves and forgotten the amazing uplifting power of true mateship.

The MATES Men's Network is dedicated to reaching out to and supporting all men in finding direction and purpose in their lives.

MATES provides:

- A confidential forum for men, giving them opportunity to talk and be listened to about any subject, feeling or experience.
- Personal development programmes, workshops, corporate programmes, outings and events as well as a community support network.
- Integration with other professional healthcare providers within Taranaki and throughout New Zealand.

MATES aims to assist community development by connecting with men and inspiring them to become positive male role models.

Contact:

MATES chief executive officer
Kerry Babbage on 0800 462 837
or www.mates.org.nz



The Journal



Sir John Kirwin

Sir John Kirwan... taking the lead in promoting mental health and managing depression...

The 'Journal' is a successful online self-management programme for New Zealanders experiencing mild to moderate depression.

The Journal teaches people techniques they can use in everyday life to help manage their own depression.

It can be accessed on www.depression.org.nz

Sir John Kirwan fronts the television and online advertising campaign promoting the Journal and is also the coach of the programme.

This programme has been successful in promoting mental health, demystifying mental illness and countering much of the stigma and discrimination associated with mental illness.

It has been particularly successful in encouraging people, particularly men to acknowledge that it is OK to seek help.

Mental health providers and support services...

There are a wide range of clinical and non clinical support services in Taranaki – many are featured in this publication.

If you are concerned about your mental health or that of someone you know here are some people and organisations that may help.

Talk to someone you trust:

A problem shared or a difficulty acknowledged is an important first step to overcoming mental health concerns.

See your doctor:

It would be advisable to book a double appointment to give you and the doctor time to discuss your health issues and for the doctor to undertake any tests and to suggest further referrals if needed. Your doctor may prescribe medication to assist with mental distress.

Be open to seeing a counsellor:

Ask your doctor if counselling may be helpful to best manage and achieve optimum mental health. Your doctor may be able to recommend an appropriate counsellor.

Taranaki Rural Support Trust:

Sometimes it is helpful to talk concerns through with someone who understands the challenges of rural life. Members of the Taranaki Rural Support Trust all have fellow rural people's interests at heart.

The TRST Office is based at Federated Farmers – 06-757-3423

Trust Coordinator:

Louise Thompson 06-752-4264 or 027-481-4007

Like Minds Taranaki:

A mental health promotion arm of the Ministry of Health. Like Minds Taranaki has had a long term commitment to improving mental health awareness in Taranaki.

06-759-0966 or 0800-454-536
mental.health@xtra.co.nz

www.likemindstaranaki.org.nz
Like us on Facebook.

Supporting Families in Mental Illness (Taranaki):

Is a nation wide service offering a free, confidential, mobile service, which supports families/whanau and carers of people experiencing mental illness and/or drug and alcohol issues.

06-757-9300
sftaranaki@xtra.co.nz
www.sfnat.org.nz

Dairy Women's Network:

Shona Glentworth
06-769-9500
www.dwn.co.nz

Taranaki Women in Farming:

Bronwyn Muir
06-764-5062
bronwyn@onfarmsafety.co.nz

Rural Women NZ:

Shirley Read
06-752-3698
shirley.read@ruralwomen.org.nz
www.ruralwomen.org.nz

Taranaki Federated Farmers:

06-757-3423
taranaki@fedfarm.org.nz

Tui Ora Ltd:

Provide a comprehensive range of kaupapa Maori mental health and addiction services.

06-759-4064
reception@tuiora.co.nz
www.tuiora.co.nz

Taranaki Suicide Prevention Coordinating Group

The group includes representatives from Like Minds Taranaki, Taranaki District Health Board's Mental Health & Addiction Services, ACC and local contracted mental health service providers. Representatives from Federated Farmers, secondary schools, Ministry of Social Development and Primary Health Organisations also attend the meetings.

Chair: Fi Szpetnar-Perez
027-485-8866
tspcg@hotmail.com

MATES:

The MATES Men's Network is dedicated to reaching out to and supporting all men in finding direction and purpose in their lives.

CEO - Kerry Babbage
0800-462-837
info@mates.org.nz
www.mates.org.nz

Alcohol & Drug Service - Taranaki District Health Board

Self referrals accepted.
06-753-7838

Touched by Suicide:

Operating in Hawera and New Plymouth, Touched by Suicide offers people who have been bereaved by suicide an opportunity to meet and foster growth, strength and hope for the future.

Contact:
SF Taranaki – 06-757-9300

NATIONAL AGENCIES:

Ministry of Health Healthline –
0800-611-116

Lifeline – 24 hrs per day.
0800-543-354

Samaritans –
0800-726-666

Alcohol & Drug Helpline –
0800-787-797

Gambling Helpline –
0800-654-655

Suicide Prevention Helpline –
0508-828-865

USEFUL WEBSITES:

www.depression.org.nz –
ideal for adults

www.thelowdown.co.nz –
ideal for younger people

www.likeminds.org.nz –
Like Minds Like Mine

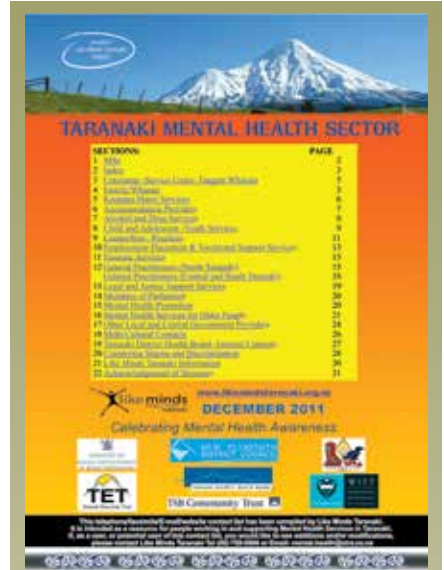
www.mentalhealth.org.nz –
The Mental Health Foundation

IF IN A CRISIS SITUATION:

Contact the Taranaki DHB
Crisis Service – 753-6139.

If you are concerned about someone else's or your own safety:
Call the Police – 111

If you or someone you know needs urgent help – call 111.



Taranaki
Mental Health Sector
Directory celebrating
mental health
awareness...

Email: mental.health@xtra.co.nz

A free updated copy of this
32 page Directory is available
on the comprehensive
Like Minds Taranaki website...

www.likemindstaranaki.org.nz

This publication contains some general information about mental illness and it's management. Medical advice should be sought from your Doctor.

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TSB Community Trust



Paula
Ingram

This publication is available online at:
www.likemindstaranaki.org.nz

Michelle Wilson-McLoven Photography



Taranaki Kowhaiwhai panel - The Hammerhead shark, Mangopare - 'keep positive, see it through'