

Date: 26 August 2016

## The art of mental health

Paint your Path is a colourful art competition in south western Sydney that's paving the way for mental health consumers and their loved ones to share their artistic journey Australia wide.

Participants will be given the chance to have their art work printed on Biopak cups that will be distributed domestically. SWSLHD Mental Health Service Director Dr Claire Jones said the competition theme 'learn and grow' isn't just about showcasing creative work but also about focusing on how entrants process their feelings.

"Communication is important in recovery, so if art can help our consumers or their friends connect with another person in some way, then that's great," Dr Jones said.

Mental illness can impact everyone including NRL players, which is why the Wests Tigers' football club are showing their support for people living with mental illness by getting behind the art competition.

"We hope that competition entries from the Tigers', mental health consumers and their loved ones will help to reduce stigma about mental illness while also helping participants to learn about themselves and grow as a result," she said.

Sporting organisations around the world have long tried to rid stigma surrounding mental illness by encouraging players to express themselves and their emotions. Dr Jones said it isn't uncommon for athletes not to want to acknowledge when they are experiencing difficulties with their mental health.

"Some athletes don't like talking about mental illness as they are concerned that it could be perceived as a sign of weakness but this couldn't be further from the truth – it takes a lot of strength to open up about how you're feeling.

"Athletes are often seen as role models and have an enormous amount of pressure to always perform at their best both on and off the field. The anxiety associated with meeting these expectations can make seeking help for a mental health problem hard but it is a really important step towards getting and staying well," Dr Jones said.

Wests Tigers' CEO Justin Pascoe said the team's goal is to care for their players and ensure that they are in a position to show support when it's needed in order to help break the silence on a life-changing illness.

"Wests Tigers are proud to be involved with this incredibly important initiative," said Pascoe.

"Mental illness can impact anybody at any stage in their life and it's important that people understand that it's ok to speak out and seek help."

### **PHOTO OPPORTUNITY**

**WHAT:** The Paint your Path art competition is open to south western Sydney residents who have a current, past history of mental illness or have a loved one living with mental illness. Entrants will have a chance to get their artwork displayed on Biopak cups nationally with 14 lucky artists selected to showcase their artwork through Hospitals in South Western Sydney Local Health District. The theme for the competition will be 'Learn & Grow' and can be interpreted however the artist sees fit.

**HOW:** Submit your application to by 9am, 26 September 2016 for judging. For more information visit [www.swslhd.nsw.gov.au/MentalHealth/pyp.html](http://www.swslhd.nsw.gov.au/MentalHealth/pyp.html)