

DRY JULY MORE IMPORTANT THAN EVER

Dry July in 2020 is more important now more than ever before as people battle with the challenges of COVID-19.

WRAD is promoting the annual campaign as an important initiative to get people back on track after an upswing in alcohol use in recent months.

The spike in alcohol consumption during the pandemic is concerning and could lead to long-term implications.

“WRAD hopes people use Dry July to take a break and reset their alcohol use.”

Whilst alcohol is the focus of ‘Dry July’, WRAD is also concerned about rising misuse of prescription medication, and other illicit drugs, which potentially lead to more health problems, homelessness and domestic violence.

Operations manager Mark Powell said the COVID-19 restrictions had led to large increases in purchasing and consumption of alcohol.

A recent poll by the Australian Foundation for Alcohol Research and Education highlighted worrying trends for Australians.

While there are no statistics to confirm additional consumption in the Warrnambool region, anecdotally, WRAD has noticed increasing community concerns about alcohol use and an increase in presentations.

“The fact that people are not having to leave home for work or having to drive as much has led to spikes in drinking on weekdays when people normally wouldn’t be drinking,” Mark said. “WRAD is concerned what the possible implications might be going forward for our community.”

Concern about the virus and boredom are also significant factors in the increased consumption.

“Dry month” promotions have been shown to work internationally.

A University of Sussex study showed that taking part in ‘Dry January’ led to overall drops in drinking days, overall amounts of alcohol consumed and frequency of drinking also dropped. The research showed benefits such as 93 per cent of participants had a sense of achievement; 88 per cent saved money; 80 per cent felt more in control of their drinking; 70 per cent had generally improved health; 67 per cent had more energy; 58 per cent lost weight; and 57 per cent had better concentration;

“WRAD’s vision is to advance the health and wellbeing of those in the south west affected by substances and promote optimal quality of life and we believe the benefits of a “Dry July” are evident and we encourage people to take this opportunity to abstain from alcohol for a month,” Mark said.

“It has been our experience that for many people addiction is a slow onset and it’s not until they try to stop that they realise the hold that alcohol or drugs has on them.”

If you are struggling; contact WRAD on 1300 009723 to learn more about ways to manage substance use.

Results of participants, in a study from the University of Sussex, that had taken part in ‘Dry January’:



93% of participants had a sense of achievement



76% learned more about when and why they drink



67% had more energy



88% saved money



71% realised they don’t need a drink to enjoy themselves



58% lost weight



82% think more deeply about their relationship with drink



71% slept better



57% had better concentration



80% feel more in control of their drinking



70% had generally improved health



54% had better skin

BERMINGHAM TRADITION CONTINUES

The name Bermingham has been part of WRAD since its inception, and now a new generation has joined the team.

WRAD's new youth outreach counsellor Renee Bermingham is following in the footsteps of her mother-in-law, Dawn.

Dawn had been with WRAD since 1986, progressing from receptionist to finance and officer manager before her retirement earlier this year. Dawn still returns to the office to help in the finance department on a part-time basis.

Renee works in a different part of the agency but has the same commitment to WRAD.

Prior to joining WRAD in May, Renee had been working in retail and at Kuna Bim youth residential rehabilitation operated by Wellways in Warrnambool.

Renee joined the independent semi-supported housing for youth with mental health issues last October after completing a mental health and alcohol and other drugs course through Gen U.

Renee had previously started studying community services but didn't complete the course as she concentrated on raising her family of four children.

"When I went to go back, some of the units I completed were no longer included so I couldn't get credits for my previous work," she said.

Instead, Renee moved into beauty work, something she could do from home while continuing Mum duties, but the desire to help people never left.



RENEE BERMINGHAM

"I felt I needed to go back; I definitely wanted to work in this area," Renee said.

She joined WRAD during the coronavirus pandemic, adding to the challenge of a new role as Renee has been guiding, educating and supporting young people via phone hook-ups instead of the usual face-to-face sessions.

"Because of the COVID-19 restrictions, I don't think I've had a true representation of the job so far," she said, but she's seen enough to appreciate the value of the work.

"It's about helping youth to find strategies and ways to deal with their substance use and to work out their goals and then help them achieve those goals," she said.

"Doing it on the phone is challenging but having said that I don't know any different. However, I love building face-to-face relationships and putting a face to the name, especially as you get more involved with them."

Renee loves listening to and learning from her clients. "Everyone has a story and I just love hearing their stories," she said. "I don't judge them and if I can help them out along the way, I'm in a pretty special role."

Renee believes education, awareness and empathy are the keys to helping young people. "A lot of youth aren't aware of the risks they are taking. It's about balancing the pros and cons of their use and offering a different viewpoint that they are often taking drug solutions to life problems when there are other solutions."

Renee is continuing at Kuna Bim on a casual basis. Her role at WRAD is a maternity leave position.

LOOKOUT DECISION WELCOMED

VCAT has agreed to amend staffing levels at The Lookout, giving WRAD the green light to progress the project to the next stage.

However, the timing remains uncertain with the COVID-19 pandemic likely to affect how quickly the plans can be advanced.

"These plans will be reviewed on a regular basis and as soon as practical, WRAD will negotiate with the Department of Health and Human Services to source operational funding and The Lookout Committee will explore options to build the facility at Atkinson's Lane Dennington," Director Geoff Soma said.

WRAD remains dedicated to completing this important project to benefit clients, families and the community.

"We look forward to developing beneficial partnerships," Geoff said. "WRAD will continue to openly communicate any progress with The Lookout project and at the appropriate time, WRAD will also invite representation for a community consultation committee."

WRAD hopes the residential rehabilitation centre will be included in the 2021-22 state budget and has been talking with DHSS to develop a plan for the next stage of the Lookout's development.

WRAD takes this opportunity to thank all of those people who have assisted us to date.

FROM WELLWAYS TO WRAD

New AOD clinician Hayley Elliott has followed her former co-worker Renee Bermingham from Wellways to WRAD.

Hayley had been with Wellways for more than four years, including two years in a team leader role for the youth residential rehabilitation program. Her first connection to the agency was a course placement and she then became a volunteer before moving into casual, part-time and eventually full-time work.

"I did certificate IV in Mental Health and AOD at TAFE in 2015 and did a four-week placement at Wellways," Hayley said. "I didn't plan to go into youth work but that's what I enjoyed the most."

She worked on a volunteer basis alongside another worker to create a short-term cooking program and then was offered casual work which led to ongoing employment. "It was all too good to be true," she joked.

While working at Wellways, Hayley became interested in the connection between alcohol and other drug use and mental health challenges.

She also wanted to step away from the team leader role, where she had six staff reporting to her, and return to face-to-face support work. "That was the area I wanted to work in," she said, "so I stepped back into case management to have a greater connection with people."

Raised in Warrnambool from a young age, Hayley lived in Melbourne for 10 years before returning to this area.



HAYLEY ELLIOTT

Her new role with WRAD involves counselling people with AOD issues.

"I like to work on a strength-base, being there and playing a role in helping people discover what they can do and discover the strengths that they didn't realise they have.

"I want to help them to identify their motivations; sometimes people just don't see it."

Hayley also loves to learn, from people and through courses.

"I love listening and learning from people," she said. "The people I help are the experts; they know themselves and they have all the jigsaw pieces; it's just a matter of supporting them to put it together."

She already has the relevant training requirements for the position, but is interested in doing more study in the field in the future.

"I firstly want to sit back and learn more about this job," she said.

"What inspires me is seeing people on the journey of recovery and progressing through their recovery, and at the same time it's helpful to reflect on yourself and learn from them about yourself and others."

A FRESH LOOK

WRAD has taken advantage of the COVID-19 lockdown to give the centre a fresh look.



The offices have been repainted, with new grey tones adding a more clinical look being offset by a splash of orange.

There is also new carpet to give the place a fresh, new smell, and the air conditioner has been replaced to improve climate control.

This has been the first major refurbishment since WRAD moved into the purpose-built centre at 172 Merri Street in July 2006.

SLIDING DOORS MOVES ONLINE

The Sliding Doors program has made a smooth transition to online services during the coronavirus pa

Coordinator Angela Alexander said numbers, engagement and retention has been strong since the new format was introduced.

"Perhaps because people have been in isolation and not doing their normal activities, they have engaged really well," she said.

"We've had excellent numbers and outcomes and the participants have been focused and well-engaged. We've had great feedback and the participants seem to really enjoy it."

The program including cognitive behaviour therapy sessions has remained the same but has been delivered online instead of in-person.

However, community-based and group activities have been curtailed and replaced with modified online activities.

The service has been totally online since late March. At this stage, it will stay online as Victoria continues to battle COVID-19.

FINDING THE RIGHT TRACK

Felicity Sloane knows how easy it is to take the wrong track in life, but she also knows how to get things heading back in the right direction.

WRAD's new peer support and advocacy worker brings lived experience to the role, having recovered from a drug-induced psychosis in her 20s.

Felicity found the structures provided by the mental health and drug and alcohol systems were essential in her recovery, and now she's hoping to help others on their journey.

Felicity has worked in mental health services as a support worker and before that in disability support services. She has just returned to work after 10 years of raising two children with her dairy farmer husband James near Camperdown. She is also studying a Certificate IV in Peer Mental Health Work through Mental Health Victoria.

Things are good today, but Felicity can relate to clients going through tough times.

"In my 20s, I experienced drug-induced psychosis and ended up in the mental health system," she said.

Felicity attended residential rehabilitation through alcohol and other drug services and says the five-week program was a key to her recovery.

"That was really good because it created a lot of structure," she said. "In the lead-up to people having a crisis, their structure tends to be lost. Self-care is also an integral part of recovery. I know from experience that services really help to put self-care and structure back into everyday life."

Now she hopes to use her experiences and how she engaged with services to help people facing similar problems, while also validating her experiences.

"I think I will be growing from the interaction with people," she said. "Through our relationship, I will keep in touch with my own recovery and value that experience."

"Psychosis is scary but it's an experience that helps you to reassess how you're living your life and you can end up with values that are healthier and happier."

"It's easy to get on the wrong track in life. This is an opportunity to stop and reassess and look at things from another angle."

Felicity said the residential rehabilitation program run by a Christian group was life-changing for everyone around her. "It was good for my family because they knew I was in a safe space. It's a relief for everyone to have that break and get structure back into your life."

Now she is inspired to help people because of what she's experienced.

"I found I had the capacity to self-advocate and I really wanted to help people who haven't had the opportunities that I've had," she said.

"I think it is helpful to speak to people about experiences. Through meeting people that have had similar experiences, I have been able to validate my own experience and what psychosis means to me."

"This position is about supporting people with addiction and distress and using my lived experience to support and validate them and help them to find hope and discover ways of recovering."

Felicity started with WRAD during the lockdown and has been working at home, but is now working in the office two days per week.



FELICITY SLOANE

CLIENT SUPPORT

WRAD is finding new ways to connect with clients to make sure services meet their needs.

The centre is surveying clients and forming a focus group to find the best ways to connect with consumers. WRAD's new peer support and advocacy worker

Felicity Sloane said the centre was looking to improve services by engaging consumer perspectives.

Felicity is preparing a client survey and plans to form a focus group to look at policies and procedures and the best ways to obtain client feedback.

"It's about breaking down barriers and creating a balance of service delivery," she said. "We look at it as a co-production, where everyone is involved in service delivery."

Director Geoff Soma said the new consumer advocate role would ensure clients have input and help to guide service delivery.

Clients wishing to participate in the survey or join the focus group can contact Felicity at WRAD on 1300 009723.

NEW GP REGISTRARS

Two new GP registrars will join WRAD's Handbury Medical Clinic for six months starting August 3. Dr Bibha Pradhan and Dr Sylvie Gjerde, and joining our existing team of Drs Sue Richardson, Clare Mooney, Devendhran Ramu and Yunfei Han.

They are being hosted as part of the Murray City Country Coast (MCCC) GP Training program that offers specialist training for qualified doctors who want to pursue a career in general practice medicine.

MCCC is one of nine regional training organisations in Australia that offers the Federally-funded Australian General Practice Training (AGPT) Program.

Doctors who join GP training develop their specialist skills and knowledge through supervised work placements in hospitals and accredited GP teaching practices that service the health needs of metropolitan, regional and remote communities across Victoria.

WRAD has previously participated in the program which benefits the doctors in their specialist training field and the medical practice by adding to the number of doctors available for consultations.

Finance manager Alistair Ross, who organises the placement for WRAD, said they are already doctors in their own right and are now taking the next steps in specialist training.

Drs Pradhan and Gjerde will be supervised by senior doctors and have dispensation for patients to receive full Medicare rebate.

“There is particularly strong demand in the community for female doctors, particularly those with an interest in obstetrics and gynaecology.”

Dr Pradhan has completed a diploma in Obstetrics and Sydney Paediatrics Child Health Program. Since moving to Australia, she has had placements in Alice Springs, Maitland, Launceston and Warrnambool since August 2019; has been actively involved in hospital audits and keen to participate in teaching sessions and provide support/mentoring for more junior colleagues and medical students.

Dr Gjerde is an Australian-trained GP registrar. “Becoming a GP has been my goal throughout medical school and residency,” she said.

Dr Gjerde says she wants to experience the breadth of community medicine and gain experience in addiction medicine. She also hopes to undertake an obstetrics and gynaecology placement. As a long-term goal, Dr Gjerde wants to work in general practice and become an advocate for women's and indigenous health and the welfare of refugees.

COVID G.P RESTRICTIONS

The Handbury Medical Clinic has been primarily conducting telephone consultations during the COVID-19 pandemic period, but patients have adapted well to the new system.

While some face-to-face consultations have continued when needed, especially for flu vaccinations, most people have appreciated the option of phone appointments.

Finance manager Alistair Ross said phone consultations had been challenging for reception staff, with multiple phone calls sometimes being required, but had worked well to keep people in touch with their GP during the pandemic.

“We are looking forward to eased restrictions when we will conduct more face-to-face consultations within recommended social distancing and protection protocols;

but at this stage we're waiting for advice from the government,” Alistair said.

“We are prepared but we're not promoting an open-door policy at this stage. It is a changing situation and we will update advice on our Facebook page and website as changes are made.

Most patients have been phoning in for their appointments, although some people have been on-site for flu vaccination clinics and some vaccinations for children.

Protocols have been developed to ensure that when more people do return to the clinic, social distancing requirements and decontamination processes will ensure a safe environment for all staff and clients.

To avoid having too many people in the building, the Handbury Medical Clinic will also investigate whether some patients will be required to wait in their cars before being called.

OUR RAINBOW TICK



WRAD continues to work towards accreditation as a Rainbow Tick organisation, recognising its commitment to LGBTI+ pride, diversity and inclusion.

Before WRAD can apply for accreditation it must meet a range of criteria and the organisation is determined to ensure this is done properly.

The aim is to create a welcoming inclusive organisation – visual cues are an important part of that, and one of the areas we will be focusing on. This will include adding the rainbow flag on WRAD's website and at the WRAD Centre.

WRAD Sliding Doors coordinator Angela Alexander is organising the accreditation and is working through a Rainbow Tick site audit.



We are very grateful to members of the LGBTIQ+ community for agreeing to take on a consultancy role - their input and support is crucial," Angela said.

WRAD is part of the newly formed 'Rainbow Tick Implementation Network' which includes partner agencies as well as regional councils and other local services. Meetings are held bi-monthly to share information and work on shared events and activities.

Angela and fellow staff member Kay-Leigh Walmsley-Sims have been attending "HowTo" webinar training delivered by Rainbow Health Victoria. The training is designed around the six national standards that make up the Rainbow Tick, and coaches participants through the practical steps involved in embedding LGBTIQ inclusive practices within their organisation.

NEW INTERCOM SYSTEM

To ensure everyone's safety, WRAD has installed a new intercom system to regulate numbers entering the building.

This initiative will ensure the reception and waiting room areas adhere to social distancing limits.

It's a simple procedure, with staff able to respond and open the door if it is safe for visitors to enter.

People entering the building are also being temperature checked to ensure everyone can remain safe.


WRAD appreciates the understanding and patience of all staff and clients using the facility during this difficult time.

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www.wrad.org.au

Like us on Facebook on:

<https://www.facebook.com/wradcentre> 

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**Call: 1300 002 760 Mon to Fri 9am-5pm
or Email: gscintake@acso.org.au**

You can also contact Directline on **1800 888 236** for information and out of hours support.



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