Monday 6th April, 2020

Dear Live4Life Partner

It is just over two weeks since I last wrote to you and so much has changed since then. I want to first thank you for your continued support and update you on what we are doing in response to Covid-19.

We have been promoting the two-year independent evaluation of Live4Life in Benalla and Glenelg to government departments, funders and other key stakeholders. This has included the Premier, Minister for Mental Health Martin Foley, the Minister for Regional Development Victoria Jaclyn Symes, the Department of Health and Human Services, the Royal Commission into Victoria’s Mental Health System, Department of Education and Training, Catholic Education, Independent Education and the Primary Health Networks of North West Melbourne, Murray, Gippsland and Western Victoria.

The message has been very clear and simple: right now with schools closed and physical distancing rules in place due to Covid-19, the mental health and well being of our young people living in rural communities could not be more important and Live4Life, with its proven impact, needs to be supported.

I have been encouraged by the responses that I have received from government and philanthropy. We are advocating to State Government that they contribute funding for local Live4Life co-ordinators in each Live4Life community. This role will provide backbone support to the local School and Community Partnership Groups, work with Youth Live4Life staff, help facilitate the Crew, coordinate with schools and potentially help deliver teen and Youth MHFA.

If you have not already, this week you will receive the 2 page evaluation info-graph, a draft media release and advocacy tip sheet. These can be used when circulating the evaluation to your local media, politicians and other key stakeholders. $74Million has been allocated to boost mental health services during the Covid-19 pandemic and we want to ensure that some of this funding flows through to rural communities.

On a more immediate level, we have been looking at ways to deliver components of Live4Life in each community while physical isolation restrictions remain in place. Two of the most important elements of the delivery of the Live4Life model is the dissemination of evidence based mental health education to secondary college students and our youth participation activities – our Live4Life Crew Engagement.

For ultimate effectiveness and safety, the optimum environment for this, to date, is in a face to face setting. The Covid-19 pandemic has impacted our delivery of these critical messages to around 5000 students in 2020. We are now in a position where we need to consider – no message or adapting our message for an interim period of time and moving our mental health education into online modules that can be easily accessible to our students across our 6 rural Victorian communities.
We also need to continue the critical Crew Engagement work. This could include extending the Crew’s training through an online module and working collaboratively with them in an online environment. Annie and Cathryn will work with you on how best this can be achieved and how we can continue to support the mental health and wellbeing of our young people.

On a personal note it is important that we check how we are coping. There may be times when we feel overwhelmed, anxious, or stressed. Last Thursday I woke up with a heavy sadness. The previous Friday we had managed to get Finn out of Chamonix and back to Australia and into 14 days of isolation. It was a surreal experience greeting him at the airport, unable to touch him, unable to give him a hug, him with a face mask on, forlorn having to say goodbye to his new life as it was just taking flight. I was just relieved he was home. The sadness I woke to on Thursday was for all those young people whose lives were just taking off and are now put on hold. It was for all those Year 12 students who have been told that this is such an important year for them. We have to check not only on each other but on our selves. How are we coping? And if needed, reach out for support.

Take care

Bernard Galbally