

9th May 2006

GARY APPLEBY STORY

On the 2nd of October 1999, our lives were turned upside down when we lost our 28yr old son Gary to suicide. Gary had just played off in the Goulburn Valley League Grand final when Rochester won the flag, and had celebrated with the team. Team photos were to be taken on the Saturday morning, sadly he did not make it. His death did not only affect us, it also devastated a football team, family members, friends, in fact the whole community. We all asked why?

He had told us it was the best feeling he had ever had winning a Grand Final, he was on top of the world, or so we thought. It wasn't until we received a sympathy card from a family friend, which had a note in it about their daughter who had been suffering with depression and wanted to take her own life, that suddenly we started to wonder if this was the reason. She explained it is not really your life that you want to end, but the unbearable pain and sadness, that feeling of being in a deep dark hole with no way out that you want to take away.

We did some research into depression, and a few months later attended a Suicide Awareness workshop sponsored by the CWA. The speaker was a young man who had worked with Lifeline. Suddenly everything began to fall into place. It was now evident that the signs had been there for years, but because we knew nothing about depression, we had not recognised them. We learnt from this workshop that depression is an illness just like pneumonia, not a sign of weakness or lack of willpower. It is treatable just like any other illness. We found it hard to believe that in 1998, 2683 known Australians took their own lives. An average of 7 Australians commit suicide every day, and for every 1 suicide, there are more than 30 attempts.

Gary and I worked side by side every day in the milking shed and I often wondered why sometimes he would walk in with a grin and chat all through milking, then the next day appeared to be in a bad mood and not even speak. Sometimes he would show anger for no reason at all, and other times appear to have no energy and would want to sleep half the day. I did not have any idea that this was obviously depression and I honestly do not think Gary himself knew why he was feeling this way. If only he had been able to say how he was feeling we may have been able to get him onto medication and counselling which could have helped.

This seems to be typical especially in young males who do not want to appear weak, so they just bottle it up inside themselves. As I write this letter I wonder where it is all going to finish. Sadly there is not enough done in relation to mental health. There must be so many people out there just like us who do not know what depression is all about. They do not know the signs, and when they do, they cannot seem to get any help or know where to go for help.

I trust that eventually some programme will be set up, particularly in the country areas, to assist people who are needing help as well follow up counselling. People need to be made aware of the warning signs and know how to and where to find help.

Lorraine Appleby