

Thursday, 8 September 2022

## **CONTRIBUTION TO BLACK DOG INSTITUTE'S LIFEBOUY APP SEES NEWCASTLE PERMANENT DONATION PROGRAM PASS \$1 MILLION MARK**

Newcastle Permanent employees have donated more than \$13,300 to Black Dog Institute, which will help with the second trial of [LifeBuoy](#), an app designed to help young people manage their suicidal thoughts and distress in daily life.

Having started in 1997, this sees the CommunityAssist Employee Donation Program surpass \$1 million donated to worthy charities.

The donation came about from a nomination by Mobile Banking Manager, Mark Iuliano, who wanted to make a contribution to Black Dog Institute following the death of his brother-in-law, Gus, in March this year.

"Gus had a mental health condition but had been working through things," Mr Iuliano said.

"But in March it must have got to a point where it got too much and he saw no way forward.

"Gus was 38 when he died, with three children aged 18 and younger, so it's been really difficult for his kids, as well as his sisters, his parents, and his family and friends."

According to the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, approximately 3,000 people die by suicide each year in Australia, with suicide being the leading cause of death for people aged 15 to 44.

Shortly after Gus died by suicide, nominations for Newcastle Permanent's CommunityAssist Employee Donation Program opened.

Each year, employees donate around \$60,000 via payroll deductions and nominate charities they believe deserve support. Employees then vote to select four a year to receive funding.

Mr Iuliano saw a donation to Black Dog Institute as an opportunity to commemorate his brother in law's life.

"Gus must have reached out to the Black Dog Institute in the past, because one birthday he asked for donations to Black Dog Institute instead of buying him presents," Mr Iuliano said.

"Making a donation to Black Dog Institute seemed like the best way to honour his memory.

"I've always contributed to the CommunityAssist Program and while I've voted, I'd never nominated before. But this time, when the call for nominations went out, I just thought I'd put Black Dog Institute out there and see what happens.

"I let my colleagues know what Black Dog Institute was and why I was nominating them, and they were all really supportive which was great," he said.

“Being able to say to my partner that we were able to do this, we did it for Gus, then to be able to let Gus’ sisters and his mum and dad know that the organisation I work for is going to donate this money – and it’s a substantial amount – I’m just really grateful for the support from my colleagues and the business as a whole.

“I just hope this is a little positive to come out of it,” Mr Iuliano said.

The donation of more than \$13,300 will go towards the continued testing of the LifeBuoy app in a new Australian trial, which will help researchers at the Black Dog Institute confirm that it is safe and effective therapeutic tool to help people self-manage suicidal thoughts.

Head of Partnerships at Black Dog Institute, Tasman Cassim, explained how the money will be used to help deliver of the latest LifeBuoy trial.

“The generosity we have seen from Newcastle Permanent employees is exceptional and greatly appreciated,” said Mr Cassim.

“The money will be used to cover trial costs associated with recruiting participants, and financing lived experience youth advisors to help the research team understand what the results mean for young people experiencing suicidal thoughts. Involving lived experience will help us to get key findings out to the community and young people in ways that best support understanding and uptake of digital tools, such as LifeBuoy, by those in need,” he concluded.

### **Key mental health statistics:**

In Australia, approximately 3,000 people die by suicide each year, of which 14% are aged between 15 to 24 years<sup>1</sup>. Suicide is the leading cause of death for this age group.

### **About LifeBuoy**

LifeBuoy is a smartphone application designed to help young people self-manage their suicidal thoughts and distress in daily life.

The app is informed by the principles of Dialectical Behaviour Therapy and Acceptance and Commitment Therapy and aims to improve emotion regulation and distress tolerance through interactive learning activities.

Smartphone app-based interventions for suicidal thoughts, provide accessible, anonymous, and timely support, and have the potential to increase treatment access and reduce suicide by overcoming help-seeking obstacles.

Suicidal thoughts are an important target for suicide prevention efforts; intervening early in suicidal thoughts may help to prevent a suicide attempt.

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<sup>1</sup> Black Dog Institute: <https://www.blackdoginstitute.org.au/research-projects/lifebuoy/>