

Tree aims to be a conversation-starter

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A TREE on Wangaratta-whitfield Road has been painted blue as an ongoing remembrance of those lost to suicide. Part of the national Blue Tree Project charity, the tree is also designed to be a conversationstarter around mental health issues and suicide, and aims to encourage people to speak up when battling mental health concerns.

By ‘spreading the paint and spreading the message’ that it’s okay to not be okay, the project hopes to break down the stigma still attached to mental health in the community.

The Wangaratta-whitfield Road tree painting has been in the works since 2019, driven by Ashlee Hutchinson and Trevor Jenvey, who had lost their brother/son Tom Jenvey to suicide as a 22-year-old the previous year.

Ashlee and Trevor are part of I’d Rather Listen to You Than Your Eulogy, a Facebook page for the Wangaratta Area Suicide Prevention (WASP) group, which was reformed - with the support of the Wangaratta Grit and Resilience Program - from the Wangaratta Suicide Prevention Network (WSPN).

The former Wangaratta Suicide Prevention Network had initiated the Blue Tree Project concept locally along with Albury Wodonga Health on World

Suicide Prevention Day in September 2019.

At that stage, led by Renee Murtagh who was part of the WSPN, a small tree was painted blue and made available to be hosted by organisations, sporting clubs, businesses or anyone interested in continuing awareness and conversations around mental health issues and suicide.

Also that year, \$3000 was raised towards establishment of a local blue tree through the Transmoto 8-Hour motorcycle event held on the Markwood property of Doug and Mick Hamilton.

Trevor is a life member of the Alpine Motorcycle Club, of which Tom was also a member, and Ashlee had shared the family’s story at the event.

Though the pandemic halted its development in 2020 and early ‘21, the concept was carried over by Ash and Trevor to the new WASP committee late last year, and with backing from the Grit and Resilience Program, plans for the blue tree in Wangaratta-whitfield Road progressed.

Painting of the tree was completed earlier this month, thanks to much community support, including that of landowners Ian and Anna McDonald, who allowed the group to give new life to a tree on their property.

A group of volunteers gave their time on the day, working tirelessly to see the project to fruition, with businesses also offering assistance.

It now stands as a poignant reminder to those passing the area to consider the battle being fought by many, and the importance of starting those vital conversations.

Trevor and Ashlee, WASP, and the Grit and Resilience Program thanked all those involved in making the blue tree concept a reality.

If you would like to know more about the local group working to raise awareness of mental health and suicide within the community, would like to become involved, or if you have any future project ideas, visit the I’d Rather Listen to You Than Your Eulogy Facebook page.

For details about the origins of the Blue Tree Project, visit www.bluetreeproject.com.au

* If this media article causes you any distress, please phone Lifeline on 131 114 or the Suicide Call Back Service on 1300 659 467.