

# Rural Aid thanks volunteers

RURAL Aid has thanked its generous team of volunteers in light of National Volunteers Week, and ahead of Volunteers Day this Monday, June 14.

Rural Aid CEO John Warlters said the charity wouldn't be where it is today without the hundreds of volunteers who had dedicated their time, energy and money to bettering the lives of others.

"We are so fortunate to have such a wonderful team of volunteers ready to drop everything and help out Aussie farmers and their communities," Mr Warlters said.

"Just last month, we had more than 20 volunteers put their lives on hold, on short notice, to help out flood-ravaged farmers in New South Wales.

"Our volunteers consistently give their all to Rural Aid.

"Volunteers are integral to the Our Town makeover events, the Farm Army work program and to the running of the Rural Aid office.

"They travel hundreds of kilometres, sometimes forgoing their own beds, and spend their days toiling away for the betterment of our farmers — it's truly inspirational."

Mr Warlters said their work doesn't go unnoticed.

"We are so grateful to these everyday Aussies," he said.

"A huge, heartfelt thanks for all the invaluable work you do."

Rural Aid always welcomes new volunteers, Mr Warlters said.



■ HELPING FARMERS... Rural Aid volunteers on the Taree floodfront.



SOS Yorkes and the National Enterprise for Rural and Community and Wellbeing have been working together to help local farmers.

The organisations have co-designed a series of stories addressing some of the issues, taken from 50-plus interviews with farmers from across South Australia, New South Wales and Victoria. Recurring themes include recognising distress and anxiety; economic, weather and other downturns and distress; marital stress and needing to talk to someone; help seeking and the road to recovery. Once a month, the Yorke Peninsula Country Times will run the latest story, as well as contact details for support services.

## You don't have to fix things all on your own

JOE, 55, grew up on the family farm on Yorke Peninsula and is the fourth generation to work the land.

Joe is one of those people you least expect to be struggling.

As Joe says, "I'm probably one of those sort of loud, life-of-the-party sort of people."

At first, Joe didn't understand why he was feeling terrible.

Yet he would have these episodes for weeks where he would be in "a dark space" and "wasn't enjoying anything," he said.

Almost no one knew what was going on because he didn't talk to anyone, whilst his partner Jessica knew something was wrong but felt helpless.

When he told his mates, some of them were surprised and laughed because he's just not the sort of bloke to get depressed.

But things built up and got worse.

When the drought came six years ago, the "anxiety levels would get really high," he said.

He would often be driving the tractor in the middle of the paddock, crying to himself.

"Things that normally roll off my back pretty well (would) set me off," he said.

"I end(ed) up blowing up over something that wasn't really warranted.

"I just had a lot of trouble sleeping, because the family owe(d) \$750,000 which doesn't sound as much, but it is equivalent of about \$2 million now.

"At night, I was just having panic attacks and ... anxiety attacks and all that sort of stuff."

It took a while for Joe to get help.

"I went to the GP's office and just started crying to him, and he said I think you're pretty depressed mate," Joe said.

"He listened, really listened."

Joe now realises depression and anxiety are not something you can fix on your own.

"You have to get professional help even when you don't want to because you are working 14 to 16 hours a day without anyone else around," he said.

After he started taking antidepressants and got more counselling, Joe started to open up to Jessica a lot more.

They would go on long drives to take their minds off things.

Joe has realised he wants to keep going because he loves his life.

"I want to hand (the family farm) on to the next generation in as good or better condition," he said.

By Katrina Jaworski

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If you or someone in your family or community might benefit from support for mental health and wellbeing reach out to your GP or a community counsellor.

**For immediate assistance, contact:**

**Mensline: 1300 789 978**

**Regional Access: 1300 032 186 (for rural SA)**

**Lifeline: 13 11 14**

**Beyond Blue: 1300 224 636**

**Suicide call back service: 1300 659 467**