

Hope from care

Adrian Ballantyne

DEPRESSION is Jane's life.

Sometimes her bouts of fear and sadness last just a few seconds.

Other times they affect her so badly she is too afraid to leave the house to go to the supermarket.

She has been like this since experiencing traumatic events in her childhood and, on rare occasions, has entertained thoughts of suicide.

"It makes me withdraw from everyday life and my everyday responsibilities," Jane said.

"I've battled it all my life and I've been the same person all my life," she said.

"I've lost many friends, partly because they don't have the illness and they judge you for it."

Jane isn't her real name, but her participation in a revolutionary study at Dandenong Hospital and Monash University precludes the *Leader* from revealing her identity. She joined the Depression Awareness Recovery Effectiveness (DARE) project after reading an article in the *Leader* about how it might help her tackle her illness. DARE participants are separated into two groups to take part in one or two treatment programs. One program involves learning to use strategies including meditation to tap into thoughts, feelings and moods and help them deal with their emotions. The other program – of which Jane is a member – involves learning to monitor symptoms through a regular questionnaire. It's an approach that has worked for Jane. "Joining the program has given me hope that people care. It's given me reassurance," she said. "Support is the one thing to get me back on my feet again."



Project director Prof Graham Meadows said early signs from participants had been encouraging. "People don't often realise they're getting in trouble until their lives are already affected by depression and then it's that much harder to get out of," Prof Meadows said. "We hope that both groups will receive benefits," he said.

"We're doing our best to make sure that everybody who gets into the study gets something that's helpful to them." The DARE project is seeking more people who have experienced depression to join the study.

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