Building Mental Health First Aid Capacity in the Community

Background

Central Blue Mountains Rotary first raised money to put towards mental health in May 2019 with a view to launching a program supporting mental health and wellbeing in the local community. The widespread 2019 bushfires and subsequent events increased the imperative to support community resilience, good mental health and wellbeing. We recognised that Mental Health First Aid (MHFA) is an effective way to reduce stigma, build knowledge and skills, give people confidence to talk about mental health issues, and improve overall capability to strengthen mental health and wellbeing. Rather than just fund people to undergo MHFA training, a more effective use of funds would be to train Instructors who could deliver the courses to a greater number of people.

After the fires we gathered more donations and then applied for a grant from a *Rotary Australia World Community Service* fund managed by the Rotary District Governors in Australia. With our funds raised and the grant, we can sponsor a MHFA Instructor course for 16 participants. We are aiming for a mix of RFS, SES and community organisations (including Rotary).

Participants would be expected (by MOU) to deliver a number of courses pro bono in those organisations. The expectation in receiving the grant will be that we focus on bushfire affected areas, eventually Australia wide, but starting in NSW.

To best manage training group size and cost, the training will be delivered to 12 participants as a stand-alone-course, and the remaining 4 will be placed on courses to be delivered in the Sydney, courtesy of MHFA Australia.

Process

Candidate instructors will place an expression of interest with their organisation who will shortlist the applicants and advise Central Blue Mountains project manager, Jennifer Scott. Candidate instructors will then need to apply through MHFA and demonstrate they meet the following selection criteria:

1. Good knowledge of mental health problems and their treatments
2. Personal or professional experience supporting people with mental illnesses
3. Respectful attitudes towards people with mental health problems
4. Enthusiasm to deliver MHFA courses
5. Excellent group facilitation and communication skills
6. Knowledge of mental health services
7. Good interpersonal skills
8. Organisational support to conduct MHFA courses (this will be by a letter of support from parent organisations and Central Blue Mountains Rotary).
9. Hold a valid Working With Children Check

Training Location First Twelve

The instructor training for the first twelve instructors will be conducted in the Blue Mountains at Katoomba RSL Club. Strict COVID guidelines will be in place for the course.

Lunch and teas will be provided. Candidates will be billeted with Rotarians, or may choose to stay in commercial accommodation at their own cost.

Training Location Next Four
The instructor training for the four remaining instructors will be conducted in the Sydney area, time and place TBA.

Course Delivery Post-Accreditation
Successful instructors will be expected to deliver at least 6 MHFA courses with at least 6 participants on each course in the two years following accreditation. Instructors will be encouraged to deliver courses in pairs where possible so as to support each other. Coordination and a simple reporting process are under consideration.

Preferred Instructor Numbers and Delivery Areas
Subject to negotiation, the following are the preferred numbers and locations of Instructors:

RFS	6	Blue Mountains	South Coast	Central Coast	
SES	3	Blue Mountains	South Coast	West (Dubbo)	
Rotary	5	Blue Mountains (2)	South Coast	Central Coast	West (Orange)
Council/Community	2	Blue Mountains			

Timing
Dates for the first course are 30 November – 4 December 2020.

Next Steps
Finalise MOU with MHFA
Finalise MOU for Instructors
Establish protocols with SES, RFS, other Rotary Districts, and Community groups for support of Instructors and assistance in delivering courses. We envisage experienced MHFA Instructors assisting new Instructors to deliver courses until they are comfortable with content and the teaching pack.