



# Media Release

10 September 2015

## Auburn unites to break the stigma of mental health issues and promote suicide prevention

The Salvation Army, community and religious leaders as well as the general public will join together this evening on World Suicide Prevention Day and 'R U OK' day for the **Auburn Together 4 Hope** community walk – now in its second year – to help raise awareness and break down the stigma commonly attached to mental health issues (such as depression), suicide prevention and bereavement.

The Together 4 Hope march will commence at 6:30pm at Auburn Public School (entry via Harrow Road) with the walk then proceeding down Auburn Road before finally reaching the Auburn Central forecourt where participants will hear inspiring speeches from community leaders and share in a **free community BBQ**.

The event is supported by local community groups including Dooley's Catholic Club, Auburn Community Health Centre, Western Sydney Partners in Recovery as well as other community and religious leaders.

Present at this year's walk will be NSW Opposition Leader and Member for Auburn, the Hon. Luke Foley MP, Auburn City Council Mayor Cr. Ronney Oueik, NSW Police Commissioner Andrew Scipione, Auburn Citizen of the Year and Salvation Army officer Captain Nesan Kistan, NSW Mental Health Commissioner John Feneley, former Canterbury-Bankstown Bulldogs players Hazem El Masri, Phil Sigworth and Steve Turner as well as other community and religious leaders.

Director of Auburn Salvation Army services, Major Paul Moulds, says this event provides a great opportunity for the local community to unite and support an important social and health issue.

"Mental illness does not discriminate and impacts people from all cultures and backgrounds. This is a unique event that draws our diverse community together around a shared concern and goal." Major Moulds said.

"The walk is a strong statement from this community that there are more things that unite us than divide us, and that we care passionately about seeing Auburn become a safe, supportive community, where people who are struggling or experiencing any form of hardship are recognised, heard and provided the support they need to fully recover."

"Last year's Walk was a great catalyst for action. Since then, over 80 local community leaders and workers have received training in suicide awareness and prevention skills."

Statistics for the period 2011-2013 show there was over 20 deaths linked directly to suicide in the Auburn community. However, there is anecdotal evidence to suggest these numbers are much greater – especially where a death occurs in ambiguous circumstances.

Nurse Manager of Auburn Community Health Centre, Kathy Audley, says these disheartening statistics can be attributed to the shame associated with mental illness in the Auburn community.

"Within some cultural groups and communities, topics such as mental health and suicide are not spoken about and are considered to be taboo subjects," Ms Audley said.

"Many people who suffer from mental health issues believe they will be shunned, made to be an outcast and bring shame to their family if they try to seek help. We need to come together as a community and encourage people to seek professional help."

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Member for Auburn and NSW Opposition Leader, Luke Foley MP, says he is proud to get behind the Together 4 Hope Community Walk to shine a light on this incredibly important issue.

"The more the community comes together to send the message that it is okay to seek help about mental health issues, the greater the chance we have of saving lives," Mr Foley said.

"I am proud that Auburn is playing such an active role in raising awareness around this important issue and thank the Salvos for being the driving force behind it."

NSW Mental Health Commissioner John Feneley says that community gatherings like the Auburn Together 4 Hope walk helps build the strength and goodwill necessary for resilient communities.

"It is so heartening to see a culturally diverse community coming together and working towards community wellbeing. It is within strong communities that people living with mental illness or who are at risk of suicide can find hope and acceptance," Mr Feneley said.

"Events such as this can do a lot to break down barriers and stigma and help people at risk understand there is no shame in reaching out for assistance and accessing the help and care they need."

Former Canterbury-Bankstown Bulldogs player, Hazem El Masri, says it is important for the community to rally together and shine a light on this issue.

"Suicide affects all communities including Auburn and its diversity of cultures," Mr El Masri said.

"It is the role of every member of the community to help raise awareness about mental health and highlight the need for suicide prevention."

**The entire community is invited and encouraged to come along and participate in this very important event.**

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**For more information or media comment please contact:**

The Salvation Army Media Office – (02) 9266 9820