

Monday 8th April

Beyond Bitumen rallies support for mental health

Beyond Blue's longest running public fundraiser, the Beyond Bitumen car rally, is about to start its engines for the ninth year in a row.

This year's entourage of 280 motor enthusiasts will travel about 1,500 kilometres across parts of southwest New South Wales and Northern Victoria.

The rally starts in Gundagai on Thursday April 11th and will be stopping in the towns of Corowa, Echuca, Tocumwal, Griffith, West Wyalong, and Young, before finishing in Boorowa on Monday, April 15th.

All money raised will go to the Beyond Blue Support Service, which delivers free mental health support around the clock for more than 300,000 people each year.

For organisers Peter and Trish Fehon the four-day event is a personal dedication to their 16-year-old daughter Beth, whom they lost to suicide in 2005.

Rally Director Peter Fehon said they want to reduce the stigma associated with mental health.

"People freely talk about heart disease, or breast cancer, so why is mental health still a bit of a taboo subject?" Mr Fehon asked.

"It has been very rewarding and uplifting to see rally participants open up about their personal challenges and embrace the event. For many it has given them a focus and a purpose.

"It's ok to be real. It's ok to talk about real stuff with real mates. Many make lifelong friendships as they enjoy a few days in the bush. How many new connections will you make on this trip?"

Since its inception in 2015, Beyond Bitumen has raised more than \$3 million for Beyond Blue.

Beyond Blue's CEO Georgie Harman said the event has made a big difference to people's lives.

"The money raised goes towards supporting people when they need it the most. Our Support Service is staffed by mental health professionals who are there for anyone who needs to talk, at any time. Every dollar can really help to turn someone's life around", Ms Harman said.

"Almost half of us will experience a mental health condition during our lives, and I want to stress how important it is for people to seek support early when they start to feel overwhelmed or flat or sad. Getting support early can prevent problems snowballing, and get people back on track quicker,

"I want to say a huge thank you to Pete and Trish for their ongoing support and dedication to the event, and to all the rally drivers who take part."

Beyond Blue Support Service: 1300 22 4636 or beyondblue.org.au/getsupport

Available for interviews: Peter and Trish Fehon

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