

NEWS RELEASE

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BLACK DOG INSTITUTE



TACKLING MOOD DISORDERS IN THE WORKPLACE

Employees, co-workers and bosses tell their stories in an insightful look into ***Tackling Mood Disorders in the Workplace*** in the latest Black Dog Institute Australasian Writing Competition.

As one essay writer declared, the days when an employer could get away with saying “leave your problems at the door” are long gone.

“ We all know that no matter who you are, you usually ‘*carry you around with you*’ and that most people are not able to separate themselves so much so that they can come to work without their problems,” said first prize winner, Maree Matic of Dulwich Hill in Sydney.

The NSW Minister Assisting the Minister for Health (Mental Health), Barbara Perry, presented the first prize cheque for \$2000 and a trophy to Maree for her essay titled **Carrying ‘ME’ Around**, during an award ceremony at the Institute today. Maree who spent one year working in a Thailand orphanage is currently writing her own book, (Working title: *Going Out Of My Mind and Loving It*).

In presenting the awards, the Minister underlined how important it was to ensure mental health remained high on the public agenda. “Mental illness is something that affects people from all walks of life and they are often a vulnerable section of our community,” Ms Perry said.

Joined by the State Member for Coogee, Paul Pearce, the Minister acknowledged the important work being carried out by non-government organisations such as the Black Dog Institute.

An independent judging panel comprising Jo-anne Quirk (a senior human resources practitioner and clinical psychologist), Sally Tranter (human resources director) and Graeme Cowan (author and consultant on mental health issues in the workplace) selected the prizewinners from around 200 entries.

The \$1000 second prize was awarded to Daniel G. Taylor, an educator from Adelaide for his essay ***The Way to Wellness in the Workplace*** (David’s entry in a previous Black Dog Institute writing competition *The Getting of Wisdom – Managing the Highs of Bipolar Disorder*, didn’t win a prize but was published in a subsequent book) while the \$500 third prize went to Rowena Harris from Ferntree in Tasmania. The title of her essay was ***Workplace Diversity*** and it imagines a workplace where acceptance and respect help in finding creative solutions and fostering productive employees.

A further 10 Highly Commended certificates were awarded for outstanding essays – five from NSW, two from Victoria and one each from Queensland, the ACT and New Zealand.

In their report, the judges concluded that the vast majority of people still felt very nervous about disclosing their condition for fear of it having an adverse effect on their career. People talked constantly about “putting on a work mask” and retreating to the toilet to give vent to their emotions yet avoid being detected, the judges said.

The judges highlighted the need for organisations to be much more proactive in educating employees and managers, in how to recognise and support those with a mood disorder. Whilst the importance of appropriate policies was highlighted, contributors stressed that the most crucial element was a compassionate manager who reached out to address the issue quickly. Many lamented that “values on the wall were not lived on the floor”.

“Those working with mood disorders stressed that they also have an obligation to balance their lifestyle and manage their mental health- ‘Ironically, it was only when I started working on my wellness that my work performance improved.’” said the Judges.

The Executive Director of the Black Dog Institute, Professor Gordon Parker, said it was important for line managers to be trained in identifying and constructively dealing with each individual. “This approach allows the cases to be sympathetically dealt with by specialists linked to Human Resources Employee Assistance Programs (EAP) who are professionally skilled in dealing with mood disorders.

Professor Parker said the competition had been an opportunity to take the next step in learning more about how people with a mood disorder, co-workers and bosses cope – positively or poorly – in dealing with the many immediate problems and concerns in the workplace.

He suggested that there are right and wrong answers and that the competition was looking for “people’s strategies” – both those that were effective and those that were less successful – in order to derive a workplace blueprint for dealing with mood disorders.

As with the previous four writing competitions, Professor Parker said the Institute would be looking to incorporate the rich source of material gathered during this latest writing competition and including it in a book to help improve understanding and enable people to better deal with mood disorders in the workplace.

Essays of the First, Second and Third place-getters and the Highly Commended in the writing competition appear on the Black Dog Institute website www.blackdoginstitute.org.au.

Professor Parker also extended a special thank you to all entrants who provided such a wealth of ideas and information in their essays.

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