



BLACK DOG INSTITUTE

NEWS RELEASE

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2008 Black Dog Institute Writing Competition

Young people tell their intimate stories in a rare insight into the 'Black Dog' world in a writing and poetry competition that identified grassroots solutions to discover fresh ways of addressing the issue of depression in adolescence.

Their stories and accounts from the older generation looking back on their lives were entries in the prestigious Black Dog Institute 2008 Writing and Poetry Competition.

The writing competition is the fourth conducted by the Institute in as many years, while this is the first year the Institute has offered a prize for the best poem. Both writers and poets looked at *Mood Disorders in Adolescence – Grassroots Solutions*.

With 14 percent of children and adolescents in Australia suffering mental health problems, the participants in this year's competition send out a strong message of hope, captured so insightfully by the winning entry which concluded with the words:

'For everyone who is young and struggling with depression please know that you will not feel like this forever. You are not a freak and while you may not be able to stop your tears now, you one day will and you will feel proud and confident with yourself.'

The Minister Assisting the Minister for Health (Mental Health) Paul Lynch, today presented prizes to the winners of the competition, declaring he had been deeply moved by the stories, in particular, the strength and enterprise of young people in seeking help and support.

"Our teens today are impacted by things that weren't prevalent a couple of decades ago – the internet, mass electronic media, mobile phones, global warming, premature sexualisation, higher rates of divorce, blended families and 'designer drugs'," he said.

Mr Lynch said one of the place getters, a teacher, captured the spirit of the essays. The teacher recounts his younger years dealing with depression to a big group of students. The teacher's story continues:

'He tells them honestly about what he experienced and how he hopes none of them ever have to go through it. He tells them that if they do have to deal with pain, that it's important they don't see it as the end, but rather as a step towards being a better human. By telling his story, by sharing his pain, and seeing it for what it is – depression – he takes control.'

Winner of the \$2,000 first prize and trophy was Beth Nathan from North Carlton in Victoria for her essay titled “*And Then My Tears Subsided...*”

Second prize of \$1,000 and a trophy was won by Tim Clark from Carnegie in Victoria for the essay “*What to Do When It’s Hard to Walk,*” while the \$500 third prize was awarded to Miranda Flemming of Sadliers Crossing in Queensland for her essay “*The Sensitive Steam Engine*”.

The winning poem is titled “*Growing Pains*”. The winner of the \$500 first prize and trophy is from Milsons Point, NSW, and has asked to remain anonymous.

Three independent judges – Lydia Turner (INSIGHT Volunteer), Tanya Hanstock (Senior Clinical Psychologist) and Leon de Bord (Writer and Manager) had the difficult task of selected the winners and highly commended from a total of 139 entries.

In their report, the judges declared that the myth ‘*Young people can’t suffer from a mood disorder*’ was COMPLETELY BUSTED.

“Powerful, emotive, poignant, sensitive, captivating, honest, entertaining, moving humorous and inspiring are just some of the words to describe the caliber of this year’s entries,” the Judges said. (The Judges report is available on the Black Dog website- www.blackdoginstitute.org.au).

Essays of the first, second and third place getters and the highly commended in the writing competition as well as the winning and highly commended poems are also on the Black Dog Institute website (www.blackdoginstitute.org.au).

FOOTNOTE: Executive Director of the Black Dog Institute, Professor Gordon Parker, said the essays from the three previous competitions had resulted in the production of three books accepted by distinguished publication companies – *Tracking the Black Dog* (a look at the history of the term to describe depression); *Journeys with the Black Dog* (UNSW Press); *Inspirational stories of bringing depression to heel* (ALLEN & UNWIN); and *Mastering Bipolar Disorder: An insider’s guide to managing mood swings and finding balance* (ALLEN & UNWIN), that provides a Consumer Bipolar Disorder Survival Kit.

Professor Parker said the candid look by our writers at Mood Disorders in Adolescence was a first step to producing a fourth book that would give new hope to young people, their parents and carers who deal with the ‘Black Dog’.

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