



NEWS RELEASE

Rutherford Drama Class Performance on Sydney Stage

A group of Year 11 drama students from Rutherford High Technology High School have been applauded by a packed house for an outstanding Sydney performance of their play on Bipolar Disorder.

The play *Taking Control* was performed before an audience that included some of Australia's leading authorities on the issue including Professor Gordon Parker, Executive Director of the Black Dog Institute, Associate Professor Neil Cole, Researcher at the Alfred Psychiatry Research Centre in Victoria and Professor Philip Hazell, a Psychiatrist at the Rivendell Unit for young people at Concord in Sydney.

The Black Dog Institute hosted the special performance of the play in the Institute's Lecture Theatre at Randwick today (Friday 11 August 2006).

The Institute's Executive Director, Professor Parker, said he had been very moved by the play – in particular, the way it had been written, the performance and the truths the play captured on the subject of Bipolar Disorder. The play, he said, captured the fact that with people who suffer from Bipolar Disorder, they face a long haul journey. Unfortunately, it is often many years before people are correctly diagnosed," he said.

Professor Parker said the play was perfect vehicle to help get the mental health message across to the general public.

Professor Hazell said the students addressed many of the issues associated with Bipolar Disorder. In particular, the agitated unpleasantness and edginess of being high, the impact on the sufferer and others, including parents. He said he hoped the students had the opportunity to present the play in other centres.

Associate Professor Cole, who confessed to being a fulltime play writer, said he believed diagnosis of Bipolar Disorder perhaps might well be achieved earlier if others followed the example of the students from Rutherford High in telling this story about Bipolar Disorder.

He said the play, amongst other things, highlighted the collateral damage caused by the disorder such as illicit drug taking.

The student performers are Jasmine Payne, Tiffany Smith, Chanay Mullen, Donna Meister, Chloe Wickson, Patrick Meehan and Jillian Bellamy.

The play is directed by Andrew O'Callaghan, drama teacher at the school with the help of Dr Tanya Hanstock, a Clinical Psychologist from the Hunter New England Health Service.

The Rutherford students were among Year 11 students from the Hunter and NSW Central Coast Regions that were invited earlier this year to enter a drama competition as an initiative of the Hunter Institute of Mental Health designed to encourage young people to think about mental health issues.

The students have received a real buzz from their live performances. "Performing in front of a live audience was the best part. Performing gives us such a rush and especially knowing it is our own script and seeing the audience's positive reaction is always good."

Interestingly, the students planned to do a play on drug and alcohol addiction. “But as we undertook the research, we found that addiction often masks a mental health issue, such as Bipolar Disorder. From here our interest grew and we decided it was definitely worth doing a play on Bipolar Disorder.”

The students’ visit to Sydney was sponsored by the Tulloch Vineyard. [Photographs](#) of the performance appear on the Black Dog Institute website.

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