

### **Kimba learns of mental health first aid**

Thursday, 5 October, 2006

The Eyre Regional Health Service rolled out a new training initiative last Thursday in Kimba to help increase broader community awareness of mental health issues.

Mental Health First Aid, a program funded by the SA Department of Health, was delivered to Eastern Eyre Health & Aged Care staff and Kimba community members last week.

The program, delivered in partnership with Relationships Australia, is being rolled out across the state in a drive to increase awareness and understanding of mental health issues in the wider community.

Department of Health director of mental health Dr John Brayley said the unique program provides people with the skills and knowledge to respond and assist individuals who are experiencing distress from the effects of a mental illness.

"The Mental Health First Aid program teaches first aid skills to deal with a mental health crisis situation and to respond to the early stages of mental health problems."

"The program teaches people to recognize the symptoms of depression, possible suicide, anxiety, psychosis and substance misuse, as well as the treatments and resources available to help," said Dr Brayley.

The program is taught to a diverse group including local councils, non-government organizations, neighborhood houses, hairdressers, taxi drivers, carers, as well as community health services, and other community members.

First aid help is given to an injured person before they have access to medical treatment. Mental Health first aid is help given to someone experiencing mental health problems before professional help is obtained.

The course is not designed to create counsellors out of the participants. The aim is to provide skills for people to be able to deal with a mental health crisis situation and give initial support.

It aims to increase the effectiveness of community responses to mental illnesses.

Dr Brayley said the Department of health has a strong commitment to assisting the community to understand what mental health means and how having a mental illness can impact on individuals as well as their families and the wider community.