



McCARTHY MENTORING

## Mental health leader wins 2016 Executive Scholarship

12 May 2016

Sarah Coker, The Director of Programs for national charity SANE Australia has won the 2016 McCarthy Mentoring Not for Profit Executive Scholarship. Now in its fourth year, the scholarship is designed to assist a talented executive progress their career, strengthen their leadership skills, manage tough organisation challenges and increase their capacity to affect change through their important work in the community.

Ms Coker has the responsibility to manage a diverse range of innovative activities to help improve the lives of Australian's living with mental illness. SANE Australia's key focus is preventative health care and early intervention through support, training, and education. SANE's largest program is the HelpCentre which includes a telephone, email and online chat service where people can access information from a trained health professional about mental illness (1800 187 263). In 2014, SANE launched two online peer support forums that are moderated 24 hours a day. Since their inception, there have been more than 46,000 new posts and 119,000 unique visitors. Evaluation of the forums has found that the online support from peers helps to alleviate feelings of isolation and increase a sense of connection.

Ms Coker has clear ambitions for SANE, she would like to see SANE be a leader in mental health reform and suicide prevention in Australia. *"My role is to provide leadership and manage the overall performance of SANE's programs. My ambition is to see SANE continue to deliver and develop programs that have a measurable impact on people effected by mental illness. I would like to see SANE widely recognised throughout Australia as a key mental health organisation proving information and support to people with complex mental illness and their carers, friends and family."*

*"I am honoured and excited to be the recipient of the McCarthy Mentoring Scholarship for 2016. I believe my mentor will help me achieve my goals by providing a sounding board to talk through issues and obstacles that I am facing at work and by providing exposure to other ways of thinking and working. This is a wonderful opportunity for personal development and I hope it will also allow discussion of innovative ideas from an external perspective that may lead to opportunities for SANE to grow," said Ms Coker.*

McCarthy Mentoring's Executive Director, Sophie McCarthy said that they were delighted to offer the scholarship to Ms Coker.

*"Sarah is a talented researcher and project manager who has worked in mental health for most of her career in Australian and the UK. She has recently been promoted to the Executive Team and this is the perfect time for an experienced mentor to support her through that transition. It gives Sarah an external and confidential sounding board to test ideas, insights on how a board operates and their expectations of her and the opportunity to reflect on her leadership style," said Ms McCarthy.*

*"We know mentoring builds people's confidence and that monthly meeting ensures you spend time reflecting on your purpose and progress as a leader. This is so important for effective leaders and*

*perhaps more so in the NFP sector where people are working in challenging areas such as suicide with passionate teams and uncertain funding. It can be a volatile combination.”*

*“I hope the mentoring program will be valuable, challenging and fun for Sarah. Therese is super smart, a great listener and has a very dry sense of humour – she has been a fantastic mentor to many of our clients” said Ms McCarthy.*

Ms Coker’s mentor, Therese Ryan, is currently Chair of Gippsland Water, Deputy Chair of Victorian Managed Insurance Authority, a Trustee Director of WA Super, and a director ASX Listed Burson Group Ltd, and of VicForests and Metropolitan Fire Brigade. She is also an independent member of the Audit Committee of City of Melbourne. In the not for profit sector she is a director of Good Shepherd Australia and New Zealand. Ms Ryan’s last executive role was VP and General Counsel, General Motors International Operations. Ms Ryan was General Counsel for GM Holden, Chair of Holden Employees Superannuation Fund, General Counsel for Qenos Pty Ltd (a JV of Exxon Mobil and Orica) and had many years as a partner in a Melbourne based boutique law firm.

2015 scholarship winner, Suzanne Connolly-Andrews has led Gurriny Yealamucka Health Services in Yarrabah, Northern Queensland following the transition from government to community-controlled management of the service. Within the past year the service has seen significant improvements in the health of the community such as 87% immunisation rate and has succeeded in meeting and exceeding national health targets as it embeds the new model.

2014 scholarship winner, Brett Macdonald is the CEO and Co-Founder for national charity, Dry July Foundation and CEO of Clear Heads International. Brett has been instrumental in Dry July’s year-on-year success and growth. It has collectively raised more than \$15 million, helping support 37 cancer services across Australia and NZ.

2013 scholarship winner, Karen Bevan received the scholarship for her work in advocacy for disadvantaged children and families at UnitingCare. Since then she has lead the submissions team on the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, has become the CEO of Playgroups NSW and is the President of NSW Council of Social Services.

**Further information:**

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