



Dubbo's first Pride March

By **YVETTE AUBUSSON-FOLEY**

MEMBERS of the Dubbo and surrounding districts lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, questioning and asexual (LGBTIQA) communities, and their straight allies, filled the rain-drenched streets of Dubbo's CBD with rainbows on Saturday, October 31, for Western NSW's first Pride March.

As an important gesture to mark the end of Mental Health Month organised by the Rainbow Alliance, a branch of the Connected Communities Project and headspace Dubbo, the historic event received positive and non-discriminatory response. It's seen by Annie Hartley, clinical psychologist at headspace, as a positive for everyone.

"Being able to be visible, and being able to have a collective of LGBTIQA and straight allies to show support, really sends the message that even if perhaps you don't have that support within your immediate network, then within the wider community there are people you can talk to, be it community members, services, professionals. There is a wider network that you can be part of," Hartley said.

"I think in terms of mental health, having a social network is a real asset and a protective factor against issues such as depression, anxiety and even suicidal thoughts.

"In rural areas, the risk factor for LGBTIQA suicides is incredibly high for reasons such as isolation, bullying, lack of appropriate services or lack of a community presence as well," said Hartley.

"If you are struggling, whether you're questioning your sexual gender or orientation or you're hesitant to disclose your identity to your immediate network, there are people who you can be yourself with and express yourself freely with in the community.

"That's really important for our mental health and our identity, that we are true to ourselves and we are authentic," she said.

Discrimination born from ignorance or prejudice can create a source of fear for the LGBTIQA community.

"People can be anxious about becoming a part of a social group because they might fear what other people might say. Whether they will say it or not, they can have that fear, or they can be depressed because they feel isolated, or because they haven't quite worked through the different variables to do with gender or sexuality yet, and they're still processing it all," Hartley said.

The Pride March created a non-discriminatory forum for the wider community to participate in a conversation about issues specifically affecting the LGBTIQA community.

"That's really import because it's a great opportunity for individuals but also the community to be reflective about their belief," she told *Dubbo Photo News*.



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The LGBTIAQ communities brought their own rainbows to Western NSW and Dubbo's first Pride March, held on Saturday, October 31.
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