

## Award for Programs for the Disadvantaged in Memory of Carolyn Keane

POPULATIONS OF 50,000 AND UNDER



**MICHAEL LLEWELLYN-SMITH**

*ICMA's Program Excellence Award for Programs for the Disadvantaged, established in memory of Carolyn Keane, recognizes a local government that has enhanced the quality of life for the disadvantaged, including homeless citizens and people with AIDS. This year, ICMA presents the first of two awards in the 50,000-and-under population category to Prospect, South Australia, and City Manager Michael Llewellyn-Smith for the city's mental health program.*

One in five Australians has a diagnosable disorder such as schizophrenia or depression, and this number doesn't account for the thousands more with minor mental health problems. This reality, coupled with

growing demand, limited resources, and the increasing difficulty for those who most need assistance to access the care they needed, was the hurdle facing the city of Prospect, South Australia. The city's mental health program aims to address this global issue at the local level.

From its inception in June 2000, Prospect's mental health program has garnered high praise as an innovative and effective means of addressing mental health issues in the community. Program participants, local businesses, government agencies, and community organizations have all embraced the program.

Prospect's mental health program targets *all* residents, not just those with previously recognized mental health issues. The program is designed to provide easy access to information about mental health issues and to prevent future problems. Program activities encourage and support social and recreational opportunities for socially isolated residents with mental health problems, thereby fostering self-confidence and a stronger sense of belonging to the community.

The elements of the program include: sessions and workshops on specific mental health issues, such as depression management, which are open to the community; health promotion activities and displays at the Prospect Library and a local shopping center; games night, a regular event targeted toward mentally ill and socially isolated residents, held in conjunction with the local community center; and "Living It Up!," a series of social and recreational activities targeted toward

residents with mental health problems.

All activities are free to participants, and transportation is provided for those who need it. Furthermore, program activities take place in conveniently located venues that are unconnected to clinically oriented services. This helps to overcome the stigma that is often associated with mental illness and helps people feel more comfortable in addressing issues.

During the six-month pilot in 2000, the program attracted more than 200 participants—three times more than the targeted number. To date, more than 750 residents have participated in the city's mental health activities, and attendance continues to grow. Additional residents have been reached through promotional materials and displays at local shops and facilities. Through exposure to those who have mental illnesses, the local community—including organizations and businesses located in the area—is more aware of mental health issues.

Most importantly, however, the program has helped local residents feel that they are a part of the community. It has provided them with the knowledge, skills, and opportunities to enhance their mental well-being. In providing an array of educational and social opportunities, Prospect's mental health program has reached out into the community to help not only those with a diagnosed mental health illness but those who are at risk of suffering from depression or isolation in the future. The city has succeeded in proving that old adage: an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure. ♣