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**Score's
newest
babies
welcomed**
page 2



**Lynne's
pride
in her
town**
page 7



**Pastor
to
wave
goodbye**
page 10

Women fill support gap

By Caitlin Andrews

SOMETIMES identifying you have a problem and need help is the toughest step to take, but it is the catalyst for help and improvement.

Encouraging women to recognise the signs of perinatal and postnatal depression and anxiety sooner rather than later is at the core of a new support group that will start in Scone next month.

The new Upper Hunter Perinatal Depression and Anxiety Support Group aims to address the current gap in support services for women and men who suffer from perinatal depression during pregnancy and post birth.

According to statistics, one in seven mothers and one in 10 fathers suffer from perinatal depression and anxiety.

Based on the objectives and beliefs of the not-for-profit Gidget Foundation, the local group will provide an avenue for mums, dads and family members to gain support here in Scone.

The group is being formed by Muswellbrook Neighbourhood Services coordinator Skye Bennett and local doctor Larissa Burke who is also an ambassador for the Gidget Foundation, which promotes awareness of perinatal depression and provides support for women and their families.

The duo have teamed up with the Australian Breastfeeding Association Upper Hunter Group who are enthusiastic



LEADERS: Muswellbrook Neighbourhood Services coordinator Skye Bennett and local doctor and Gidget Foundation ambassador Larissa Burke are the drivers behind the new Upper Hunter Perinatal Depression and Anxiety Support Group to be launched in Scone next month.

about supporting the initiative and there are already about 10 women interested. Dr Burke said there is now a free day stay program launched

by the Gidget Foundation at Gidget House at North Sydney, however there is currently nothing in the local community at all of this sort of nature so

there is definitely a demand.

"A lot of problems start during the pregnancy, but many don't realise it until after the baby is born," she said.

By Caitlin Andrews

THE Score and Upper Hunter Regional Saleyards will see another major upgrade start later this year to ensure the facility stays competitive within the industry.

A major project worth \$1.53 million has been approved in the 2015-2016 Delivery Program and Operational Plan of the Upper Hunter Shire Council to carry out the important work at the yards in Muffet Street, Scone.

The saleyards have proved their worth in the region this year selling more than 70,000 cattle throughout the current financial year, an increase on the average of 60,000 throughout the past three years. The works were approved this week and plans are underway for the physical labour to start in the new financial year.

\$1.53 million upgrade for saleyards

The proposed upgrades include installing a roof over the selling yards where cattle are penned prior to the sale, similar to the roof constructed over the holding yards in 2011.

The other major aspect of the project is replacement of the deteriorated concrete floor with a new modern yard design with a soft floor arrangement to prevent cattle from getting sore feet while waiting to be sold.

New water tanks and solar power will also be installed to allow greater self-sufficiency and a reduced impact on costly resources, such as the town water supply. Upper Hunter Shire Council Property and Business coordinator Joanne McLoughlin said the aim is to modernise the facility in order to keep in line with the

saleyards at Tamworth and Singleton and how they are structured.

"It is also important to ensure the facility meets all the animal welfare requirements and Occupational Health and Safety standards.

"The new modern yard design will also reduce labour costs, water usage and the amount of effluent being discarded into the ponds during the cleaning process, so it is creating environmental and financial savings for the council," Ms McLoughlin said.

"The improved conditions for the animals, in theory, should return better weights and sale prices to the producers and it will allow the saleyards to remain competitive."

Upper Hunter Shire Council Business

"Hopefully we can reduce the stigma around recognising the signs and symptoms and encourage people to gain help earlier."

Ms Bennett said while the group is a great initiative for women, it is open to fathers or even grandparents, as they also feel the impacts.

"Our aim is to support women and their families in the local community and it is going to be a very inclusive group, open to all people who are interested in learning how to deal with perinatal depression," she said.

"It's an opportunity to speak to others and gain support in a confidential and friendly environment."

The first meeting of the group will be held next month, with a time and venue to be advised, with meetings planned to occur on a monthly basis to start with.

In the future the group will host fun activities and events, as well as fundraising events for the Gidget Foundation.

For more information on joining the group, contact Skye at Upper Hunter Community Services on 6542 3555 or Dr Larissa Burke at Scone Medical Practice on 6545 1600.

If you are concerned about yourself or someone else, contact the local community health nurse, your local doctor or Lifeline on 13 11 14

Enterprise and Tourism manager Sean Constable said the council is in the process of applying for a Federal Government grant through the National Stronger Regions Fund, however the upgrade will go ahead regardless of the grant outcome.

He confirmed work will start in the next financial year and said this will be the final stage of the major upgrades at the saleyards.

"The work will be carried out in stages to enable the sale process to continue.

"The agents and the saleyards committee are all behind the project, so it should be a good outcome," Mr Constable said.

"I'm sure the cattle owners and buyers that support the facility will also be happy."