

## Media Release

Friday, January 14, 2011

### Early Years expertise to help more families

St John of God Health Care's expertise in supporting couples during pregnancy and families with young children will see new service development and expansion of existing services across Australia in 2011.

As part of a commitment to Social Outreach and Advocacy, Early Years services focus on health and wellbeing from the point of conception until children reach the age of four, in order to give infants and families the best possible start in life.

With nationally and internationally renowned experts in perinatal and infant mental health guiding St John of God Health Care's service expansion, this year will see the expansion of new Raphael Centre services in Western Australia and Victoria as well as the further development of others such as the Blacktown Raphael Centre established in New South Wales during 2010.

Addressing unmet needs in mental health for parents and infants at this time is a clear focus in delivering services where there are current gaps in provision. Our Early Years investment, where services are accessed free of charge or at minimal cost, will centre on the following areas in 2011:

- **Strategic development of Raphael Centre services** – Two new experienced project officers (based in the Eastern States and Western Australia) will allow us to identify specific community needs, address perinatal and infant mental health issues and further develop clinical governance.
- **Opening Raphael House in Ballarat** – This new facility will be St John of God Health Care's sixth Raphael Centre in Australia, providing support to mothers, fathers and infants during pregnancy and early childhood to families in Ballarat, Victoria.
- **Raphael Centre expansion in Western Australia** – Building on the successes of Raphael Centre Subiaco, we will develop services in the southwest metropolitan area (Fremantle) and Perth's northern suburbs, partnering with existing community organisations.
- **Advocacy with health bodies** – Key personnel from St John of God Health Care are members of the Western Australian Association of Mental Health (WAAMH) Board, the Statewide Aboriginal Child Health Project Interagency Steering Group and the State Perinatal Mental Health Reference Group for Western Australia, using our expertise to influence health policy.
- **Strong Family, Strong Culture development** – A wholesale review of our Aboriginal health service aimed at improving health and wellbeing for infants and pregnant mothers will be completed with service enhancements to be developed, ensuring we are meeting remote communities' health needs in the most effective way.

Early Years Manager at St John of God Health Care, Anna Roberts, said: "It is certainly going to be a very busy year for developing our Early Years services in 2011 because we have already identified several gaps in service provision. Antenatal and postnatal

depression and anxiety affects a lot more people than is widely thought and we are committed to expanding our services to help many more parents and children in Western Australia, Victoria and New South Wales.

“Our Eastern States perinatal and infant mental health project officer has already been appointed and we are currently recruiting an identical position for Western Australia. These experienced professionals will drive development of our Raphael Centre services across the country. In WA we plan to double our capacity to help parents and families in the Perth metropolitan area.”

Ms Roberts added: “The expertise of luminaries in their field such as Professors Marie-Paule Austin and Bryanne Barnett and Dr Caroline Zanetti, guiding our Perinatal and Infant Mental Health Steering Committee means that we have set excellent standards of care for services in this area. Our next aim is to ensure that the services we have established can reach more families where there is a genuine need for support and that is a major task for us in 2011.”

## ENDS

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## NOTES

**St John of God Health Care** is a leading provider of private hospitals, pathology, and Social Outreach and Advocacy services, throughout Australia, New Zealand and the Asia-Pacific region.

We return all profits to the communities we serve by:

- Updating and expanding technology and facilities
- Expanding existing services and acquiring new services
- Providing Social Outreach and Advocacy services to people experiencing disadvantage

**Social Outreach and Advocacy** services provide significant care and relief for people experiencing disadvantage throughout Australia, New Zealand and the Asia-Pacific region, particularly in areas where we have identified gaps in current service provisions.

Through Social Outreach and Advocacy, St John of God Health Care utilises its existing expertise and reputation to help people and communities help themselves improve health and wellbeing outcomes wherever possible. Our dedication to ‘early intervention’ means that we aim to address health issues as early as possible in their life cycle with the intention of preventing such issues becoming long-term or chronic health factors.

More information is available at: <http://www.sjog.org.au/outreach>

**Early Years** strategy focuses on the perinatal period up to the age of four as this has been identified as the key stage to give children and families the best possible start in life.

**Perinatal** is defined as the period from conception to 12 months after childbirth.