Tristan Jepson
Memorial Foundation

Marie Jepson

Co-founder and Director, Tristan Jepson Memorial Foundation

The Tristan Jepson Memorial Foundation (TJMF) was established in 2006 by my husband George and myself after our son Tristan, a young lawyer, took his own life following a long battle with depression. The idea germinated after his death following a gathering of some of Tristan's friends where girlfriends shared that their partners, who had sworn them to secrecy, also suffered from depression but refused to seek help.

The Foundation aims to raise awareness, educate and reduce the stigma of mental illness in all aspects of the legal profession. It is committed to creating lasting change that supports mental wellbeing across all aspects of the profession from students to the judiciary.

We began by initiating the annual Tristan Jepson Memorial Lecture in 2006. The following year the lecture was presented by the Honourable Geoff Gallop and a panel discussion with Managing Partners of Freehills, Blake Dawson, Clayton Utz and Minter Ellison committed to work together to address the issue of depression within the legal community.

It became clear that while research had been undertaken in North America, no such research had been conducted in Australia. A generous donation of $10,000 by the NSW Bar Association gave the TJMF the opportunity to approach Professor Ian Hickie of the Brain and Mind Institute to initiate the research into depression amongst law students and members of the legal profession.

Courting the Blues research showed that lawyers exhibited three times the depression of members of the public to the point of disability and distress. They did not exhibit help-seeking behaviours and alcohol was used to self-medicate, with the work environment a major contributing factor to lawyers' stress. Amongst law students, mental health deteriorated within months of them commencing their course.

The exciting response to *Courting the Blues* has been a series of initiatives.

Within the profession, Freehills, Blake Dawson, Clayton Utz, Mallesons Stephen Jaques and Allens Arthur Robinson, combined with the College of Law to produce the resilience@law DVD. This DVD is the basis of a mental health module implemented within the College of Law program.

The University of Wollongong has piloted the Vitality for Life and Law program, incorporating the teaching of mindfulness and reflection skills.

The Teaching and Learning Award-winning Macquarie University Law PAL program is the first student-initiated and developed program to focus on teaching resilience and success through collaboration.

The recent ANU Law Students' Reform Report is the first student-conducted research challenging their learning environment and outlining recommendations for change.

The TJMF has presented *An Inconvenient Truth – Mental Illness in the Legal Profession*, an education module to the Federal Court Judges and will present the Resilience Workshop at the ALSA conference in July.

The Foundation has extended its role across Australia as the legal profession, at all its levels, is coming to realise the responsibility it has to reduce the risk related to mental health amongst its members. By encouraging dialogue across the profession, it enables innovation and best practice to be shared quickly and effectively.

I greatly appreciated the Society's invitation to speak at the Mental Health: Caring for the Legal Profession Breakfast.