

MEDIA RELEASE

ROTARY BESTOWS INTERNATIONAL HONOUR ON CAIRNS LOCAL DULCIE BIRD

June 24, 2012 - Last night Dulcie Bird was awarded a Paul Harris Fellow by the Rotary Foundation of Rotary International for her work in suicide prevention in north Queensland.

This is the highest honour Rotary International can give an individual and it is Rotary's way of expressing its appreciation for a substantial contribution to its humanitarian and educational programs.

It is named after Rotary founder, Paul Harris, a Chicago lawyer who started Rotary International with three business associates in 1905.

District governor Graham Koch said Rotarians only designate a Paul Harris Fellow as a tribute to a person whose life demonstrates a shared purpose with the objectives of the Rotary Foundation.

"Last night we had the honour and pleasure of recognising Dulcie Bird as she becomes a Paul Harris Fellow," he said.

Mrs Bird is the chief executive officer of the Dr Edward Koch Foundation, which has been leading the way in suicide prevention as well as undertaking a number of community initiatives in postvention work since its establishment in 1997 in the Cairns community.

"It is a great honour to be given this award. It is the culmination of many years of hard work by the Foundation and its volunteers," Mrs Bird said.

The Dr Edward Koch Foundation will commence a new project in far north Queensland in partnership with Rotary District 9550 to help provide support to those with social and emotional wellbeing issues and problems that they may be experiencing since Cyclone Yasi.

The project will extend from the Tablelands, through to Georgetown and Normanton and south to Tully. Mr Koch said funding had been specifically raised for cyclone relief purposes. "This is great example of Rotary partnering with other organisations to reduce trauma and distress within our community."

A part-time project officer will be employed over a 12-month period to provide Life Suicide Prevention workshops and to facilitate the establishment of suicide support groups in targeted communities.

Life suicide prevention workshops will be held in Georgetown, Normanton, Atherton and any other towns that request help.

These workshops aim to give an increased understanding of the issue of suicide. It is also hoped suicide support groups in the communities of Tully, Innisfail, Georgetown, Normanton and Atherton, will be established.

"Suicide prevention training programs are essential but the existence of local networks of supportive people is also necessary to maintain the prevention capabilities at a local level," Mrs Bird said.

Mrs Bird said the experience of grief due to suicide is unique and can, at times, be difficult for those without personal experience to understand.

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For interviews, contact Graham Koch on 0418 730 595 or Dulcie Bird 0409 765 305

About the Dr Edward Koch Foundation

The Dr Edward Koch Foundation is a non-profit organisation, established to focus and support public health activities in north Queensland. It was registered as a public company with limited liability on 26 March 1997, but its first project was approved and funded in October 1996. The Foundation is closely associated with Queensland Health's Tropical Population Health Unit, the University of Queensland Cairns Campus, and James Cook University. Foundation Objectives include promoting and initiating innovative preventative and educational programs to improve the health of the community and supporting and conducting health research and development projects

About Dulcie Bird

Dulcie Bird is a founding director of The Dr Edward Koch Foundation and was appointed to the board in March 1997 and to her role as chief executive officer in July 1997. During her time at the Foundation, she has helped to grow it from a fledgling charity to a nationally recognised non-profit organisation. The Foundation is now highly regarded for its work looking after the health and wellbeing of people in communities in regional Australia, with a particular focus on suicide prevention.

As chief executive officer, Dulcie has played a leading role in developing and delivering the Foundation's Life Workshops, which train people in suicide prevention, the Life Bereavement Support Service, a service for family members and others in the community bereaved by suicide or other sudden unexpected death and an intensive suicide prevention program which is now being applied in many of the communities of Far North Queensland.

She also chairs the Far North Queensland Suicide Prevention Taskforce, a coordinating body for the many organisations and individuals in the region with an interest in mental health and suicide prevention and she has participated in developing several position statements and presented at international conferences on suicide prevention. Dulcie hosted the Queensland Suicide & Self-harm Prevention Conference 2008. She was also involved in the successful campaign to achieve World Health Organisation Safe City accreditation for Cairns in 2009 and is a member of the Mental Health Indigenous Advisory Committee and chairs the Life Advisory Committee.