Media Release

Sophie Pieters-Hawke and friends lead the fight against dementia for young people

Sophie Pieters-Hawke, granddaughter of Hazel Hawke, has joined with three close friends to become Alzheimer's Australia’s first Young Ambassadors.

Sophie, Andrea Britz, Annabelle Boyd-Jones and Tess Paul, have all had a loved one with dementia and know all too well that the condition does not just affect the person with the illness.

Sophie said that young people who have a grandparent or even a parent with dementia are often left out of the dialogue around Alzheimer’s and dementia as it is commonly associated with older people.

“My grandmother was diagnosed with dementia in 2001,” she said.

“Now she is at the stage where she does not always remember who I am when I visit and it hits me every time. But even though she is in the later stages of dementia, she still appears happy and content and enjoys our company whether she remembers us or not.”

Sophie’s family has been involved with Alzheimer’s Australia since Hazel was diagnosed.

But it was the Forget Me Not Fundraiser Cocktail party during Dementia Awareness Week last year that put Sophie, Andrea, Annabelle and Tess, known as the Forget Me Not girls, on the map as advocates for younger people affected by dementia.

The Forgot Me Not girls believe that young people are an important part of the story about dementia. They can be crucial in helping to provide support to loved ones affected by dementia and also a powerful voice in the public debate around this illness, which is currently the third leading cause of death in Australia.

Andrea Britz first approached Sophie with her idea for a fundraiser for younger people affected by dementia in 2009.

“There was nothing out there that gave young people the chance to stand up, tell their stories and to show support against this disease that takes our grandparents and parents away from us,” said Andrea.

Annabelle, hearing about it from a friend, immediately went to the group to find out how she could help.

“The idea was there to have an event for younger people affected by dementia and I instantly wanted to be part of it,” said Annabelle.
This was the point when Tess got involved.

“When I heard about the idea I was on board straight away,” said Tess.

“My grandmother has dementia, and this was a way for me to fight it.”

The Forget Me Not Cocktail Fundraiser raised $27,000 for the Hazel Hawke Alzheimer’s Research & Care Fund last year. It was held at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Sydney and supporters were entertained on the night by comedian Denise Scott and musician Jen Cloher.

The CEO of Alzheimer’s Australia Glenn Rees said the Forget Me Not girls’ hard work and determination was admirable.

“They were very determined last year for the night to be a success – and it was,” Mr Rees.

“I am very excited to have them on board as Alzheimer’s Australia Young Ambassadors; they will be able to lend their experience with dementia to help thousands of young people realise that they are not alone.”

The Forget Me Not girls are already in full swing planning their next event – a cocktail party on Saturday 24 September at The Pavilion, in the Botanic Gardens, Sydney, to raise money again for the Hazel Hawke Alzheimer’s Research & Care Fund. For further information please go to www.forget-me-not.com.au.

The girls will also be participating in the Alzheimer’s Australia NSW Memory Walk and Memory Jog on Sunday 15 May at the Bay Run.

You can join them and help raise funds to provide much-needed support to people living with dementia, their families and carers. For more information or to register, go to www.memorywalk.com.au.

For interviews with the Young Ambassadors – Sophie Pieters-Hawke, Andrea Britz, Annabelle Boyd-Jones and Tess Paul please contact Tegan McGrath on 0407 232 212.
Key facts and statistics

- An estimated 269,000 Australians currently live with dementia
- Without a significant medical breakthrough, that is expected to soar to about 981,000 by 2050
- Each week, there are 1500 new cases of dementia in Australia. That is expected to grow to 7,400 new cases each week by 2050
- Dementia is the third leading cause of death in Australia, after heart disease and stroke
- One in four people over the age of 85 have dementia
- Dementia is fatal and, as yet, there is no cure
- Dementia has an impact on every part of the health and care system
- The total estimated worldwide costs of dementia were US$604 billion in 2010
- These costs account for about 1% of the world’s gross domestic product
- If dementia were a country, it would be the world’s 18th largest economy
- If it were a company, it would be the world’s largest, exceeding Wal-Mart (US$414 billion) and Exxon Mobil (US$311 billion)
- Australia faces a shortage of more than 150,000 paid and unpaid carers for people with dementia by 2029
- The cost of replacing all family carers with paid carers is estimated at $5.5 billion per annum
- Dementia will become the third greatest source of health and residential aged care spending within two decades. These costs alone will be around 1% of GDP
- By the 2060s, spending on dementia is set to outstrip that of any other health condition. It is projected to be $83 billion (in 2006-07 dollars), and will represent around 11% of the entire health and residential aged care sector spending
- Dementia is already the single greatest cause of disability in older Australians (aged 65 years or older)

What is dementia?
Dementia is the term used to describe the symptoms of a large group of illnesses which cause a progressive decline in a person’s functioning. It is a broad term used to describe a loss of memory, intellect, rationality, social skills and physical functioning. Alzheimer’s disease is the most common form of dementia, accounting for between 50 – 70% of all dementia cases.

Dementia can happen to anybody, but it is more common after the age of 65. However, people in their 30s, 40s and 50s can also have dementia.

Alzheimer’s Australia is the peak body for people with dementia and their families and carers. It provides advocacy, support services, education and information.

National Dementia Helpline: 1800 100 500
(The National Dementia Helpline is an Australian Government Initiative)
Dementia is a National Health Priority www.alzheimers.org.au

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1 Caring Places: Planning for Aged Care and Dementia 2010 – 2050, Access Economics, July 2010
2 Keeping Dementia Front of Mind: Incidence and prevalence 2009 – 2050, Access Economics, August 2009
5 Making Choices, Future Dementia Care: Projections, Problems and Preferences, Access Economics, May 2009