

Depression rife in Brisbane firms

A LEGAL recruiter has added her voice to the Tristan Jepson Memorial Foundation, which aims to raise awareness, educate and reduce the stigma of depression in the legal fraternity.

Alex Correa works closely with lawyers and wanted to help raise awareness to the cause in Queensland after witnessing depression first hand.

“Having spent many years in the legal profession, I’ve come across many depressed lawyers and have seen the terrible toll this has on not only them, but those around them,” she says.

“The foundation (Tristan Jepson) has strong alliances with the Victoria Bar Association, the New South Wales Law Society and the Australian Law Students Association.

“Having come across the foundation and the wonderful work it’s doing, I wanted to see what I could do to spread that very important message here in Queensland.

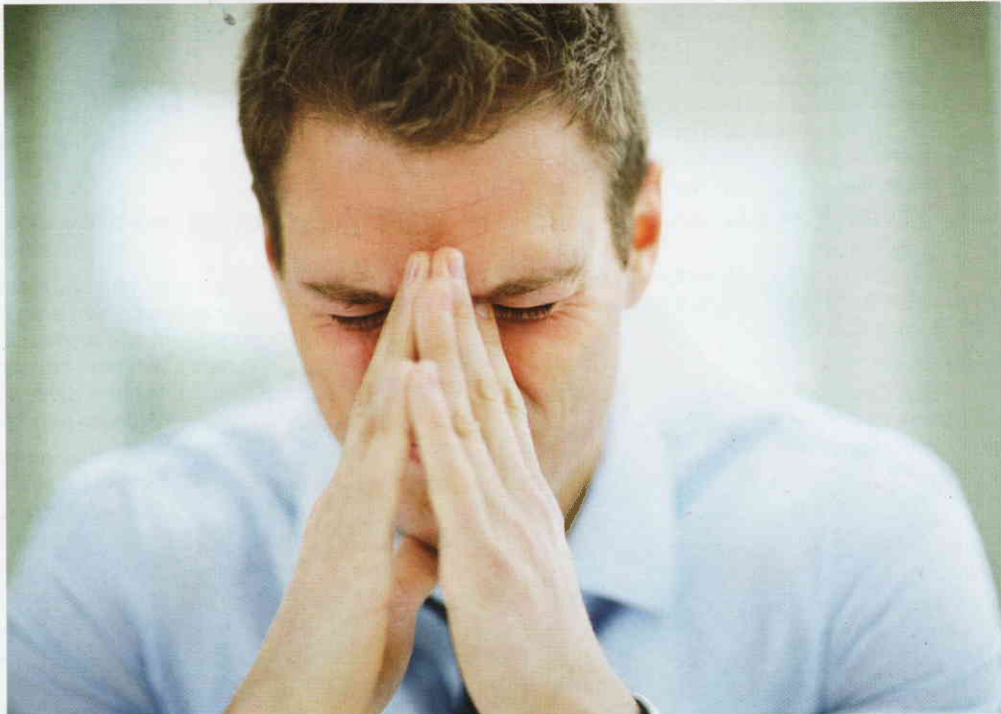
“This is a particularly serious issue and one that many law firms simply don’t know how to handle.”

Marie Jepson started the foundation after her son Tristan died in 2004 following a long struggle with depression.

“After my son died, a number of young people came to our house – I spoke with Tristan’s girlfriend and a number of his friends and a lot of them were lawyers,” she says.

“His girlfriend said a number of Tristan’s colleagues were suffering from depression and wouldn’t get help. So we started the foundation in 2006 and approached a university about researching depression amongst law students and they basically told us it wasn’t their job to look after the mental health of students and that depression wasn’t an issue with law students.”

That dismissive attitude only strengthened Jessop’s resolve and in 2000 the foundation received a \$10,000 donation from the New South Wales Bar Association.



“We commissioned the first research into the mental health of lawyers and law students and we called it *Courting the Blues*,” she says.

“The research showed that 35 per cent of law students were suffering depression to the point of disability and that one in three lawyers were depressed. As a result of the research, we looked at how we can make a change in a profession that we actually know very little about.”

The foundation started by influencing heavy hitters in the legal fraternity.

“Our strategy was to influence the people who had the most influence and we began with providing the research that basically stated that depression was a major issue in the profession and in the law schools,” says Jessop.

“There have been a number of spontaneous initiatives throughout Australia that have been started as a result of the research that basically deal with building resilience and creating awareness about depression in the industry.

“When somebody is suffering from depression, the words they hear inside their head are more important than anything else. It’s a debilitating illness that’s very internal, so that’s why our aim is to raise awareness, educate and remove the stigma that’s quite often associated with depression.”

More info at
www.beyondblue.org.au
www.tjmf.org.au