



MOUNT BARKER
DISTRICT COUNCIL

16 October 2023

Media Release

Unique collaboration supporting youth mental health

As part of Mental Health month this October, Wallis Cinemas Mt Barker is the destination for an Embrace Kids excursion on Thursday 26 October 2023.

The event is a first ever collaboration between the Mount Barker District Council, Rebekha Sharkie MP, Wallis Cinemas Mt Barker, Mount Barker Community Centre and the local community to organise a school event to celebrate body diversity, promote positive body image, mental and emotional health and combat negative messaging in media and advertising.

Deanna Wallis said that wellbeing and mental health are areas of high importance to the Wallis family and business due to their own individual mental health journeys and of those around them.

“For me personally, throughout my time at school I was heavily bullied for my appearance, passions, health issues, family business and dynamics,” Ms Wallis said.

“This had a massive toll on my wellbeing leading to deep depression, anxiety and an eating disorder. After completing school and becoming an educator myself, it was my mission to ensure no child in my care felt what I did as a child, to create safe and inclusive environments and help them know that their uniqueness is their super power.

“As the saying goes, you can take a teacher out the classroom but you can't take the classroom out the teacher. Although I am not in education anymore, advocating for inclusion for all and ensuring our youth feel valued is still of such strong importance to me.”

The event is inspired by Taryn Brumfitt's Body Image movement and will include a screening of the Embrace Kids documentary followed by a series of mental health workshops and fun filled activities for students.

“When I saw Embrace Kids last year with leaders of our community, dialogue started on how we can ensure as many youth in the Mt Barker district have access to this film,” Ms Wallis said.

“Embrace Kids is so beautifully done, capturing so many facets of challenges that youth face and we knew, we had to do something.”

“I am so grateful to be collaborating with Mt Barker Council, our local MPs, Mount Barker Community Centre, community groups, and businesses to support our youth. This is such a rare collaboration that is bigger than us all. I'm so grateful for the enthusiasm and commitment of all involved.”

Three hundred students from Mount Barker High School, Mount Barker South Primary, Mount Barker Primary and Callington Primary School are expected to attend the excursion.

“We all know the challenges that have been occurring specifically in Mt Barker recently and whilst I know this isn't going to solve all the problems, it is my hope that our youth feel valued, worthy and inspired to create an environment of kindness and inclusion,” Ms Wallis said.

Quotes attributable to Rebekha Sharkie MP

“Our young people are living in a world which is moving faster than ever before, coupled with a consistent focus on physical appearance and a desire for real time documentation of day to day life on social media.”

“These factors have considerable influence upon the emotional and physical wellbeing of young people.”

“It is vital that we equip our young people with the skills that will enable them to navigate the challenges of this environment.”

“Movements such as the one initiated by Taryn Brumfitt go a long way in making these skills visible and accessible to young people in a format which is engaging to them.”

“I look forward to working with the Wallis Family and Mt Barker Council well into the future to ensure younger members of our community are offered more opportunities like this to engage with topical issues and explore them in a safe, supportive environment.”

Quotes attributable to Acting Deputy Mayor Harry Seager

“I congratulate the Wallis Cinemas Mt Barker, and Deanna Wallis in particular, for supporting and promoting this event, the Embrace Kids excursion.

“The issue of negative messaging in social and other media is of particular and growing importance in our community and more generally. The promotion of unrealistic expectations and stereotypes and the toxic content so often displayed are having significant impact, especially on young people’s lives. This event, and the wider support it has attracted, is an important step in seeking to promote a more positive perspective regarding these issues.”

Quotes attributable to Sean Hames, Executive Officer Mt Barker Community Centre

“This excursion is a great example of the power of collaboration. So many more positive projects like this can be achieved through multiple groups working towards a shared goal. Young people in our community need and deserve this opportunity, and we are so pleased to be a part of this important work.”

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