

MEDIA RELEASE

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GIANT PUMPKINS HELP SQUASH MENTAL HEALTH STIGMA IN COORONG

Who would have ever thought that a conversation about a giant vegetable could help to save someone's life? But it seems to be the case in the Coorong district.

The *Tailem Bend Giant Pumpkin Growing Competition* first began in 2017 to raise awareness and support for suicide prevention in the Coorong District Council area.

The battle of giant pumpkins aims to start a conversation about mental health and suicide prevention in local rural communities, and all proceeds raised from the program go towards the *Coorong Suicide Prevention Network* – known locally as '*Conversations Matter*'.

The initiative is certainly growing awareness, and also growing in public popularity, with this year's competition entrants ranging from three years of age to the more experienced 76-year-old.

Coorong District Council Mayor Paul Simmons says it was great to see this competition encouraging a social connection between community members of all ages and backgrounds – after all, anyone can have a go at growing a giant pumpkin with the free seed packs distributed locally.

"The competition is something that anyone can be part of and opens up an opportunity for those who need it. The actual growing of the pumpkins is really just a catalyst for creating connections amongst local people who are looking for some common ground to help start conversations," Mayor Simmons says.

"Rural communities have a higher risk of mental illness, specifically rural men, which is why our Council continues to back great programs like this.

"The drought has taken a toll on local farmers, businesses and families, and creating positive community outlets and events can make a big difference to their lives.



Above: 2019 winner, Craig Lutze from Coonalpyn.

Postal Address:

PO Box 399
TAILEM BEND SA 5260
Email: council@coorong.sa.gov.au
Web: www.coorong.sa.gov.au

Coorong Civic Centre

95 – 101 Railway Terrace
TAILEM BEND SA 5260
Phone: 1300 785 277
Fax: 08 8572 3822

Meningie Information Hub

49 Princes Highway
MENINGIE SA 5264

Tintinara Customer Service Centre

37 Becker Terrace
TINTINARA SA 5266



“It often only needs to be a small gesture or a few words that can help people suffering from mental health issues, and this competition is just one of the initiatives that the Conversations Matter volunteer group can be proud of.”

Event organisers revealed that no weigh-in event occurred this year, instead there was a ‘weigh-in period’ held over 15-18 April, in which over 10 pumpkins of all different shapes, sizes and colours were weighed.

A Coonalpyn local, Craig Lutze (pictured), won this year’s competition with a pumpkin weighing in at a whopping 62 kilograms.

The Pitt family reign as giant pumpkin growing record-holders, with their heaviest pumpkin weighing 64.4kg back in the inaugural year (2017).

Council will continue to promote programs associated with suicide prevention and mental health via its social media platforms, so stay tuned to the Coorong District Council Facebook page for more details in the future.

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Contact:

Nat Traeger

DIRECTOR COMMUNITY & CORPORATE | COORONG DISTRICT COUNCIL

Phone: 1300 785 277 | E: ntraeger@coorong.sa.gov.au

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PO Box 399
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