

NO SHAME IN TALKING

A campaign encouraging people to talk about the effects of alcohol, drugs and gambling in the family has been launched in Blacktown.

VOICES, established by Drink in Family Support Services (DIFSS), helps families to talk about the problems.

With the message "There's no shame in talking about it", the campaign acknowledges the whole family is affected by a member who has a drug or gambling problem, according to the co-ordinator of DIFSS and VOICES, Tirrania Suhood.

Ms Suhood said DIFSS was unique to Blacktown, where it had operated for 15 years.

"DIFSS thought of doing something to make people more aware of these issues," she said.

A survey of about 20 counselling and support agencies in April found a need for a further support service.

Of the clients of the agencies surveyed, 88 per cent found it difficult to talk about alcohol, drug and gambling problems in the family, while 58 per cent felt it was hard to talk about them in the community. The most common reasons were shame, denial, blame, and the belief the issues were socially inappropriate to discuss.

Ms Suhood believes it is important that people feel comfortable about discussing the problems of alcohol, drugs and gambling. This includes recognising that all members of the family can be affected and may be reluctant to talk.

"It can have a huge impact on every member of the family," Ms Suhood said. "A lot of people are too scared to talk. Talking can make people feel better, just talking to anyone."

Initial funding came from the NSW Social Policy Directorate of the International Year of the Family.

Ms Suhood said that while DIFSS was the catalyst for the campaign, the work of referral agencies and community groups was vital.

"DIFSS could not have done this on its own," she said.

The Alcohol Drug and Information Service (ADIS) provides a telephone service for the project, which has been advertised in Blacktown.

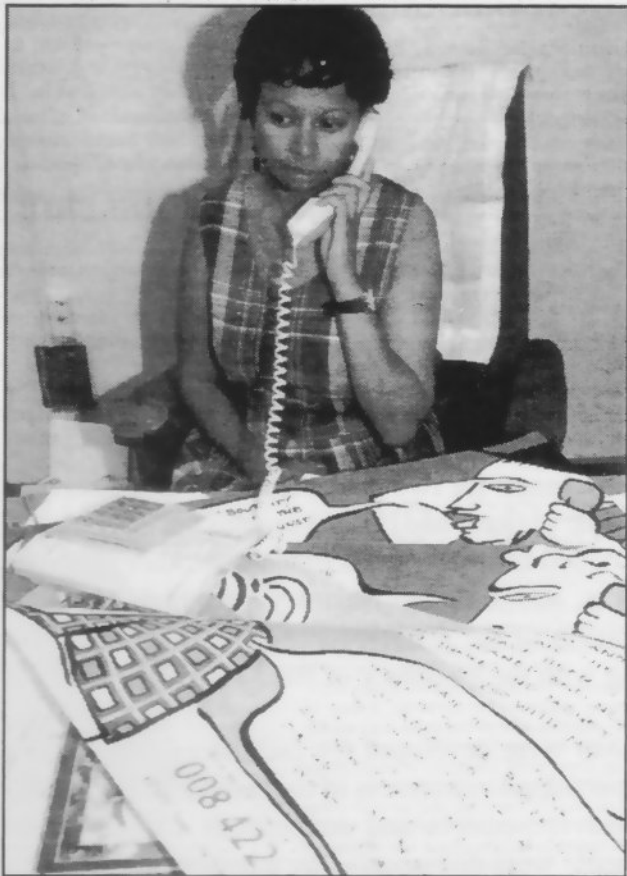
Posters have been sent to community support groups, shops and schools.

Ms Suhood said other regions had expressed an interest in running similar campaigns.

She said many people could spend Christmas feeling lonely and isolated if they thought they had no-one to turn to.

"It is a time when people can feel really alone," she said. "There is a lot of crisis happening around Christmas time."

For support and information ring 008 422 599.



Ms Suhood