

Media release

Gallagher Bassett funds community “gentle bears” project

Claims manager Gallagher Bassett Services Pty Ltd aims to have teddy bears in every emergency services and police vehicle across Australia.

Gallagher Bassett (GB) has funded a project that will see the bears available for police and emergency services personnel to give to children in trauma situations, like accidents and domestic violence.

The project was launched in South Australia by the SA Governor, His Excellency Rear Admiral Kevin Scarce, AO, CSC, RANR, this month. GB is now in talks with police departments in the Northern Territory and Victoria, with the view to expanding the project's reach there. Eventually GB wants to see the project spread across Australia.

Paul Easter, GB General Manager - NSW, has been the spearhead. He spent 20 years in the South Australian police force and knows only too well the dreadful circumstances for children involved in trauma situations. Mr Easter had heard of the gentle bears project overseas and saw the opportunity, with GB's assistance, to launch it in Australia.

“The teddy bears are an emotional first-aid tool, designed to make situations more ‘bear-able’ for kids. The bears say ‘please hug me’ across their chests and encourage children to transfer their emotional pain. Child psychologists say teddy bears are familiar objects that offer security to kids,” he said.

The project did not replace professional therapy that traumatised children may require, but was first-hand assistance that police or emergency services personnel could offer immediately. “It's hard to settle children down and get them to focus away from the immediate trauma. A cuddly teddy bear can be a great help,” Mr Easter said.

So far there are 1,000 bears in SA police and emergency services vehicles and another 4,000 are on order. Mr Easter expects to have distributed 8,000 bears throughout emergency services by the end of this year, with another 8,000-10,000 to be distributed in 2008. GB has spent around \$100,000 on the project in its first 12 months, but its investment is ongoing.

Gallagher Bassett chairman Peter Searson said GB's corporate philosophy was to support community projects that made a difference, rather than sports sponsorships and the like. He said it took nine months to get the project to the launch stage in SA, the first state to be involved. It had high-level police department support, with deputy commissioner Gary Burns attending the Adelaide launch.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION, PLEASE CONTACT:

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Photographs of a teddy bear and the launch function are available. Please phone Kate Tilley.