

Love Bites: Student Art Exhibition Grand Opening

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Thursday 4th December, 2014 – Artworks from students throughout the Shire were showcased at this year's 'Love Bites' art exhibition. With the Mayor and multiple local agencies in attendance Thursday's Grand Opening was an opportunity to celebrate the positive impact the *Love Bites* Program has had on the lives of many young people within the Sutherland Shire. The exhibition also provided an opportunity for our local community, alongside government and private sector representatives, to stand together against domestic violence and sexual assault.

Opening the exhibition, Sutherland Shire Family Services (SSFS) manager Diane Manns commented,

"If ever there was a perfect example of an integrated partnership and collaborative approach then the Sutherland Shire Love Bites program is it!"

The Love Bites Program

The *Love Bites* program is a best practice and researched program on domestic violence and sexual assault. Delivered to year 10 students of the Sutherland Shire for the past 3 years it had reached over 2200 students, and ran in 9 schools during 2014.

In 2010 Sutherland Shire Family Services identified a significant increase in referrals to SSFS from police and young people impacted by family and domestic violence. In 2011 Sutherland Shire Family Services partnered with local agencies, EDYS and Project Youth to establish the Sutherland Shire branch of *Love Bites*. Educating young people on healthy relationships the program,

"...deconstructs the myths that exist in the local community about domestic violence and sexual assault. It challenges gender stereotypes, attitudes, values relating to domestic violence and sexual assault." (Diane Manns, Manager Sutherland Shire Family Services)

Some 70 individuals from government and non-government organisations give up their time to share in the delivery of the program in the schools; ranging from community workers, police, sexual assault workers, youth workers, and domestic violence workers. To learn more about the *love bites* program and to view some of the artwork visit <https://www.facebook.com/lovebitessutherlandshire>.

About Sutherland Shire Family Services (SSFS)

Sutherland Shire Family Services (SSFS) is a grass-roots, not for profit community organization born out of a community need for practical hands on support for families and has been running for 27 years. Since then tens of thousands of families, parents and children have been supported through the provision of essential community based, family oriented services, helping struggling families navigate their challenges with dignity and hope, and practical skills to help them rebuild their lives. As a leading organization in family worker services as well as domestic violence support –SSFS provide a safe haven for families. For more information visit: www.ssfs.org.au/