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Bike riders prepare to help WA youth

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In an attempt to help young West Australians at risk of suicide, self-harm or depression, 48 people will travel 640km - on their bikes.

The annual Ride for Youth (R4Y) is a tough five-day bike ride from Albany to Perth.

Forty-eight participants aged between 25 and 60 years have been training for the past six months - and have ridden up to 8000km - to take part in the event, which starts in Albany on March 29.

Held annually since 2003, the event is the biggest fundraising event for non-profit organisation Youth Focus, which offers free mental health services to the State's vulnerable young people aged between 12 and 18 years.

"On their journey, the riders stop at a number of schools to engage with students in the issues associated with suicide, depression and self-harm and the services and support Youth Focus offers free of charge," a spokeswoman said.

"The R4Y is Youth Focus' largest fundraising event, raising a massive \$797,000 from last year's ride and over \$4 million since its inception.

"Suicide is the leading cause of death among young people;

second only to major vehicle accidents."

Peter Trench who is a rider, coach and chairman of Ride for Youth, said it cost Youth Focus \$3.6 million each year to provide free services to more than 1000 young people and 200 families around the State.

"Why do we do this? Suicide attempts by adolescents are frequent and admission to hospital because of intentional self-harm is approximately 15 times more common than completed suicide," Mr Trench said.

"Almost one-third of young people who complete suicide have made a prior attempt.

"This year's Australian Democrat Youth Poll found that more than 50 per cent of young people 'knew someone who has committed suicide or seriously considered committing suicide'."

Mr Trench said there was strong evidence to show that successful interventions for depression and other mental health disorders were available, affordable and cost-effective.

"However, there is an enormous gap between the need for prevention and treatment of mental disorders and the resources available," he said.

"In developed countries with well-organised health-care systems, between 44 per cent and 70 per cent of patients with mental health disorders do not receive treatment.

"Youth Focus is in need of continual support by the local community and businesses to cope with what will become an imbalance of funding and special needs due to additional calls on our services for young people and families who are experiencing mental stress and strain through the current financial crisis."

To make a donation or more information visit rideforyouth.com.au.

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