

Bringing Hope

The Salvation Army suicide prevention and bereavement support programs emphasises the importance of Hope, for each of us in our daily lives. Our program is called Hope for Life in recognition of the fact that hope is often what is missing for those who are at risk of suicide and hope is a critical issue for people who have been bereaved by suicide. Researchers and practitioners understand that hopelessness and helplessness is a common emotion in suicidal ideation. It is a pervasive sense of hopelessness that brings people to a point where they believe that things can't improve and that there is nothing that anyone can do to help them through the darkness and gloom that surrounds them. This is why it is important for each of us to understand the meaning and significance of hope and learn how we can become shining lights of hope to each other.

Understanding Suicide Bereavement

In Australia, approximately 2000 people die each year by suicide and research confirms that for every person who dies by suicide, there are at least 6 people who will be intimately affected, furthermore the ripple effect of a suicide death impacts on a wide range of people who knew the person who died and includes family, friends, neighbours, fellow students or work colleagues, acquaintances from sporting groups, clubs or social networks, health professionals consequently the impact can be felt by up to 100 people or more. This means that each year in Australia, up to 200,000 people may feel the impact of a suicide death.

People who experience the death of a loved one by suicide feel a range of emotions that may include guilt, anger, resentment, relief, abandonment, isolation, shock, disbelief and denial. Jeffrey Jackson writing in the Handbook for Survivors of Suicide states, 'On top of all the grief that people experience after a "conventional" death, you must walk a gauntlet of guilt, confusion and emotional turmoil that is in many ways unique to survivors of suicide.' (Jackson, J 2003). The deep sense of anguish and loss and the myriad of emotions that people experience, the constant questioning Why? and What if? makes suicide grief different from other grief. It is critical that people in this situation are provided with practical support and opportunities to share their grief.

There have been many analogies given for the experience of grief:

- Terrifying Roller Coaster of emotions
- Lonely Valley of sadness and grief
- River of risk

Some have likened the experience of grief to a journey through a canyon of despair. When the journey begins, there are many people there to support and share the journey however there are times when the bereaved person feels very alone with their devastating grief and sadness. Thankfully, we know that the person will eventually sail into calm waters where they see a glimpse of hope, particularly if there is someone who is there to share the journey.

If you know someone who has lost a loved one by suicide, you may be interested in finding out more about how you can support that friend or colleague. The Salvation Army Living Hope training course will provide you with the skills and confidence to know what to do and what to say to be of help and comfort to them. The course is a two day face to face training course, it is complimentary and we are able to come to you to deliver this training. The Living Hope training course can also be completed on line and this too is complimentary.

For more information please contact Hope for Life National Coordinator:

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Or - to do the Living Hope course on line, visit the Hope for Life web sites

www.suicideprevention.salvos.org.au

When you complete this training you will feel better equipped to

- Know what to do.
- Know what to say.
- Know where to go for help

Hope, Meaning and Direction – a unique conference experience

Hope for Life recently sponsored a National Suicide Postvention Conference, entitled “Hope, Meaning and Direction.” The conference was a collaborative initiative and included various organisations that provide information and services aimed at raising awareness about suicide prevention and postvention as well as providing support to those who may be at risk of suicide and those who have been bereaved by suicide. The conference organising committee included representatives from the following organisations; The Salvation Army’s Suicide Prevention – Bereavement Support Services (Hope for Life), with the support of the, Lifeline Foundation, Wesley Mission, Jesuit Social Services, United Synergies, StandBy Response Service, Life Is Foundation, The Compassionate Friends, Promote Life NT and the Bereaved by Suicide Centre for Intense Grief Therapy. The conference organisers would also like to acknowledge the support provided by the Federal Government’s Department of Health and Ageing as well as Suicide Prevention Australia.

The plenary speakers included four visiting experts from the USA: Professor Madelyn Gould, a professor in psychiatry and epidemiology, and deputy director of Research training in Child Psychiatry at Columbia University; Jerry Reed, vice-president and director of the Center for the Study and Prevention of Injury, Violence and Suicide; John Jordon, a psychologist specialising in work with survivors of suicide and other traumatic losses, and the professional advisor to the Survivor Council of the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention; and Michelle Linn-Gust, international author and president of the American Association of Suicidology.

Australian plenary speakers included Professor Webster; Professor Graham Martin, chair for the conference, director of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry at The University of Queensland, and clinical director at the Royal Children's Hospital Child and Youth Mental Health Service; Jill Fisher, national coordinator for the StandBy Response Service; Dr Diana Sands, director of the Bereaved by Suicide Centre for Intense Grief; Barbara Hocking, executive director of SANE Australia; and Tom Brideson, the NSW coordinator of the Aboriginal Mental health Workforce Program.

A key and a key focus of the National Suicide Postvention Conference was providing a voice for the bereaved, recognising that there is much to learn in listening to the stories and the lived experience of those who have lost a loved one by suicide. During the conference, delegates heard from various family members who bravely and poignantly told their stories, in the hope that they might raise awareness about the impact of suicide.

For more information and photo's from the conference visit the Hope for Life web site.

<http://suicideprevention.salvos.org.au/postvention-conference>

Lifekeeper Memory Quilt Initiative

The Lifekeeper Memory Quilts are designed as a memorial to people who have died by suicide. The first quilt was unveiled in 2009 and contains the images of 62 people approximately and provides a fitting way to remember the lives of each of these 62 individuals and their families. In June 2012 a further 5 state-based quilts were unveiled, these Quilts will be available for memorial services which we anticipate will be held in each state. Further information on this will be posted on the Hope for Life web site,

For more information contact Envoy Alan Staines Email: alanstaines@optusnet.com.au Mobile: 0412 164 575.

Dr Kathleen Peters from the School of Nursing and Midwifery has commenced a formal evaluation of the Lifekeeper Memory Quilt initiative to determine its effectiveness as a support strategy for friends and families involved, and in raising awareness of the impact of suicide in Australia. The research team will collect qualitative data in addition to quantitative data for the purpose of explicating the meaning of quantitative descriptions. The quantitative component of the study will use a questionnaire to seek responses from participants regarding the effectiveness of the project as a support strategy and for raising public awareness of suicide. In addition, in-depth interviews will be undertaken with participants of the Lifekeeper Memory Quilt project. The Evaluation Report will be available in early 2013.

World Suicide Prevention Day – 10th September 2012

This specific date has been set aside to remember those who have died by suicide and to raise awareness about the impact of suicide throughout the community. Various events and services will be held throughout Australia on this day and we want to encourage members of the broader community to become involved in raising awareness either through participating in a specific event or by talking about the issue of suicide prevention with friends, neighbours, colleagues, workmates or family members.

Further information and resources can be found on various web sites including

Hope for Life web site – www.suicideprevention.salvos.org.au

Suicide Prevention Australia web site - www.wspd.org.au

International Association of Suicide Prevention - www.iasp.info/wspd/

Living is for Everyone - www.livingisforeveryone.com.au/Home.html



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