

Mental Health Report Card

The National Mental Health Commission, chaired by Professor Alan Fels released the first Report Card on Mental Health and Suicide prevention, entitled A Contributing Life: the 2012 National Report Card, in November 2012.



This is a significant document and one which all of those involved in the area of suicide prevention and bereavement support will want to read.

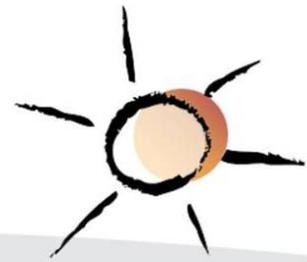
The report tells us that there are more than 2000 deaths from suicide in Australia each year and over 65,000 suicide attempts. More needs to be done to support those people who are at risk of suicide and those who have been bereaved by suicide.

The report also states that almost half the Australian population will experience a mental health illness at

some time in adult life, this should compel all of us to be engaged in finding out more about these issues and particularly how we can support each other in difficult times. You can access the Report Card on line at www.mentalhealthcommission.gov.au

The Mental Health Commission's web site also includes some short film clips of people talking about their experience of suicide. Jasmine and Cindy courageously tell their stories, in the hope that others will be helped. Cindy talks about the comfort that she received from participating in a Suicide Bereavement Peer Support, she says that being able to talk to people who understood what she was going through group was a great support for her and helped to diminish the stigma that she felt surrounded suicide. She encourages people in similar situations to reach out and connect with the services that have been set up in particular to support people who have been bereaved by suicide.

Jasmine talks about her own experience of living with a mental illness. She speaks enthusiastically about a group that she attends, where she has learned a new skill and more importantly has been given hope for her future. She is about to exhibit some of her art works that have evolved since she joined this group. She says that joining this group made a massive difference to her, it gave her confidence, it gave her something to aim for and she has learnt to do things that she didn't think she could do including painting and presenting information to a public group. She now has hope. To listen to these stories and more visit www.mentalhealthcommission.gov.au/our-report-card/watch-the-videos/preventing-suicide.aspx



Lifemaker Memory Quilt

Hope for Life feels privileged to be able to contribute to the Report Card. The story of Cindy Mills whose daughter Victoria is represented on the Lifemaker Memory Quilt, is featured in the report.

Cindy talks about the therapeutic benefit of participating in the Lifemaker Memory Quilt initiative as well as the importance of speaking with other people who have been bereaved by suicide.

You can read about Cindy’s experience on page 69 of the Report Card.

There is one National and five State Based Quilts including two for NSW, one for Queensland, one for Victoria and one for South Australia. We are keen to develop a Northern Territory and ACT Quilt as well as a Western Australia and Tasmania Lifemaker Memory Quilt.

If you are interested in participating in the Lifemaker Memory Quilt Project please contact Envoy Alan Staines Email: alanstaines@optusnet.com.au Mobile: 0412 164 575. The Quilts can be viewed at the Hope for Life web site. The Lifemaker Memory Quilts are available for viewing, particularly in the context of a Healing and Remembrance Service.

Preventing suicide

Bereavement support for families

Evidence suggests that families affected by suicide grieve differently from others who are bereaved by a sudden death.¹⁸⁴ This may be because families experience high levels of stigma from the community, suicides are often kept secret and there are many unanswered questions.

Families bereaved by suicide are left with unresolved issues – questions as to what else could have been done, guilt and the difficult processes of police and coronial enquiries to endure. Their grief can affect their own health and family interactions, and heighten their own risk of suicide.¹⁸⁵

What it means for Cindy, New South Wales

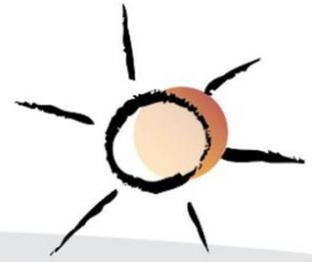
I never saw myself as someone who would come to rely on a support group. I'd always been self-sufficient and life was good. That all changed when my daughter Victoria took her own life.

I should have seen the signs. Victoria had experienced self-harm, she'd been bullied and was diagnosed with Type 1 Diabetes. Victoria saw three psychologists but was never diagnosed with a mental illness; she was simply described as an "angry teenager" and was never prescribed medication. I was assured that teenagers who cut themselves rarely suicide. After Victoria took her life, a few of her friends revealed that she had talked about suicide, but no-one believed that a beautiful, intelligent girl with the world at her feet would actually take her own life. I shuddered at the memory of her screaming "I may as well kill myself". I wish so much that I could jump back into those moments.

I was lost and alone, despite being surrounded by family. No-one could relate to what I was going through. I knew that for the sake of my other daughter, I needed help. I wanted to be with Victoria so badly that I felt vulnerable to suicide myself.

I joined a support group for those bereaved by suicide. At last I was introduced to other people with similar experiences. Free from taboo and stigma, we could gain an understanding of the complexity of our situation, work through our tragedy and begin to heal. The Salvation Army Lifemaker Memory quilt that I am pictured with represents a tiny fraction of the 2,000 Australians lost to suicide every year; a snapshot of real people, not just statistics, a number or a file in a coroner's office.

Click to watch Cindy's story



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And so this is Christmas

John Lennon of Beatles fame, penned these words in 1971, and they are often used at Christmas time as a form of reflection. Thinking through what we have achieved over the past 12 months, looking at the good times and the not so good times and perhaps looking forward with anticipation to the new year and the opportunity for a new start.

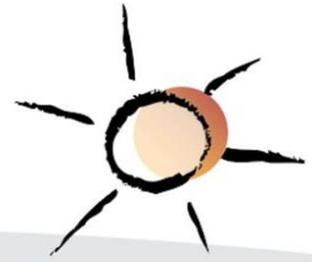
So this is Christmas
And what have you done?
Another year over
And a new one just begun

For some people, these words bring with them a sense of fulfillment particularly those who feel that they have accomplished what they had hoped to in the preceding 12 months might have a feeling of satisfaction and completion.

For others, these words might be a cause for regret at missed opportunities. For others the end of the year brings pain and sadness, particularly for those who have lost a loved one.

This time of year, when the focus is on friends and family, celebrating together, demonstrating their love for each other and sharing in family activities, can be particularly difficult for those who might be feeling lonely, those whose family is estranged and those who are experiencing the particular pain of grief and loss.

As a community we need to be watchful and be ready with a word of encouragement offering hope to people who may be experiencing distress or loss, at any time of the year, but particularly as Christmas draws near, we should be mindful of those in our community who need to know that there is hope for the future.



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Hope for Life would like to wish you all a very happy Christmas, may you know the peace, joy and hope that this season brings.

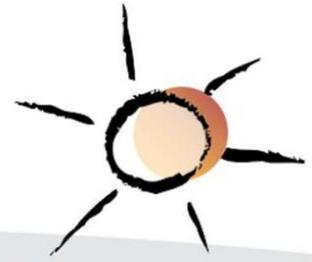
We finish with the hopeful words of John Lennon's Happy Christmas (War is Over):

And so this is Christmas
We hope you have fun
The near and the dear one
The old and the young

A very merry Christmas
And a happy New Year
Let's hope it's a good one
Without any fear

At Christmas time especially we need to **Be There** for people who may be at risk of suicide. **Be There** happens to be the name of a suicide prevention training course offered by Hope for Life. We also provide training for people in the community who want to learn more about providing support to people who have been bereaved by suicide, this training is called Living Hope.

The Hope for Life training courses are offered free and can be accessed via our web site or we can deliver face-to-face training in your workplace, school or community. By being informed you may help to save a life.



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Learn more about how you can become involved in raising awareness about suicide prevention

Hope for Life has a range of measures that will inform you about the impact of suicide and equip you to be a support for people who have been bereaved by suicide. We also have programs that are designed to involve people who have been bereaved by suicide, to support them in their grief journey and to provide opportunities for them to support others. These include:

- Hope for Life Champions Program
- Lifekeeper Memory Quilts
- Hope for Life website
- Living Hope Bereavement Support Training Program

Don't forget Hope for Life training courses are offered free and can be accessed via our web site or we can deliver face-to-face training in your workplace, school or community. By being informed you may help to save a life.

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

For more information please contact Hope for Life National Coordinator:

Stephanie Wilks

Phone 02 9356 2120

Mobile 0435 967 265

Email Stephanie.wilks@ae.salvationarmy.org

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

www.suicideprevention.salvos.org.au



The Salvation Army Hope For Life Program gratefully acknowledges the financial assistance of the Australian Government Department of Health and Ageing through the National Suicide Prevention Strategy.