

Hope Saves Lives

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### ***In this issue:***

This issue of the “Hope for Life” focuses on the power of community and the need for social inclusion and connection with others as an important pre/postvention strategy to suicide, with particular reference to regional Australia. It also introduces our new National Program Manager Bill Sayers, and features important events (recent and future) that underline the “Hope for Life” team and The Salvation Army’s commitment to suicide prevention and postvention. This newsletter also acknowledges the ongoing work of Envoy Alan Staines who has played such a significant leadership role in delivering the “Hope for Life” program since its inception.

In the modern world one of our greatest risks is that of social detachment and isolation. Beyond factors such as mobility, hardship and geographical isolation, the way we relate to each other in a world that has more technology, greater mobility and virtual engagement (via email and social media) is changing rapidly. At times this may fail to provide the emotional fuel that will sustain us through times of hardship and adversity, including grief and loss. To quote the German philosopher Goethe;

*“The world is so empty if one thinks only of mountains, rivers & cities; but to know someone who thinks & feels with us, & who, though distant, is close to us in spirit, this makes the earth for us an inhabited garden.”*

Truly knowing someone and sharing experience is an important part of emotional healing. The power of community is to band together in a physical space, create the capacity to share and the opportunity to connect. The Salvation Army’s suicide prevention and bereavement support program engages communities through workshops, education and memorial events throughout the nation. Through this media we have the opportunity to converse about the experience of suicide without judgement, lay foundations for conversations in a safe and supportive environment, and provide access to information and ongoing help. The need to connect exists whether we live in the city, regional or remote Australia.

### ***National Program Manager***

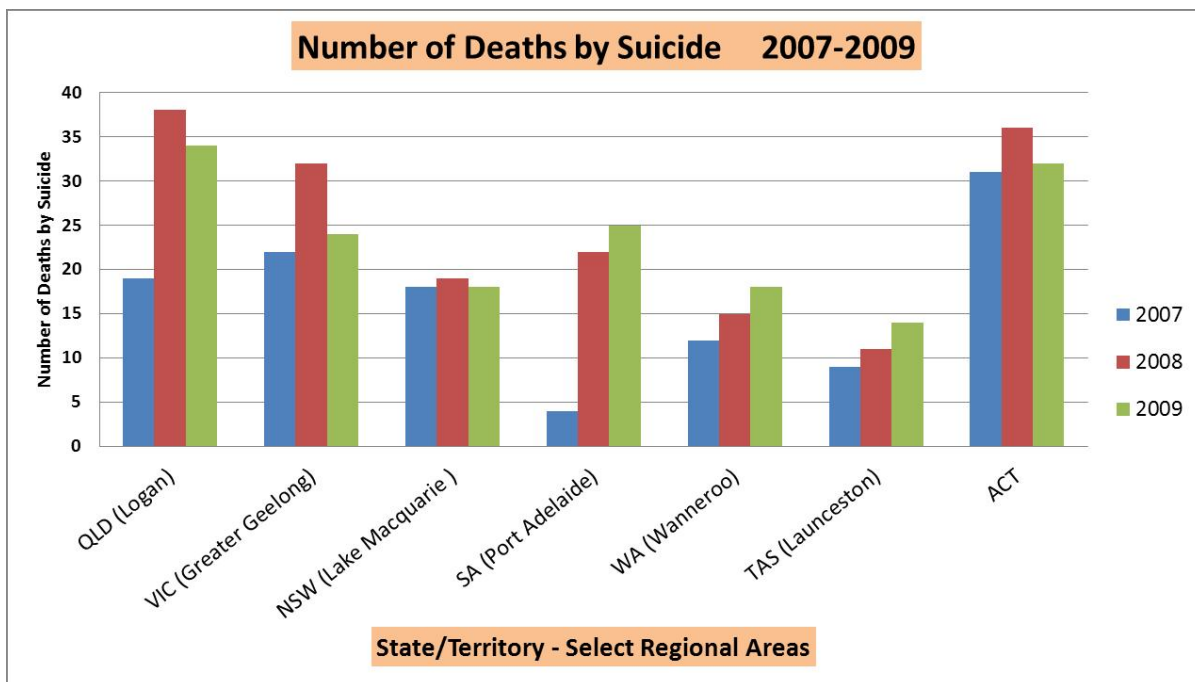
Bill Sayers has commenced as the new “Hope for Life” National Program Manager effective as of October 2013. Bill has a background in education, sociology & psychology, working over many years as a Regional and General Manager in the disabilities & employment services sector. He is passionate about the issues of suicide prevention and postvention and sees the “Hope for Life” program as an essential thread in healing individuals and communities, impacted by suicide and loss. He is committed to ensuring that “Hope for Life” serves those who have experienced the pain of suicide loss and those who are at high risk of suicide, through effective programs, partnerships & events.

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**Understanding Regional Communities**

According to “Next Steps” – Victoria’s Action Plan on Mental Health published by the Victorian Department of Human Services in 2006, rural communities (particularly inland towns) of less than 4000 people have a higher suicide risk than urban areas, particularly amongst young men. Issues raised included the conservative nature of some rural communities, issues pertaining to gender, unemployment levels and access to firearms. Consistent with the Salvation Army’s own experience, the report identifies that services are less available in regional areas, and that individuals are often less confident in using specialist services in comparison to the city, where anonymity and privacy can be maintained far more readily. Whilst the reasons for this lack of engagement are sometimes complex, we acknowledge that confidence is built through community resourcing, engagement and trust. Our personal experience is that “word of mouth” and on selling of events, resources and services within regional areas is a potent weapon in prevention and postvention. We can all have an active role to play in looking out for not only our friends and families, but as champions for those who through disability, personal circumstances and grief have become isolated or feel that there is no real support.

Statistical data from the Australian Bureau of Statistics covering the timeframe from 2007 to 2009 indicates that regional areas and some metropolitan areas (below) continue to experience significant suicide rates and no significant reduction in rates occurred during the period surveyed.



Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics – Deaths by suicide between 2007 and 2009.

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### ***Hardship and Resilience***

Beyond more predictable socio-economic and demographic variables regional Australians frequently endure hardship through natural or catastrophic events. In recent times we have had whole communities impacted, with lives and livelihoods lost. These events have had an enormous impact in communities socially, economically, relationally and psychologically.

The first decade of the 2000's brought much of the east coast into a significant El Nino drought event. Over the past five years we have observed two significant cyclones impact Far North Queensland in Yasi and Larry, the continuous cycle of extreme weather events through the interior including the catastrophic South East Queensland floods, and the enormous losses of life through the bushfires in the Kinglake district near Melbourne and in Tasmania. Individuals and families have also incurred enormous property losses due to the scale these events as well as significant bushfire events in South Australia, Western Australia and most recently, in the Blue Mountains region in New South Wales. Whilst the direct human toll of extreme weather events is very apparent, the aftermath and long term trauma is often less so. A professional who has decades of experience in dealing with the bereaved recently made the observation that a difficult time for many survivors of natural disasters is the period beyond 18 months after the event, where service interventions decline, bureaucracy is impacting on the recovery process and people are still dealing with issues of grief and loss. This reality, combined with the economic volatility and personal hardships within regional economies generally, can unfortunately lead to an individual choosing to take their own life.

The Salvation Army "Hope for Life" training program funded by the Commonwealth Department of Health, seeks to support and provide comfort, as well as a window for ongoing assistance to the bereaved. The program has evolved and responded to a 2010 Senate Community Affairs References Committee report titled "The Hidden Toll: Suicide in Australia". This document recommended that: "The Commonwealth, State and Territory governments together with community organisations implement a national suicide bereavement strategy". It was acknowledged by the same committee that "the impact of suicide on people with close relationships to the deceased is enormous" and that rural and remote areas should be targeted for prevention and awareness campaigns.

Whilst there is little data available regarding the longitudinal impacts of droughts and disasters within the Australian experience, "Hope for Life" offers a helping hand to regional communities and survivors of suicide via its "Living Hope" – Suicide Bereavement Support Courses. You are welcome to call the number below, leave a message or speak to one of our team members directly if you feel that your community or local organisation would benefit from a program into 2014.

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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.

### By being informed you may help to save a life.

For more information please contact Hope for Life National Program Manager:

Bill Sayers

Phone 02 9356 2120

Mobile 0435 967 265

Email [bill.sayers@aue.salvationarmy.org](mailto:bill.sayers@aue.salvationarmy.org)

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

<http://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

### International Survivors of Suicide Day- Saturday 23<sup>rd</sup> November 2013

*Every year, survivors of suicide loss gather together in locations around the world to feel a sense of community, to promote healing, and to connect with others who have had similar experiences.*

How it started: In the United States, National Survivors of Suicide Day is celebrated on November 23, 2013. National Survivors of Suicide Day was designated by the United States Congress as a day when the friends and family of those who have died by suicide can join together for healing and support. This day always falls on the Saturday before America's Thanksgiving. In 1999, Senator Harry Reid introduced a resolution to the United States Senate which led to the creation of National Survivors of Suicide Day. Reid is a survivor of his father's suicide. As citizens of other countries began observing the day in their local communities, it was renamed as International Survivors of Suicide Day. Every year, the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention sponsors International Survivors of Suicide Day, a program that unites survivors of suicide across the world. At events in hundreds of cities spanning six continents, survivors of suicide gather together to remember their loved ones and offer each other support. The American Foundation for Suicide Prevention produces a program shown at these events that features personal stories and advice from other survivors and health professionals.

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These events help survivors cope with the tragedy of losing someone to suicide. The link below demonstrates the importance of sharing and community for survivors and loved ones, as they share their loss and fondly remember their loved ones.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hT6SsGlvS1Q>

In Australia, International Survivors of Suicide day is marked by a number of significant memorial events and tributes over the coming weeks. One such event will be in Adelaide (see below)

**Walk through the Darkness...and into the Light.**

*Walk for suicide prevention, in memory of a loved one, or to support others bereaved by suicide.*

Date: 16<sup>th</sup> November 2013

Location: West Beach

Time: 5am

Meet at the Adelaide Shores Sailing Club  
Barcoo Road Tennyson, South Australia

After the walk the Remembrance Ceremony at Henley Square will take place

Time: 6:30 am

*Please note a complimentary breakfast will be served after the Remembrance Ceremony*





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### *A story of Hope*

The **Rosebud Healing and Remembrance Ceremony** was held at the Rosebud Corps on Sunday 10th November 2013. Jeff and Janette Philp facilitated a beautiful service to commemorate those who had died suddenly or by suicide. Even though each story was different and the resulting grief is unique for each person, solace can still be found. The bereaved were able to express their grief and take time out from their everyday lives to reminisce about their loved ones who they will never forget.

Music greeted the bereaved as they gathered to remember their loved ones and after a lovely welcome the service began. As the names of the deceased were read out the bereaved were invited to light a candle for them. Time seemed to stand still as the names were read, the candles were lit and gently music filled the church. Many tears flowed as the bereaved acknowledged the love they maintain for the deceased and remembered the times shared with them, the times they laughed and cried together. Another touching moment was seeing the array of roses brought in especially for the service, where each attendee could choose a 'Remember Me or Loving Memory' rose to take home in honour of their loved one.

The Lifekeeper Memory Quilt was also on display at the service. The quilt powerfully depicts the many lives lost to suicide in Victoria. Hennie Watts from the Salvation Army Hope for Life program spoke about the quilt and the importance of it not only as a memorial to people who have died by suicide but also as an educational tool for suicide awareness and prevention. Hennie also contributed to the poignancy of the service by reading a poem titled 'I'm Free' which reflectively informs us 'not to grieve for me as I am free.'

On a personal note, a mother of a serviceman who had served in Afghanistan spoke about the subsequent suicide of her son after he had returned from the war. She spoke about the devastation she felt when the police came to her door to tell her that her son had completed suicide. This mother believed that the horrific sights of the war and her son's inability to heal after such a traumatic deployment led to the suicide. Then within six weeks her husband died after her son's death, where this woman was left to care for her five younger children. With the support of the church and the community this woman has been able to survive these losses and spoke with great eloquence as she described her journey and encouraged others so that they too, can survive the loss of their loved ones.

Here lies the importance of Healing and Remembrance Services as kindred people gather to share stories and comfort each other in their grief. The bereaved bring hope, love and support to each other which allows healing to take place and from this place of healing comes the ability to help others on their journey.

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### ***Future Healing and Remembrance Services to put in your diaries***

#### **Healing and Remembrance Service**

*Theme: We are not alone.*

Date: Sunday 24th November 2013      Time: 2:00 pm

Address: Ferntree Gully Salvation Army

37 Wattletree Road

Ferntree Gully, Victoria

Phone: (03) 9752 2682

[Click to download invitation](#)

### ***Lifemaker Memory Quilt Initiative***



[Click here to watch](#)

The Lifemaker Memory Quilts are designed as a memorial to people who have died by suicide. The first quilt was unveiled in 2009 and has become a fitting way to remember the lives of each of these individuals and their families. In June 2012 a further four state based quilts were unveiled. These quilts are available for memorial services which and can be requested for events in each state.

Further information please contact Julia Hoskins on (02) 9266 9896 or

Envoy Alan Staines [alanstaines@optusnet.com.au](mailto:alanstaines@optusnet.com.au)

Mobile: 0412 164 575.

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### ***Special acknowledgement***

**Alan Staines OAM OF (Envoy)** has just returned from Oslo Norway, where he was awarded the prestigious International Association for Suicide Prevention 2013 Norman Farberow Award 'In Recognition Of Outstanding Contributions in the field of Bereavement & Survivors of Suicide Loss'.

Alan was the Founder and Director of Hope for Life, the Salvation Army's Suicide Prevention Bereavement Support Services from 2006 up to June 2013. He was a driving force behind the establishment of the Salvation Army's suicide bereavement services. For over 30 years Alan has played a pivotal role in the recognition and development of Postvention Services in Australia and remains a driving force in serving The Salvation Army's vision through his personal commitment to the bereaved, the memory quilt project and "Hope for Life" memorial events.

### **The human face of suicide and loss - A quilt story**

On the 9<sup>th</sup> September 2013 the Southern Community Welfare Service gathered at Monro Park Cronulla to commemorate World Suicide Prevention Day. A group of thirty gathered to honour their loved ones who had died by suicide. The park was a perfect setting to display the Lifekeeper Memory Quilt and it subsequently generated many conversations about suicide and suicide prevention. Many passing by were drawn to view it as it is brightly coloured and stood proudly in the park, billowing gently in the sea breezes of Cronulla.

Most attendees were unaware of the high numbers of Australians who have completed suicide and the quilt allowed for this conversation to take place, giving a face to the cold statistics. We observed that many approaching the quilt were silenced when they saw the faces looking back at them. All of the deceased were smiling and no-one would know the truth behind the smiles. As one mother said to me 'these smiling faces remind me of my daughter who died by suicide, she was always happy and never gave any warning signs that she was going to kill herself.'

Behind the faces we can see that the people who are represented on the quilt have a hidden story; stories of despair and hopelessness leading them to choose suicide instead of living. These faces also remind us that they were usually part of a family who are still grieving. From the day of the suicide lives have changed and as survivors, those who grieve are learning how to take their place in the world again.

Quilt events are powerful as they give the bereaved an occasion to join with others who not only perceive their grief but can draw support and love from them. The quilt has the ability to communicate to all about suicide awareness and prevention. The team at the Salvation Army Hope for Life program are committed to displaying the quilt at any appropriate event in the future to educate local communities about the importance of reducing our suicide statistics, and the role we can all play.



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### *Postvention at Christmas*



“Hope for Life” is very aware that facing the festive season after the loss of a loved one through suicide can be an enormous challenge. It is often a time of reflection, and sometimes loneliness. **Being there** for people who have been bereaved by suicide is the most important gift you can give at this time of year, affirming that people do not need to face this time in silence, or on their own.

[Links to Organisations in Australia that can provide postvention support following a suicide death HERE](#)

**Please note that the above are not crisis services.**

#### **Crisis Services:**

24 Hour crisis services are available throughout the Christmas period through:  
Salvos Care line: 1300 363 622 or Lifeline on 131114



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**Closing Message:**

Our next edition of the newsletter will cover the findings of the 2013 release of the National Report Card on Mental Health. It will also provide some background to readers about the scope of the “Hope for Life” program across the nation to date, some unique stories of resilience and ultimately, the people in cities, regions and rural areas who have participated in our training courses or events. These individuals are our front line defence for suicide prevention and postvention within their own communities.

**“Hope for Life” wish all readers safety, comfort and hope for the season, where we join together to celebrate the birth of Christ, and look to a brighter future for all.**



The  
Department  
of Health

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