From Dreams to Realities

The 2007 IASP bi-annual conference hosted by the Irish Association of Suicidology in Killarney adopted “from dreams to realities” as its theme.

This title was particularly apt for a Suicidology conference as the dreams and aspirations that we all hold dear to us as we try to make a difference in the lives of those who may be vulnerable to thoughts of suicide, to those who attempt and ultimately die through suicide are very different than the reality that many of us face in our day-to-day work in the field.

Within the field of Postvention, this is particularly so. Of the three pillars of Suicidology—prevention, intervention, and postvention—the latter is indeed the Cinderella. There has been a lack of a real dynamic focus on the area of postvention both within the literature and during the numerous Suicidology conferences over the years. It is now the exception to have postvention as a plenary in many of the conferences. This is not to suggest that scientific committees agreeing on programmes for conference are consciously omitting postvention from the schedules. It may be that those professionals, survivors and organisations are not putting their valuable work forward for consideration of inclusion. Perhaps it is now time for the postvention family to make a determined effort at getting postvention placed centrally within the field of Suicidology. It is surely up to us, as the voices of the bereaved, to ensure that these voices are heard and that we encourage and inspire the researchers and academics within the field to take cognisance of the needs of the postvention community.

The IASP conference in Ireland, through the 2nd postvention meeting, offered an opportunity for people and groups from around the international community to meet and discuss mutual problems and dilemmas that they face in trying to ameliorate the pain and distress of the bereaved. By attending the conference, coalitions and friendships were forged with others in the field. A reality that came to fruition as a result of the conference was an opportunity for a small organisation.

‘Console’, located in Ireland, to visit a number of our colleagues in the United States. Being afforded the opportunity to visit SPAN USA, AAS, the Baton Rouge Crisis Centre, and the Didi Hirsch Centre, to meet and discuss issues of joint concern with colleagues such as Larry Berman, Jerry Reed, Michelle Linn-Gust, Frank Campbell, Rick Mogil, and sit and talk with Dr Norman Farberow, the founder of the IASP Postvention Task Force, was truly amazing. To learn and share experiences, to discuss and try to arrive at common goals in some areas of concern is necessary.

The world may be a large area but the issues that the bereaved experience, are similar in many ways. We owe it to the bereaved to strive to arrive at a place where collaboration and learned experiences can be shared.

This was one of the key points raised at the 2007 IASP conference by the President of Ireland - Mary McAleese - in her address to conference when she stated, “Collaboration, I firmly believe, provides us with the key to multiply our efforts in suicide prevention.”

It is not possible for all support groups and organisations to traverse the globe learning from one another, therefore, an organisation such as IASP with its international network and, particularly, the Postvention Task Force must become the conduit for ensuring that the informational needs of these groups are met.

Many local community-based groups are struggling and looking for guidance around such issues as: what is best way to provide support to the bereaved and what models of practice are out there that can be tapped into? How should they be gathering relevant data about the bereaved coming to them for support and what can be ultimately done with such data and information to inform us in moving forward? What type of training should our volunteers be receiving and where can we access this training? These are just some of the questions that need addressing. Having attended many conferences over the years, a common theme that emerges across prevention, intervention, and postvention is the need for training and the delivery of relevant training for people. However, it is indeed a rare occurrence to receive a clear picture of what the training programme should include as a standardised baseline.

Large numbers of people working in supporting survivors are touched by suicide, be they family, friends, work colleagues, or indeed as a professional who has lost a client to suicide. For the most part, their first experience of suicide is when their loved one dies. Through the pain of the death, many times they try to establish ways of helping others through setting up support groups in small rural or urban areas. We must ensure that we can give as much support to these groups as we can to ensure that the principle of “do no harm” is at least maintained. But it is preferable to ensure that these groups and supporters can walk the journey with the bereaved using best practice guidelines as they try to live with their grief.

As one of the founding fathers of Suicidology, Dr Ed Schneiderman stated, postvention is indeed prevention for the future.

Sean McCarthy
Co-Chair, IASP Postvention Taskforce

To contribute an article or information to this newsletter, please contact either Sean McCarthy or Michelle Linn-Gust (contact details are on back page).
How To Start A Survivor Group—Updated Booklet

The WHO (World Health Organisation) published a series of booklets on suicide prevention in the year 2000. During the past months an international panel of members of the IASP Taskforce Postvention has updated the booklet, entitled: "How To Start A Survivor Group." The updated booklet integrates current knowledge and practices, and will be a valuable resource again.

The panel consisted of:

Norman Farberow (USA), Jerry Weyrauch (USA), Onja Grad (Slovenia), Anka Zavasnik (Slovenia), and Karl Andriessen (Belgium).

The booklet will be jointly published by IASP and WHO in the nearby future.

Karl Andriessen

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12th European Symposium on Suicide and Suicidal Behaviour
28th—30th August 2008
Glasgow

Due to the unexpected demand, the abstract deadlines for ESSSB12 have been extended.

The new deadline dates are as follows:

Oral Presentations—17th March 2008
Poster Presentations—28th April 2008
Date for Notification of Abstract Acceptance—12th May 2008
Early Bird Registration Deadline—14th June 2008

As there is no plenary session dedicated to Postvention, we would call on all of you interested in the field of Postvention to submit abstracts of your work for inclusion in the programme.

It is only by participation in the conference programme that we can raise the profile of Postvention, its importance, and relevance.

Web: www.esssb12.org
Reflections of a Wife’s Suicide

By: Mark Wilson, New Zealand

I left the house, gave her a kiss and a hug, and said “I’ll see you around nine.” I often think back to that final moment two years ago on March 5, 2006. It’s still crystal clear in my memory. I knew she was in a bad way, but over the 13 years we had been together, I had witnessed many bad days and had often worried about what I might return to. Still, all those previous feelings had been wrong; this night would be like any other similar night.

But it would end like no other.

When I returned she was gone. Gone forever. This was confirmed the minute I saw the police turn up on my doorstep to break the tragic news.

My darling Zita had finally been taken by the hideousness of depression. She was six months pregnant with our first child and she was the third and last sister in her family to take their own life. I didn’t have the courage to call her mother to break the news that it was now Zita. Over an eight-year period, I had done that for Karen (in 1998) and then Megan (2003).

I know the sex of my unborn child, the funeral director told me that. He said we were expecting a boy. Strangely, I sensed it was going to be a boy. We had chosen not to learn the sex of the baby but we had selected a boy’s name— Solomon Jay. His scan picture is stuck to my fridge along with other pieces of Zita’s and my life.

I reflect a lot now about what might have been. I don’t have anger or despair. How could anyone so beautiful, clever, and compassionate end up taking her life? I don’t have the answer. No one has the answer. The answer is bigger than me. I now reflect on a beautiful life that we had together. It was a blessing and such a joy. Zita helped create and mould the man that I am today. She was right when she said I could live without her by her side.

Getting to this point two years on is thanks in part to my inbuilt resilience—something Zita and her sisters never had. I awake every morning and marvel at the sunrise, the change in seasons, and the unpredictability of life. I am fortunate to have a wonderful group of supportive friends and family and through this combined strength I continue on. I talk openly and honestly about what has happened to me. I talk to Zita at times and I reflect. I shed a tear and I bounce back. I know Zita is at peace and she would want me to be at peace and I am. Her memory, our life together will be with me until the day I die, but I am living for now.

Each day, I go to the fridge I gaze at the mementos placed on it. That baby scan picture of Solomon is fading now in the sunlight, but every day I am reminded of what I had— if only for the shortest of time and what the future could have been. Soon those pictures will be removed and packed away. I’ve decided to shift from “our” house, to begin life in “my” new house. Some objects will be put back on display, but mostly, things will be stored away. It’s to the future that I am focusing. The past is with me of course, but my focus is on the future.

World Suicide Survivor Group Directory

One of the objectives laid down during the Postvention Task Force meeting in Killarney was that we seek to expand the current European Directory of Support Services for people bereaved through suicide.

It is our ambition to have as many links as possible to the IASP website from across the globe.

If your country has developed a data base of support groups, why not have them listed on the IASP website?

If you have a link to your country’s listing, please forward it via email to:

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Upcoming Events

April 16–19, 2008:
American Association of Suicidology – 41st Annual Convention and 20th Healing Conference,
Boston, USA.
www.suicidology.org

August 27–30, 2008:
12th European Symposium on Suicide and Suicidal Behaviour,
Glasgow, Scotland.
www.esssb12.org

November 1–4, 2008:
3rd Asia Pacific Regional Conference of Suicide Prevention,
Hong Kong
http://csrprp.hku.hk/iasp2008/