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Samaritans
Tackling Suicides on the Railway

Joe Ferns
Executive Director of Policy, Research & Development

Background to Samaritans
Samaritans was founded in 1953 and today takes more than 2.8 million contacts per year from people who want to talk about feelings of emotional distress and despair, including those which may lead to suicide. We offer emotional support by phone, text, email and through face to face meetings. Our service is available 24/7.

Samaritans’ service is about enabling people to create a safe, confidential place to talk about how they feel. They may not want to or feel able to talk about these feelings anywhere else. We believe that given the opportunity, most people are able to work through their issues themselves if they have someone who is prepared to listen to them.

Tackling Suicides on the Railway - Network Rail Partnership
Around 210 people take their lives on the railway each year. Every suicide on the railway is a tragic event, with huge consequences for drivers, station staff, passengers, members of the public who witness these incidents, police officers and all those who rely on the railway infrastructure. There is also a significant traumatic impact on family, friends and communities of the individual. If we remove the human implications, rail suicide costs the railway industry hours of delays and millions of pounds. The Samaritans and Network Rail Partnership is tackling both the human and the financial costs of suicides on the railway, and aims to reduce suicides by 20% by 2015.

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**Emotional Support Outside of Branch**
Samaritans branches work locally with station managers, station staff and the British Transport Police, in both prevention and post-incident support work. Samaritans provides Emotional Support Outside of Branch (ESOB) to people in emotional distress at railway locations who may be considering ending their life. Samaritans offers this service to all people identified by station staff as being in emotional distress at any time of day, any day of the week. Samaritans also offers face to face emotional support to witnesses of an incident at a train station. They attend the station following an incident, speak to those who may have been affected and hand out Samaritans contact cards with the support service contact details. Post incident support can be arranged to take place immediately following an incident, or more often to take place at the same time as the incident the next day, in the hope to meet and support some of the commuters who may have witnessed the incident on their daily commute. Volunteers often meet and support family members during this time as they often go to pay their respects at the place their loved one has chosen to end their life. Our volunteers find this a particularly rewarding and moving experience.

**Training Courses for Railway Staff**
Samaritans also provide two training courses for railway staff that deal with the issue of suicide in different ways. The Managing Suicidal Contacts course is aimed at rail staff from across the industry, along with the BTP, and gives them the skills and confidence to approach a person in distress at a railway location and provide them with emotional first aid before referring them for further support. The Trauma Support Training course is tailored specifically to the needs of those supporting train drivers or other managers following a suicide and gives them techniques to support their staff or colleagues after a traumatic event.

**Outreach with Community Health & Mental Health Services**
Samaritans is proactive in reaching out to high risk groups and communities to reduce the risk of suicide. Samaritans would like to improve its links other organisations, agencies and experts to ensure that its service is offered to as many people as possible. By forging links with GP surgeries, A&E departments and community mental health teams, Samaritans can ensure more people that may be in need of emotional support are aware of the service we provide. As part of the outreach element of the partnership, Samaritans are looking to build relationships with mental health organisations that are sited close to priority rail locations. This is being done at a local level by Samaritans branches. Through this partnership working, more people will feel able to contact Samaritans if they want to speak in confidence with someone about what they may be going through; no matter how big or small the issue may be.
A voice for those bereaved by suicide: The “Nothing Prepared Me for This” Project in Melbourne, Australia

Martin Ryan (Counsellor, Support After Suicide)
Rebecca Lister (Animateur)
Louise Flynn (Manager, Support After Suicide)

The shame and stigma associated with suicide can mean that those bereaved by suicide do not talk about it to both protect themselves and to spare others. This can result in them keeping silent so long that they feel they do not have a voice to speak with or write about their grief experience.

In order to directly address this issue, the second author (Rebecca Lister), conceived the idea of a writing and performance project involving the bereaved. “Nothing Prepared Me for This” was a project of the Support After Suicide bereavement counselling service in Melbourne, Australia, designed to provide people with the opportunity to find words and give voice to their experience. It consisted of writing, publication and performance components and was funded by a creative arts grant by Arts Victoria.

This grant enabled Rebecca to conduct weekly writing workshops run over five months in 2011 with 15 participants. These workshops culminated in the book of the participants’ work being published in 2012, consisting of 69 pieces of writing. Participants then attended further workshops to prepare them for the public performance of their work, which took place in two performances at La Mama Courthouse Theatre in Melbourne in May 2012.

The project was advertised amongst Support After Suicide’s clients and The Compassionate Friends (TCF), a self-help group. The fifteen participants consisted of twelve women and three men, with ages ranging from 20 to 74, with a mean of 51 years. Nine of the 15 had lost children to suicide. The median length of bereavement was four years.

In each week’s workshop, a new concept or skill area would be explored. Four of the workshops featured input from guest writers on poetry, creative non-fiction short story writing and writing performance respectively. Participants spent time writing in each workshop either on set exercises or on their own work. Time was put aside at the end for reading and discussion of their own material. Over time, people shared stories and became closer and more comfortable with one another, but at the same time the focus of the group was on writing, rather than being a support group.

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A mixed method evaluation was carried out at three points in the project: pre-workshop; the conclusion of the writing workshops; and after the performances. At the end of the project, interviews were also conducted on film with some of the participants.

Evaluation was done via a written questionnaire consisting of;

(A) a quantitative measure (Kessler Psychological Distress Scale) and
(B) responses to open-ended questions.

The difference between the scale scores from the beginning compared to the end of the project showed improvement and was statistically significant (at <.02 level).

Participants’ comments indicated they obtain benefits from the project in a number of ways including giving them strength, a greater sense of mastery, as a vehicle for being open about their grief, and as an opportunity to honour their deceased loved ones.

This project will be both replicated and extended following a successful application for a larger grant from the Australia Council (the national arts funding body). This was awarded to Rebecca Lister under their Creative Producer Grant scheme at the end of 2012.

This project gave participants a voice and a sense of confidence, and also provided the Support After Suicide program the opportunity to assist people in an innovative and alternative way beyond conventional counselling and group work.

A fuller account of this project will be available in an article which is in press for “Advances in Mental Health” to be published in mid 2013.

Copies of the book “Nothing Prepared Me for This” are available for purchase from www.supportaftersuicide.org.au

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LEVE – the Norwegian Organization for Suicide Bereaved has for almost ten years, tried to establish a network for young suicide bereaved. After researcher Kari Dyregrov´s work with young suicide bereaved and their needs in the time after (2006), the focus should have been even stronger on this important and vulnerable group. Unfortunately, due to many factors, LEVE never had the resources, neither voluntary nor professional, to continue focusing on this group. However, 2011 represented change. As a consequence of the initiative by one person and his ability to mobilize and engage others, Unge LEVE is now facing a new future, based on the engagement and participation of young suicide bereaved.

In 2011, an initiative was taken from the young suicide bereaved Lornts Øystein Tønne. Lornts wanted to work with young suicide bereaved as a group in a very different way; moving away from the traditional organizational perspective based on young regional contacts in each county in Norway, attached to the general organizational structure of LEVE, towards a more youth oriented perspective: Simply organizing youth camps and asking the very important questions: What is Unge LEVE (Young LEVE)? What do we need? Can we organize the youth activities solely on the young people’s needs?

The first step in this new way of thinking was to invite to a strategy camp in his hometown, Steinkjer. For a whole weekend the main focus would not be on the grief process but on making a strategy document for Unge LEVE, trying to answer the question posed above: What is Unge LEVE?

With financial support from the Norwegian Health Directorate, 13 young people responded to an invitation in LEVE´s newsletter and gathered to form the new start of Unge LEVE. This resulted in an application for a 3-year project where the main goal would be building an organization for young suicide bereaved. The project involves building up a network, arranging youth camps and making a documentary about young suicide bereaved. From a foundation called Extrastiftelsen, Unge LEVE has been granted more than 3 million NOK over a period of 3 years.

In 2012, LEVE arranged the strategy camp at Steinkjer in February and later, in November the same year, a youth camp in Trondheim for 18 youngsters with a full-day programme led by a professional, bereavement group, professionals and a social programme.

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The hope was that the young people would be inspired to continue with this work and would ask for more responsibility. And so it happened. A 19-year old suicide bereaved from the more mountainous and rural part of Norway asked if she could host the next youth camp at Geilo, a winter sport paradise in the middle of Norway. Only 3 months later, 26 youngsters met up at Geilo for bereavement groups, skiing and not at least spending time with young people in order to share some of their experiences. So what do the young people ask for? What do the young people tell us that they need? First and foremost they tell us that they need an arena to meet other young people who understand what they are going through. During these three camps we have managed to gather more than 40 young people between the age of 18 and 33, and they all respond positively on getting more information learning more about suicide, grief and suicide prevention. The bereavement groups are crucial to, exchange and learn from each other.

We have managed to get very good media coverage on the project so far and during 2012 some of the youngsters met with the Minister of Health and the Crown Prince and the Crown Princess. The project has also been presented on different professional and political conferences. Instead of focusing on the geographical variable, we are now just focusing on the camps, hoping that the local initiatives will pop up along the way. Many of the participants don’t feel the need for involving on a regular basis with Unge LEVE, but they need the opportunity to choose their participation or not. To not come is also a choice.

At the moment we are establishing a project group; the project has so far been led by the head of administration in LEVE. The youth voice is also represented in the central board of LEVE with two representatives. It has been a main concern to connect Unge LEVE to the mother organization, but at the same time keeping the atmosphere within Unge LEVE informal and noncommittal among the youngsters. This is a very important – and difficult – combination, because the participation by young people is not encouraged by traditional organizational structures; but by the possibility they have to make a change without spending too much time on bureaucracy. Consequently, the way of organizing “teen spirit” in this case, has succeeded because these principles are preserved.

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New Resource

“Grieving Resource—a Guide to Books and Other References”

The “Grieving Resource” is a guide for those grieving any type of loss. It is divided into fiction/non-fiction, age groups, and has specialized topics including the loss of a pet. Topics include suicide prevention, grieving after a homicide, and resources for children, teens, adults and professionals. New sections include: Spanish, military web sites, and anti-bullying websites.

December 2012, SMILE published the second and updated edition, which is available in a free, downloadable form at: www.smilelifework.org.

Born out of sorrow, SMILE, a USA-based 501(c)3 educational organization is dedicated to the proposition that tragedies such as suicide, drug abuse, eating disorders, violence and other self-destructive behaviours, can be prevented by providing children and young people with the life-skills they need to adequately cope with the challenges they will face throughout their lives.

The mission of SMILE is twofold:
1. Provide adults, parents, teachers, and medical professionals with the tools, education and resources they need to effectively teach and demonstrate critical life skills.
2. Provide children and young people with the life skills they need to be aware of consequences and alternatives of their actions, thus empowering them to make self-enhancing choices.

SMILE (Students Mastering Important Life-skills Education) started in 1997 and is listed with the Washington State Charitable Organizations and the IRS (Internal Revenue Service)

Current Projects

- The 14th annual SMILE conference, Early Prevention, Future Success, will be in the fall of 2013
- The Grieving Resource—Books and Other References
- In 2012-13 SMILE is providing grants to Molalla Elementary School, the Libby Centre and NEW ESD101 as part of the anti-bullying initiative, Where Civility Begins, Bullying Ends, to enhance education and prevention efforts aimed at eliminating bullying behaviours.
• Education continues through presentations and media interviews, as well as working with Hospice on grief. SMILE continues to work on suicide prevention education. The new legislative initiatives are being addressed and SMILE is a member of committees addressing both anti-bullying and suicide prevention education.

• Outreach Program works with families/communities after a suicide attempt/loss or at other critical times with 195 contributions to date.

• SMILE continues donation of educational resources to families, schools, professionals, and other organizations working with youth. The website gives families easily accessible information, including information and recipes for those with Celiac Sprue with the cookbook *Savory, Sweet, Delicious*, which is also available in print format.

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Upcoming Events

22-25 May, 2013
International Association for Suicide Prevention Regional Symposium in the Caribbean
Suicide Prevention in Rural Caribbean - Paramaribo, Suriname

24-28 September, 2013
XXVII IASP World Congress
Preventing suicidal behaviour on five continents - Innovative treatments and interventions
Norway, Oslo
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