

# SAMARITANS KEEPING IN TOUCH

Website: <http://www.thesamaritans.org.au> | Email: [samswa@bigpond.net.au](mailto:samswa@bigpond.net.au) | Admin Phone: 9381 5725

## NATIONAL VOLUNTEER WEEK RECRUITMENT DAY

“National Volunteer Week provides an opportunity for the Samaritans to reflect on 40 years of volunteering in WA. Over 1162 trained Samaritans have taken 600,000 calls from people in crisis.”

National Volunteer Week provides an opportunity for the Samaritans to reflect on 40 years of volunteering in WA. Over 1162 trained Samaritans have taken 600,000 calls from people in crisis. These Samaritans are everyday people of all ages from an assortment of cultures, professions and backgrounds. These volunteers share a common desire to support people in their community. This desire underlies the Samaritans vision of a society where everyone can be listened to, in confidence, and accepted without prejudice at any hour of the day or night to relieve their feelings of despair.

Volunteers have shared

that “I became a Sam because life has been very good to me and I wanted to give something back”. Alternately, in some cases volunteers have experienced their own personal crises and would have benefited from emotional support or can imagine being in a position of needing a listening ear. Some volunteers appreciate that “it may well be that for any of us, our unique circumstances could suddenly change and we too, may become despairing and distraught”.

Volunteers continue to be the backbone of the Samaritans. As such, we will be holding a Volunteer Recruitment Day, as a National Volunteer Week

initiative, on May 17<sup>th</sup> in the Murray Street mall in Perth, which will hopefully attract even more community minded individuals to the cause. We will connect with the public for a few hours backed by Jenny Seaton of Channel 9 and The Casanovas from Nova 93.7 and entertainment such as face painting and balloon sculpting.

## 40 Years of Volunteering

In recognition of celebrating 40 years of volunteering in WA, we will be holding our 40th birthday celebrations at the Perth Yacht Club in July. We will be commemorating this milestone by celebrating the volunteers who made it possible.

## CONTRIBUTIONS WELCOME

We welcome contributions to the newsletter. So send in your letters, ideas, articles and photos! Email to [publicat@bigpond.net.au](mailto:publicat@bigpond.net.au)

## THIS ISSUE..

40 Years of Volunteering	1
Suicide in the Media	1-3
Zippy in WA	3-4

## COMMENT: THOUGHTS OF SUICIDE

The following "Thoughts of suicide" was originally printed in the Western Suburbs Weekly, Tuesday April 10, 2007.

Forty inspiring individuals recently completed what for

many would have been the cycle of their lives. Ten teams of four took part in the Ride for Youth, completing a 710km, five-day ride from Albany to Kingspark.

They were cycling for lives too, raising more than \$500,000 for Youth Focus, to assist in the Pre-

vention of youth suicide, depression and deliberate self-harm.

For many of us, the cycle of life seems relatively straightforward: birth, healthy development to a full adult life, and death at an age gradually mov-

ing upwards on average expectations.

But as Dr Pauline Meemedduma notes in the introduction to **"If Only... Personal Stories of Loss Through Suicide"** [UWA Press, Belinda Woolley (ed)]: "The death of a loved one through suicide adds an 'extra ordinary' layer of tragedy of death".

Dr Meemedduma characterises suicide as a "unique form of loss."

"It is a loss characterised by the distressing circumstances leading up to and including the person's death.

"For many of those left behind, the loss and grief endured must be experienced in an environment of silence, isolation and stigmatisation."

The irony of the situation is that deaths by suicide are generally not explicitly reported in the media, as research suggests spikes in suicide attempts in the wake of negative portrayals of suicide.

But this has a curious effect, as the majority of portrayals of suicide relate to celebrities. The rationale must be that those in the public realm pass a public interest test that makes their suicide attempts reportable.

So for example, in recent days actress Halle Berry has spoken about seriously

considering suicide as a way out. The story could be seen as positive, as she pulled back from the brink and reflected on what was good about her life.

Yet one would think by the logic that keeps many more 'ordinary' accounts of suicide out of the media, her story would in fact be counterproductive.

Surely an astonishingly beautiful, Oscar-Winning actress who doesn't think life is worth living does not provide a great role model for the rest of us. Celebrity suicide therefore tends to glamorise and fetishise.

And there is much to learn from those more ordinary accounts. The stories in "If Only" are incredibly moving and powerful in their simplicity. Take David, whose brother Jim took his own life at the age of 18. It sets David on a destructive path that saw him teetering on the brink. But in a way his own small hell was a kind of tribute to, and legacy of Jim's final act. Like many in the book, he had to honour his own grief.

Perhaps the media as a whole believes that if they can't present the facts as they see them, they won't report at all.

But one senses from the stories in "If Only" that the media could play a much more active role on breaking a cycle that lead to the deaths of more than 2000

Australians every year.

### **Samaritans response**

Hello Hugh,

I read your "Thoughts of suicide" in the Western Suburbs Weekly, Tuesday April 10, 2007.

It raises some interesting ideas. Just what is the difference between useful and actively dangerous media coverage of the issues surrounding suicide?

It set me to wondering, if the distinction between helpful and harmful media coverage on the issue of suicide does not have more to do with reporting the ways suicidal ideation has been overcome without the person taking their own lives, rather than concentrating on those who have actually attempted or completed suicide, be they famous or not. More energy to the positive. Talking about ways people have overcome suicidal feelings rather than talking about those who have actually felt they had to go as far as taking their own lives.

**Mandy Paterson**

**The Samaritans**

**Youth and Community**

**Liaison Officer**



### **If Only...**

**Edited by Belinda Woolley**

"...suicide is a choice made by the victim and for those of us left behind, for a lifetime we will carry 'if only...' with us".

If Only... is a collection of deeply personal stories from people who have lost a family member or loved one through suicide. They tell of the tragic loss of children, partners, parents and siblings, and relate the difficulties and struggles experienced as well as the profound pain and despair that may be encountered in grief.

All of the contributors write from the heart, motivated by a desire to show that it is possible to pull your life together after a suicide, that there is light at the end of the tunnel, that the pain does lessen in time, and that life can become meaningful and productive again. The stories enable those left behind to be seen as real people: ordinary mothers, fathers, husbands, wives, sons and daughters, brothers and

sisters to the lost person; ordinary people who have experienced and suffered extraordinary loss.

As well as offering hope and support for survivors of suicide, *If Only...* is a valuable resource for profes-

sionals working with the bereaved, as well as a means to broaden awareness in the wider community.

#### **About the editor**

Belinda Woolley completed

a degree in textile design before owning her own design and print business. She has worked as manager and curator for a local art gallery and presently works as an art consultant. After losing her husband to

suicide she wrote about his life as a record for his daughter. Finding some solace through her own writing, she called for others to do the same. 'If Only...' is the product of her facilitation.

## **FEATURE ARTICLE: BRINGING ZIPPY TO WA**

Our Youth & Community Liaison Officer, Mandy Paterson and our Director Ash Towns visited the Education Department recently to discuss our proposal to introduce Zippys' Friends to the Primary School community.

### **History**

Partnership for Children grew out of work by Befrienders International, a global suicide prevention agency that Samaritans belong to.

Befrienders wanted to break this chain of despair, and reasoned that if children could learn to resolve conflicts and problems at an early age, they would be better equipped to deal with crises as teenagers and adults. So, a programme called Reaching Young Europe was created, teaching coping skills to six and seven year old children.

The results were so good that Befrienders decided to set up a new agency, to further develop work with children and young people.

Partnership for Children, started work in January 2002, taking over the Reaching Young Europe programme and re-naming it Zippy's Friends.



Since its successful pilot in two countries in 2000-01, it has spread to eleven countries including Brazil, Canada, China, Denmark, England, Iceland, India, Lithuania, Poland, Norway and USA.

Since then over 124,000 children have been enrolled in the programme, including over 52,000 in 2007.

### **Concept**

The fundamental concept behind Zippy's Friends is very simple - if we can teach young children how to cope with difficulties, they should be better able to handle problems and crises in adolescence and adult life. An important feature of the programme

is that it has been designed to be universal and transcend cultural barriers.

Zippy's Friends is an internationally recognised and implemented peer support program for young children. This program is designed to give children the skills to problem-solve emotional issues early in life so that, as they age and their problems become more complex, they already have a self-concept that they are able to manage emotionally challenging situations.

It is anticipated that once students have been through this program, they will feel more equipped to support themselves and one another emotionally on an ongoing basis.

It has also been designed to help all children, not just those who have difficulties or who are considered to be at risk. It promotes the mental health and emotional wellbeing of all.

Zippy's Friends encourages children to explore and think for themselves.

The programme does not simply focus on helping children to cope with their

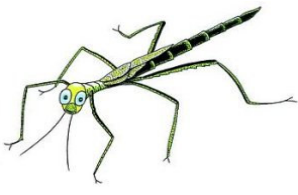
own problems. It demonstrates the importance of talking to other people when we feel sad or angry - and the importance of listening to other people when they feel sad or angry. It affirms a child's ability to both give and receive support. Children practise choosing solutions that not only help them, but also respect other people.

It encourages children to generate their own solutions and strategies, and to discuss how helpful they might be. The activities in this programme develop children's abilities to judge their own success. Children should not need to depend upon the presence of a teacher or adult, or peer approval, in order for them to know if they are successful or have acquired the skills.

### **Delivery**

The students own teachers present the program to them. The strength of the already existing student-teacher rapport adds to the effectiveness of this program.

The programme is built around a set of six stories.



Zippy is a stick insect and his friends are a group of young children, and the stories show them confronting issues that are familiar to young children - friendship, communication, feeling lonely, bullying, dealing with change and loss, and making a new start.

The 24 sessions are divided into six modules, each focusing on a particular theme and is delivered to year one students.

### Principles

The programme is not competitive. Children are not marked on how they perform. No child comes top or bottom of the class. Instead, children are encouraged to work together, helping each other.

The emphasis is always on the reinforcement of positive coping abilities and the positive aspects of a child's behaviour. Inadequate behaviour or troubles are not highlighted. The emphasis is always on the ability to learn, adapt and improve skills.

Teachers do not judge what is right or wrong, or suggest that specific solutions are the right or wrong ones. Instead, teachers

encourage the children to find new and different solutions and to decide amongst themselves which solutions seem best in different circumstances.

Repetition and continuity are essential for learning so Zippy's Friends tries to draw from as many familiar environments and situations as possible, so that the skills the children practise will be generalised to different environments and situations.

Collaboration and helping each other are important focuses of the program. Encouraging children to offer help and accept help is an important step in coping successfully. For example, if a child cannot think of an answer to a question, other children are encouraged to give him or her suggestions.

The focus of all activities is on collaboration and not competition so "successful" completion of activities is the group, as opposed to individual efforts. Success is evaluated in terms of a group or at least a team involving two or more children, or the child and an adult.

The programme teaches children:

- ⇒ How to identify and talk about their feeling,
- ⇒ How to say what

- they want to say,
- ⇒ How to listen attentively,
- ⇒ How to ask for help,
- ⇒ How to make and keep friends,
- ⇒ How to deal with loneliness and rejection,
- ⇒ How to say sorry,
- ⇒ How to cope with bullying,
- ⇒ How to resolve conflicts,
- ⇒ How to deal with change and loss, including death,
- ⇒ How to adapt to new situations,
- ⇒ How to help others

### Professional Evaluations

Zippy's Friends has been extensively and professionally evaluated. The experts who conducted the most recent major study of the programme's implementation and impact said: 'We are not aware of any other programme of this type for young children that has been the object of such a detailed and rigorous evaluation.'

Evaluations have found that children who took part in Zippy's Friends showed improvements in cooperation, assertion, self-control and empathy. Most important of all, children who took part learnt to use more positive strategies,

such as saying sorry, telling the truth, talking to a friend, thinking about a problem, trying to stay calm

Importantly, the programme was shown to be equally effective with boys and girls and that children retained their newly-learned skills one year on.

### Teachers Evaluations

In a survey of over 300 teachers from six countries:

- \* 78% agreed that their class now had a common language to discuss day to day problems
- \* 80% agreed that the programme improved the atmosphere in their classroom
- \* 95% agreed that it helped them to get to know the children better
- \* 89% felt they had become better teachers

We propose to facilitate the introduction of the program into WA schools in the name of getting the "listening to others" message to where it is most needed (both for the children, their parents and the teachers). We have taken the first important step and I hope we shall be able to report positive progress. very soon.