

## **THREE STEPS TO SAVE LIVES**

### **OUR KEY MESSAGES FOR LOCAL AUTHORITIES**

Talk to Me 2 is the Welsh Government Suicide and Self Harm Prevention Action Plan for Wales. Many of the top-level objectives in this strategy are reliant on effective local partnership working through a cross-collaborative approach.

For example, one of the main objectives of the plan is to improve awareness, knowledge and understanding of suicide and self harm amongst individuals who frequently come in to contact with people at risk of suicide and self harm and professionals in Wales. This objective is facilitated by frontline training in suicide awareness for public services. However, to achieve this objective, it is vital that local services, agencies and organisations work in a joined up and collaborative way to effectively manage and target their resources.



**The most effective means of achieving this local and collaborative approach, is the creation and implementation of local suicide prevention plans and ensuring the engagement of Local Health Boards and local authorities in Regional Multi-Agency Suicide Prevention Fora.**

Local suicide prevention plans are developed and implemented by multi-agency groups and are critical to implementing the national suicide prevention strategies published by Welsh Government.

The promotion and implementation of our Three Steps to Save Lives are reliant on effective partnership working through the creation of local suicide prevention plans and attendance of Regional Multi-Agency Fora. All regions (Mid and West Wales; Cardiff and Vale and Cwm Taf; South East Wales; North Wales) have established multi agency suicide prevention forums which have agreed local reporting structures and which report to the National Advisory Group. It is vital that every local authority area in Wales works to a local and national plan because without one, suicide prevention work is much less effective than it could be. To discuss this further, please contact us on [wales@samaritans.org](mailto:wales@samaritans.org)

## **1) ADDRESSING SOCIOECONOMIC DISADVANTAGE SAVES LIVES**

In 2016, Samaritans commissioned eight leading social scientists to review and extend the existing body of knowledge on the link between suicide and socioeconomic deprivation. In 2017, we launched the findings of this research in the report '[Dying from Inequality](#)' -

- Areas of higher socioeconomic deprivation tend to have higher rates of suicide.

- Men are more vulnerable to the adverse effects of economic recession, including suicide risk, than women.
- People who are unemployed are two to three times more likely to die by suicide than those in employment.
- Increases in suicide rates are linked to economic recessions.
- The greater the level of deprivation experienced by an individual, the higher their risk of suicidal behaviour.
- The least skilled occupations (e.g. construction workers) have higher rates of suicide.
- A low level of educational attainment and no home ownership increase an individual's risk of suicide.

In Wales, every local authority has a unique geography, economy, and population; it follows that a profile of deprivation and associated suicide risk will also vary between local populations. At a time when nearly a quarter of the Welsh population lives in poverty, we are committed to policy approaches in suicide prevention that mitigate the devastating effects of socioeconomic disadvantage in Wales.

We need greater recognition that suicide is linked to socioeconomic disadvantage, but we also need to dispel the myth that many deaths by suicide must therefore be inevitable.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS FOR LOCAL ACTION**

- There needs to be greater awareness among welfare, housing and employment practitioners and policy-makers of the impact of economic hardship, financial and housing insecurity, loss, and trauma on mental ill-health, suicidal behaviour and self-harm.
- Every local area should have a suicide prevention plan in place. 'Priority places' in the community (such as hospitals, custody suites, job centres, food banks), especially those in areas of highest deprivation, should be a key part of these plans, potentially providing appropriate services or fostering ties with relevant agencies.

Staff and volunteers at services accessed by individuals who are experiencing socioeconomic disadvantage, including job centres and food banks, should receive specialist training in recognising, understanding and responding compassionately to individuals who are in distress and may be suicidal.

- There should be early intervention to help those in debt or in financial distress. Financial advice and support should be easily available and accessible. Staff working in the banking, finance and employment support sectors should be trained to improve recognition of suicide risk so they are capable of helping individuals access appropriate psychological and social welfare support services.
- People bereaved or affected by suicide or suicidal behaviour in others should be offered psychological and material support. This applies particularly to people living with socioeconomic disadvantage

## 2) COMMUNITY AND SOCIAL CONNECTEDNESS SAVES LIVES

A lack of community and social connection can make an individual more vulnerable to mental health issues, suicidal thinking and behaviour and therefore, social connection is a protective factor for individual suicide risk. Community and outreach groups and volunteering are interventions which can help to tackle public health issues including loneliness, isolation and mental health.

In order to achieve social connection with its associated protective factors, the nature of community and outreach groups and volunteering can be extensive and wide-ranging. Digital literacy, sports, basic numeracy, arts and crafts, music and coffee mornings are all examples of group activities which achieve the outcome of social connection.

Organisations such as Men's Sheds Cymru, which cite 'social exclusion as a hidden but persistent problem in many communities', aim to address the problem by creating community groups for 'men to pursue their interests, develop new ones, belong to a unique group, feel useful, fulfilled and a sense of belonging'<sup>1</sup>. Established in Australia in 2005, Men's Sheds is now established and growing in the United Kingdom. However, organisations such as Men's Sheds are supported and funded by the Third Sector and their sustainability needs to be safeguarded to protect those who are most vulnerable –

*"It gives me a reason to get up in the morning and for two days a week I feel I'm gainfully employed. I feel good working with and helping chaps who often feel isolated in the community. I would need a very good reason not to come." Bill, 67*

With the increase in library and community centre closures in Wales and the ending of Communities First, we are concerned that those communities who are most vulnerable may experience an increase in loneliness, isolation and poor mental health due to the subsequent lack of social connection which these centres and schemes provide. It is vital that these types of community and social outreach groups are recognised for their health benefits; social connectedness tackles mental health issues and loneliness and isolation, and can work to reduce the strain on health and social care services.

### RECOMMENDATIONS FOR LOCAL ACTION

- Community groups should be given more focus as a form of prevention and early intervention for loneliness and isolation in Wales and policy solutions should be worked up to increase community participation in local authority areas.
- [Loneliness mapping](#), which allows local services and local authorities to work collaboratively to use existing data to predict where the most lonely and isolated residents live, allows limited resources to be targeted at people and places that need them most. Households with just one occupant, a head of a household aged 65 or above, being situated in a low-income area, and not owning a car are among the indicators. Loneliness mapping should be viewed as a preventative measure which can help to alleviate this risk in the most vulnerable individuals.

<sup>1</sup> 'What is a Men's Shed?' <http://www.mensshedsymru.co.uk/what-is-a-mens-shed/>

### 3) REDUCING ACCESS TO MEANS SAVES LIVES

In 2015, the publication of an international review of existing studies of Interventions to reduce suicides at suicide hotspots, showed that preventing access to the means of suicide, for instance by installing barriers and safety nets, can reduce the number of deaths at suicide hotspots by more than 90% .<sup>2</sup> The review also found that additional interventions to encourage help-seeking (placement of signs or crisis telephones) reduced the number of deaths by half when used in combination with barriers and safety nets and by 61% when used alone.

The period of suicidal crisis, where someone is fixated on taking their own life, usually only lasts a short while. Creating a barrier, whether it is a fence, or an alternative course of action, such as details of an organisation like Samaritans which offers round the clock support can often interrupt people enough for them to have second thoughts about what they are doing and seek help.

#### RECOMMENDATIONS FOR LOCAL ACTION

- 1) Installation of physical barriers, nets, Samaritans signs or improved surveillance using CCTV at possible or known high risk locations. These could include: Bridges, Viaducts, High-rise buildings, Multi-story car parks, Cliffs and Level crossings

*\*Samaritans signs can be ordered through the Wales Office on [wales@samaritans.org](mailto:wales@samaritans.org)*

- 2) Frontline staff should be provided with suicide awareness and/or intervention training .

Samaritans and other organisations offer a range of workplace training programmes that can be tailored to the needs of different organisations  
([www.samaritans.org/your-community/workplace-training](http://www.samaritans.org/your-community/workplace-training))

Staff training has formed a major part of the rail industry's suicide prevention programme. Bespoke courses sponsored by Network Rail and delivered by Samaritans equip railway staff in Wales with the skills to identify people who may be contemplating suicide and the confidence to approach them and offer immediate support.

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<sup>2</sup> **Interventions to reduce suicides at suicide hotspots: a systematic review and meta-analysis**  
Pirkis, Jane et al. The Lancet Psychiatry , Volume 2 , Issue 11 , 994 - 1001