

Response to Senate Inquiry November 2009
Our Story

It was on the 2nd February 2006 when our son Scott took his own life at our home here in Wagga. He was 19 years and 11 months young.

This was the most shattering and devastating loss any parent can experience.

The grief we have had to endure has at times been unbearable.

The impact on his 3 sisters has been ongoing and traumatic. His death changed our lives forever. Our family life as it once was had been destroyed. We were a close and loving family who valued each other and the times we were together. The loss of this special person from our lives, the prospect of no longer having him here to share our family occasions, grow older, and be part of our future is with us forever.

Scott was the last one of our 4 children still living at home with us

The tragedy was more devastating, because my husband David and I were on holiday in Northern NSW when Scott died . The lack of appropriate action from people he knew, the fact that he was not found for 22 hours despite people being at the house the whole time added to our distress.

We were left with unanswered questions about the circumstances around Scott's death.

We pursued vigorously all avenues in the early months to seek the answers until the time came when we knew we would have to learn to live without ever knowing the reasons for this catastrophe.

Following a tragedy of this proportion one expects empathy, understanding and support from all the key people who are involved in those terrible weeks and months afterward.

But in our situation this was not the case.

Because we were not at home at the time there were many questions we needed to ask.

The policeman, who attended and was our contact, was uncooperative. We asked him to come out to the house as we needed to have explained to us exactly what had occurred. He refused to come and visit us and insisted we go to the station. We were consumed with grief and could hardly bear to venture outside the house so we found this very hard. I implored him to see us at home as I needed him to give us some information around the site where Scott had died.

I never knew whether he was not experienced or equipped to deal with a trauma of this type or he simply didn't understand how it was for us.

Following a succession of problems a capable senior officer took over and we were asked to make a formal complaint about the issues that we encountered. We will always be grateful for his input.

We did receive a formal apology from the police department

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In the following weeks we were misinformed about procedures that would occur e.g., we were told toxicology results we would get in 3- 4 weeks It was 5 months before they were to be completed.

We found it hard to access information. Due to the 12 hour shifts and days off the police work it was difficult to have continuity of information. Then one of the key investigators was transferred elsewhere.

There was no one who offered any sort of assistance. A police chaplain had been on the scene at the time and left his card but we did not hear from him.

We would have appreciated a phone call.

We received a letter from the coroner's office giving us some information and it stated a suicide information package was enclosed but it wasn't there.

After speaking to other families who have lost a loved one to suicide we found there were a lot of inconsistencies in their experiences. The follow up they received seemed to depend on the action of the particular policeman who attended.

One person told us they had such a compassionate policeman he contacted them every week for months to follow, to see how they were managing.

It was in May this year we attended the 2nd Australian postvention Conference held in Melbourne

It was there we learnt of the various programmes that were in place in other parts of the country, which offered support to the families of those bereaved through suicide

It was amazing to hear about the suicide postvention work that is being accomplished in the cities.

This moved us to return home knowing more had to be done for those affected by suicide in our own community.

We felt that the rural areas were disadvantaged in the assistance offered in many ways.

We believe much more needs to be done in both areas of prevention and Postvention of suicide to assist in addressing this needless loss of life.

Some areas we believe need targeting are;

1. There needs to be more awareness of the devastation and loss experienced by families who have lost a loved one to suicide.

2. There needs to be more support and services, offered to families, to assist them in coping with the unique form of grief this tragedy produces.

- 3 We see a need for more education in schools to highlight the strategies that are in place for young people.
The areas that we believe which need attention are:
 - a) Teaching young people ways they can improve their self esteem
 - b) Helping young people to not be afraid or to feel bad to ask for help when they need it, and to know how and where to access the help they need
- 4 The topic of suicide needs to be discussed more openly and the real facts and figures exposed.

How grateful my husband David and I would feel knowing that those who are faced with this terrible tragedy and heartache in their lives would have available to them the support and assistance they need, so that they do not encounter the difficult and arduous path we had to travel following the death of our only son Scott.

Sandra and David Schulz