

Community Affairs Reference Committee

Suicide in Australia

by Ray Leon

Depression is a disease. If left untreated, it manifests itself into a debilitating and crippling foe, that eats away at the very core of the most primitive part of our brain, the instinct to survive. The power of the mind to override the natural predisposition to remain alive at all costs is an indication of the severity and strength of this resolve, and once an individual has crossed the threshold of determined resolve, and has found peace with themselves that the only action left that cures the pain is self harm, the silent knell of death has already tolled, beyond the reach of ears that can intervene.

Suicide begets suicide, and with the advent of the web, mobile phones, twitter, MSN, facebook, MySpace, cyber bullying has made giant inroads into making suicide an ever growing full stop to the harassment and pain of poorly socialized individuals. Children need hugs, love and security from a very early age, and awareness of this should be tantamount ahead of every media campaign that's shoving materialistic crap into the minds of developing human beings, that are following the pied piper directly into the mouth of hell. The piper who only has profit in mind, without recourse as to the lingering effects of the very customers they corrupt, I speak of television shows that sensationalise murder, magazines that sensationalise the words terror, secret, horror, heartbreak, misery, pain, hurt, cheat, jilted, cheated, and destroy. The landslide has to stop, by admitting that our current stance on self harm is as taboo a topic as death, when the one is non existent without the other, and they both exist, albeit too often.

My time as a funeral director exacerbated my passion to become involved in the prevention of youth suicide in Australia. I met young people for the first time, when they appeared in the holding fridge wrapped and taped up from head to toe in white plastic, to stop them leaking their bodily fluids. Next I met their families, the most distraught, and gutted human beings I have ever been in the same room with. Next I would see the deceased in the mortuary, being prepared for service, and it is HERE that we take the youth, the cameras, the smells, the process of having your insides sucked through a tube to prevent decomposition, this is what society must be exposed to. The truth of what they do to your body, what it does to your family and friends, not the fantasy of a MySpace page sensationalizing an honourable exit!

It was here I learned that many car accident victims, were inaccurately reported as road fatalities, whilst their injuries and preceding actions indicated beyond reasonable doubt, that this was not an accident. Preceding behaviour, has been proven to leave tell tale clues as to the desire of an individual, that has their mind made up to finish their life. That these clues are not made public, concerns me greatly, and is a focal point for any awareness campaigns that may bring a future reduction of the incidence of intentional self harm.

Charity organisations that specialize in mental health, are struggling to get funding, and make themselves accessible. It is the people without the financial capability to access counseling or psychotherapists, that need intervention most. Youngsters living at home hiding in their Cyberworld are not going to find help, when they have spent so much time and energy creating a fake persona that doesn't allow even those in the same house to notice there are plans afoot. There are very creative types out there who's sole focus is invested in creating a desire, but whatever primeval urges that can be mustered in thirty seconds, to buy a hamburger, a car, a television, or a piece of real estate. These creative types are not being channeled to stop self inflicted death, but they have the creative power to do so. To educate the public, to put power into the people who are in the emergency services, and make them the friendly village elders of yesteryear the peers of society that will help them through troubled times, lend a hand, offer support, protect them from their inner demons, and show them that this too shall pass.

They played a very effective card when AIDS showed it's head, and it worked. Why was AIDS all of a sudden an important issue? Because it killed people, innocent unwitting people, uneducated in the severity of a natural act as primitive as breathing and need for water. Why is suicide still considered such a taboo subject in comparison to the AIDS awareness campaign. Is it because it's sacrilegious to take your own life, religious groups have condemned you to purgatory, you can not be saved, therefore you cannot be helped. The devil has taken your soul? I digress. I can not recall ever seeing an awareness campaign that brings to the fore, with the impact of a whack on the side of the head, the fact that Australia has one of the highest incidences of suicide in the world per capita. We have the highest consumption of ecstasy and alcohol in the world per capita, mobile phones per capita, internet access per capita, though perhaps unrelated, we are a nation of extremists in the sense of how we approach things.

So that begs the question, who does it right? Which infrastructure, organization, therapy, technique or campaign is the right one? My thoughts are twofold. First of all, it has to start in the home. Most suicide cases choose the safest haven in their lives, to exit from their torment. It's a place to plan, contemplate, think, and convince themselves that departing their existence is a conscious and unchallenged decision without recourse. So bring awareness to the ones who love the ones they stand to lose.

Secondly, those who's homes have no love to speak of, and therefore must find a lifeline in the ocean as they float past unseen, unheard, and uncared for. There has to be somewhere you can go, someone you can call, but the agencies such as Lifeline, are so old, that they do not appeal to a youthful brain, that has been hard wired to be over stimulated. I think Lifeline, I think mothballed clothes rack, no disrespect intended to the fantastic work done by their organisation and many like them, but it's not 1970 anymore. Advertise suicide prevention in the latest video games, leave subliminal tracks that send the message to "protect yourself

from harm”, and you have a million copies of that message world wide, seen by the very individuals at highest risk. Create a song with a catchy tune and a buzz word catch phrase that rings true of looking out for your mates, and you have something that brings this dark and scary subject into the sunlight to start planting seed that will grow roots that will firmly plant their existence into mother earth as a living being of her soil, not a decomposing one under her skin.

Funeral homes are the first place to start, because it's the last place a suicide will end. The victims are the people that have to digest their complete failure at having been un-important enough to the deceased to intervene, whilst the suicide felt themselves inadequate to be in anyone's life. It's a conundrum that requires Awareness. A committee of social workers, emergency services, psychotherapists, that are all combining to change the approach, the perception, and the awareness of this horrific disease, needs to be actioned now, today, this very minute. Someone somewhere in Australia has taken their life whilst I am writing this, someone close to them wasn't aware, and will shortly find them, and their world will fall apart.

With an attitude of life being mostly fun, make depression as natural an emotion and experience as a toothache, one that will go away.

I would very much like to share further ideas on my proposal to launch a campaign with a theme, a song, and an accompanying one second advertising campaign that plant seeds of prevention. I am unsure of whether this forum is the right place to put my ideas forward. I am currently studying counseling, with a desire to be involved in the prevention of youth suicide.

Thank You

Ray Leon