

Suicide awareness submission

Background

Many of us are prompted to do 'something about suicide' when there is an incidence close to us in the community or family. Whilst working with an NGO this happened to me and I was motivated to learn more about the influences and role that others can play in helping to divert people away from becoming another statistic. After Cyclone Larry hit FNQ the importance of helping the community to defuse their pent up emotions was a natural part of our response.

A local hairdresser reopened her salon after a few days even though most people were still trying to clean up their homes, repair fences and clear debris from their properties. Her father had the insight to realise that a lot of people would want someone to talk to after the experience they had been through. Part of the NGO response was to use as many people as possible in the community including the 'local barometers' such as vets, hairdressers and rural supply outlets to disseminate information about referral services that were available and this hairdresser had been included in this drive.

One of her male clients who was alone in the salon was clearly very disturbed by what he had been through and was now facing in the clean up (Many farmers are older and have striven all their life to establish viable properties with often the most basic equipment and limited cash flow. To then see this all destroyed was very traumatic for many) Not only was the hairdresser able to pass on contact phone numbers and the whereabouts of the Community Recovery One Stop Shop, she felt comfortable addressing the issue with him after the conversations the team had had with her about how she could help others.

This client returned to the salon later to thank her and told her she had saved his life.

Local Solution

The NGO decided to build on this very small experience and offer Suicide Awareness training throughout the community. The group actively pursued hairdressers (one suggesting their profession was 60% psychologists: 40% hairdressers) accountants, vets, rural supplies outlets, massage therapists and other 'natural helpers' in the community. Initial contact was always in person, through referrals or from personal contacts. The response to these face-to-face visits or phone calls was usually very positive but often quite cautious at the thought of having to 'prevent a suicide'. Numbers at the workshops were encouraging though surprisingly the main attendees were from the human services sector. This region is currently running workshops for this sector on a more regular basis though the sector is reliant on external funding to deliver these workshops.

Feedback from the general community outside the human services sector was predominately about the fear and responsibility of talking to someone who is about to kill or harm themselves. At crisis point. It was difficult to relay the message about early intervention with many feeling it was prying or the role of others. Those with the experience of someone they knew who took their life expressed the wish that they could have done something about it.

This all seems to reflect the fact that most people would like to be able to help but are fearful of the responsibility of another persons life.

Suggestion

Considering the above it would be beneficial to introduce suicide awareness training for those services providing regular, spaced human contact. EG

- TAFE level for trades. i.e. hairdressing, massage, physio, mechanic,
- University for accountants, business consultants,

There will be many more categories than those listed.

By including this training at this level students would be able to disengage from the realities of the personal and better understand and retain the skills needed to identify a person at risk, know how to deal with the situation on a professional basis and know where to refer the individual.

From an awareness course the individual would understand that their role is only about the process listed above with specialists taking the main role. These community barometers would merely be the early warning system that could help slow the rate of suicide in Australia.