

# STARTING OUT: DEVELOPING SUICIDE PREVENTION IN CALDERDALE

**Suicide is the biggest killer of men under 50; stopping suicide is everyone's business.**

## BACKGROUND

After 12 months of negotiation, in 2016 public health undertook a suicide audit for Calderdale. The findings largely mirrored the national picture. From our audit of 45 deaths from suicide the main suicide risks were - being male, living alone, unemployment, alcohol or drug misuse and mental ill health.

Nevertheless, the retrospective nature of the audit (2012-14) meant we remained concerned about having no data to support anecdotal evidence of suspected suicides locally.

## WHERE TO START

In time honoured tradition we invited all the usual agencies to a meeting to launch the audit and discuss next steps.

It was soon apparent that several organisations were already working around suicide, e.g. Samaritans; Fire & Rescue Service; Andy's Man's Club (bringing men together to talk about their feelings). It was largely uncoordinated yet everyone wanted to link and support each others' work. We held a workshop, invited many organisations, and this formed the basis of our Calderdale plan.



## LET'S TALK ABOUT SUICIDE

Talking about suicide, let alone encouraging agencies to think about suicide prevention, is never easy. However, in less than 18 months we have started these conversations and have made progress across Calderdale.

## STRENGTHS

The strength of the group is that it is open to all with no fixed membership, including people who have been touched by suicide. It's said we have an "eclectic" mix of people but that's precisely why we are making progress and talking about suicide everywhere.

**"The most eclectic group ever!"**

## CHALLENGES

A large number of organisations participate in the group but the fluidity of the membership does pose some challenges. In the early days new attendees wanted to re-visit the issues and decisions but now we have a published plan, this is no longer an issue. At each meeting we identify three priorities from the plan and focus on these.

Some individuals may not always feel that their issues are aired so if there are emerging issues raised by members, these are added to the plan.

To keep people engaged, we have a speaker at each meeting, e.g. one of our members, Mary, talked about a play "What Remains" written by her mother about her husband who died from suicide; Mary acted out the play as her mother - so emotionally powerful.



Mary Brooks in 'What Remains'

## CALDERDALE'S VISION

For Calderdale to be a place where suicides are eliminated and where people do not consider suicide as a solution to the difficulties they face; also a place that supports people at a time of personal crisis and builds individual and community resilience for improved lives.

## OUR PLAN

Our plan aims to be ambitious and innovative, to raise awareness about suicide and to create an impetus for change that eliminates suicides for Calderdale. No one organisation is able to directly influence the reduction in suicides and a collaborative approach between organisations and individuals must be taken.

## OUR PROGRESS

We are making steady progress and some of our highlights so far are:

- Set up a directory of local support for people in distress at <http://www.mentalhealthmatters-calderdale.uk/resources.html>
- Placed Samaritans signs on North Bridge, Halifax
- Campaigning around World Suicide Prevention Day, World Mental Health Day, 'Blue Monday' with The Samaritans and Healthy Minds

- A website for children and young people is being hosted by North Point Wellbeing to address emotional health and well-being
- Expansion of Andy's Man Clubs (AMC). In Halifax they have 42 men attending with about 600 people using the group over the last 18 months. In Hebden Bridge they average 15 men a week. Currently rolling out groups across prisons.
- Insight Healthcare held a suicide prevention workshop
- All Brunswick Centre staff mental health first aid trained and their needs assessment for people with HIV includes self-harm
- Contributed to the West Yorkshire and Harrogate's Suicide Prevention Strategy
- Successfully appointed to a public mental health post that will also focus on suicide prevention
- A toolkit has been developed by the 'Pride in Prison and Probation' by the National Probation Service (NPS) staff group for prison and probation staff working with transgender offenders. NPS staff are signposting cases to CAB and food-banks and also give out small food parcels to service users facing financial hardship
- Public health consultant now vice-chair of Yorkshire and the Humber's Community of Improvement around mental health and suicide prevention
- Raising awareness of Time to Talk on 1 February by organising a Time to Talk lunch with short chair based exercises and mindfulness.



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**Calderdale**  
Council

## References

Comer, K & Lomas, J (2016) **Audit of Suicides in Calderdale 2012-2014**, Calderdale MBC