

Insights into Youth Suicide Prevention in a Regional Centre: A Collaborative Community Wide Approach

Authors:

Park J¹, Francis F¹

¹ headspace Ballarat

Background:

The Youth Suicide Prevention Project (YSPP) was initiated in response to a significant increase in youth suicides in the Victorian town of Ballarat over an 18-month period. The objective was to review the existing system of care to better support young people at risk of suicide through service collaboration and best practice shared care principles.

Approach:

The project employed a mixed-methods approach, engaging 314 individuals across 44 focus groups, including young people, parents, carers, and professionals. The process involved surveys and open discussions to gather personal experiences and identify contributing factors to youth suicide, barriers to seeking help, and potential solutions.

Outcome:

Findings revealed a higher rate of suicide bereavement in Ballarat compared to the national average, emphasising the community's urgent need for effective interventions. Young people were less likely to seek help for themselves but would do so for friends. Stress, family dynamics, and bullying were major contributing factors. Barriers such as cost, transport, and long waitlists were significant, with young people also citing parental disapproval. As a result, several projects designed to address these findings are currently underway and will be implemented locally by September 2024.

Innovation and Significance:

This project is unique in its comprehensive community consultation approach, directly involving young people in the design of solutions. The integration of lived experiences into service redesign has the potential to significantly impact youth suicide prevention strategies. The emphasis on early intervention, mental health education, and community support aims to reduce stigma and improve help-seeking behaviours. This initiative serves as a model for translating community insights into actionable policies, projects, and practices.

Disclosure of Interest Statement:

The headspace Ballarat Youth Suicide Prevention Project acknowledges the significant contribution of its industry partners. Transparency of these relationships is critical, and potential conflicts of interest have been disclosed in this publication.