



# SUICIDE AWARENESS AND SUPPORT GROUP

2022/23

Annual General Meeting Report

A report on the activities, interventions and outcomes of the  
Suicide Awareness and Support Group.

## **MISSION STATEMENT**

**To create a safer and healthier community by preventing suicide and supporting those affected through the provision of awareness raising, crisis intervention and family support services.**

## **OBJECTIVES**

- To provide effective advice and support to people who are experiencing a period of suicide crisis.
- To work with community and statutory partners to enhance people's access to appropriate mental health and community services and ensure that clear 'care pathways' are created for those affected by poor mental health.
- To raise public awareness of the causes and consequence of suicide for individuals, families and society.
- To enhance the lives of individuals and families who have been bereaved or affected by suicide.
- To organize, and campaign for effective community and statutory based response services for those affected by suicidal crisis or suicidal bereavement.
- To provide confidential, professional and responsive community-based services which are effectively monitored and evaluated.

## Chairpersons Foreword

Another year has passed, and the families, staff and volunteers of the SA&SG have continued to show their extraordinary passion in raising suicide awareness and striving to help those most desperately in need.

The Centre continues to deliver many services which are invaluable to our community. Service's such as Family Support, Counseling, Complimentary Therapies, One to One sessions and support group meetings. They continue to raise awareness through the publication and distribution of support booklets which we have found on many occasions are an invaluable resource to those in suicidal distress and the families struggling to find answers to cope with the grief of losing a loved one to suicide. The group continues to raise awareness in the local media, getting involved in public events and lobbying government at a local level to ensure the voice of families and community is being heard.

Staff continue to deliver the ASIST workshop which is a world-renowned prevention educational tool enabling people within our community to provide Suicide First Aid Intervention when someone maybe in suicidal distress. The safe TALK training also provides the skills to become Suicide Alert and therefore help keep our communities safer from suicide. This is an extraordinary complex and vast amount of work which is being delivered by a dedicated team of people, sometimes under difficult circumstances, and they should be commended for all their efforts in achieving what they have achieved in the past year.

I would also like to thank all those who have supported the group in 2022/23 in the various fundraising and awareness events that have been held. I would like to particularly thank Lamh Dearg GAA Club and the Hannah town Community for choosing our organization to partner with Pieta House for the "Walk of Darkness into Light" which has raised a considerable amount of money and has also promoted an amazing amount of awareness for anyone affected by suicide. Your support has undoubtedly helped in delivering this much needed community service. This is still ongoing for the year of 2024 which we will always be grateful for.

We were able to celebrate our Mass of Hope and Christmas tree memorial this year and continues to be important events for families in allowing them to come together to share in their loss of their loved ones. Also, to raise awareness within our local community, that suicide is everyone's business and that we need to continue to raise awareness to ensure prevention and intervention are at the forefront of both the community and statutory sectors.

Many families have continuously raised funds and awareness by organizing annual events such as Cycles, Marathons, Football matches, Golfing, Boxing, Dancing and many more innovative ideas. Although these events are to raise funds the amount of awareness that is raised is phenomenal. This is greatly appreciated in enabling SASG to continue to maintain and sustain the day to day running of the Centre. We also continue to receive support from several local shops and bars, who display our collection boxes in their businesses.

A lot of this work would not be possible without the dedication and passion from our team of volunteers, who is the foundation of this organization. This is made up of families bereaved, families affected by

suicide, committee members, therapist and the local community, who give up their time freely and willingly.

All in all, it has been a very constructive year which I know will be built upon in 2022/23. The group has continued to help those most vulnerable either directly or indirectly through the services and support it provides ranging from a more hybrid approach of face to face, telephone, zoom which enable the person receiving the support is meeting their needs.

We must be under no illusion that the year ahead will be a difficult one with a looming climate of economic difficulty; we may need to support the community even more than ever. Even when we are faced with our own financial challenges, we must keep to the fore our aim of supporting families through their journey of suicidal grief, reaching out to those at risk and creating awareness of suicide within our community and beyond.

**Thanks for your support.**

Grainne Woods  
SA&SG Chairperson

A Drop in the Ocean

“We ourselves feel that what we are doing is just a drop in the ocean. But if that drop was not in the ocean, I think the ocean would be less because of that missing drop.”

Mother Teresa

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## Centre Managers Report

2022/23

### “Reaching out is a strength.”

I am privileged to be presenting our Annual Report. Although a lot of what is being presented has stayed the same, we still are able to provide a blended approach for our service users to avail of telephone, zoom or face to face sessions. Even though the foundation of this organization was working with families bereaved by suicide and individuals presenting in suicidal distress or crisis. In previous years we have also seen the need for supporting families living with a loved one contemplating suicide. However last year we were also able to go out into the local community and educate people on the importance of early Intervention to prevent Postvention. Therefore, the organization has evolved by increasing capacity in order to deliver this vital service. These changes demonstrate how our organization is determined to work at every level to ensure our community is safer from suicide.

I am delighted we have achieved all our targets outlined by Public Health agency (PHA) to date. By achieving these targets, this proves that the structures and systems in place within our organization, has been successful in meeting the needs of our community. This could not have happened without the determination, compassion and dedication of our team who worked tirelessly throughout the year. It is worth recognizing that this was a challenge for all staff and volunteers working with limited resources and the ever-increasing need for our services.

Also with additional funders supporting our work such as Belfast City Council, Community Foundation N.I, Wesley-Ann, Big lottery we were able to provide additional support for families and individuals and offer them a wrap around service which enhanced their emotional health and wellbeing.

It is with much appreciation that I would like to commend our management committee, staff, volunteers and members for their loyalty and support throughout the year. I would like to take this opportunity to thank you all for the dedication, commitment, time and energy that you have given effortlessly to Suicide Awareness and Support Group this past year. Without your help there are many events, lobbying and campaigning which would not have been possible without your involvement. I hope this will continue.

From Suicide Awareness and Support Group’s conception in May 2000, it is evident of how much we have evolved from a peer support group, who have experienced many trials and tribulations along their journey to a recognized Community organization in the heart of West Belfast, specifically working under the three conceptual frameworks of suicide prevention, intervention and postvention. We continue to provide a holistic service to those affected by suicide. We have an open-door policy which does not discriminate against disability, religion, gender, age, sexuality, color or ethnic minorities.

I have encouraged the staff and volunteers to access additional training to enhance their skills and empower them with knowledge to enhance the services we provide within the organization

The staff has evolved significantly this year. This includes the Centre Manager, Family Support Worker, a Triage Team, Counselors and Complimentary Therapists. It is paramount for all volunteers and staff to

be provided with regular line management, and staff to receive external supervision on a continual basis, as this is important whilst working under the three conceptual frameworks. This also ensures working within the guidelines of good practice. Whilst working within this field it is necessary to be aware of the importance of self-care, boundaries and limitations, to help us to continue to work in a professional and ethical manner.

In conclusion I would again like to thank the staff, volunteers, management committee, group members and especially the community who have worked in a diligent, compassionate and dedicated manner, to support my role as a Centre Manager of Suicide Awareness & Support Group. I am hopeful that the remainder of this report will highlight for you the tremendous work carried out by all those involved in helping to keep our community safer from suicide.

## **Family Support / Triage Department**

This family support department has evolved since its conception in 2013 to become more significant in the work we do supporting families and individuals affected by suicide. The changes to the organization have been working effectively, and below the following statistics demonstrate not only the need for our service, but also the range of services needed to support people.

- 86 Families who were bereaved who received one to one support.
- 138 Clients who engaged with Triage support.
- 455 Complimentary therapies Sessions delivered. Pamper packs delivered due to covid  
This has increased by 375 sessions being delivered since previous year.
- 881 Counseling sessions delivered.
- This has increased by 816 sessions being delivered since previous year.
- Suicide Awareness & Support Group have delivered the Applied Suicide Intervention Skills Training (ASIST) Program 3 for 60 people
- Safe TALK training 13 sessions 150 people availed of this

Family foundation Group is attended every Monday and Tuesday night with arts and crafts, Education, self care activities

## POSTVENTION

Suicide is very complex with various causes and no straightforward explanations but is a personal tragedy for those touched by a suicidal death. When the death is from suicide the grieving process is complicated by the very nature of the death. While trying to cope with their sudden loss, the bereaved can be overwhelmed by their feelings of sadness and the questions of “WHY” begin. Bereaved families feel the emotions that death always brings; adding to their suffering is the shock of a sudden, unexpected death that families are not prepared for.

The news of the death of a loved one to suicide comes abruptly without warning, suddenly they are gone, and you are faced with the news of a death like no other. It is an utterly devastating and traumatic experience, and it is coupled with mixed emotions and feeling such as shock, numbness, denial, anger, intense pain, guilt, shame, confusion, disbelief, betrayal, relief, abandonment. The grieving process has begun from the moment from the news of the death has been announced.

“I went to Suicide Awareness & Support Group a few months after I lost my grandson. I never spoke for weeks, I just sat and listened. When I was ready to talk I felt that I was heard and the other families showed me compassion and love and for that I will be forever grateful. I still get my bad days but I know when it is his Anniversary or Birthday I can just make a call and support will be put into place for me.

Suicide is a death like no other, and those who are left behind to struggle with it must confront a pain like no other. They are left with the shock and the unending “What if’s “. They are left with anger and guilt, and now and again a terrible sense of relief for some people. They are left with a host of questions from others, asked and unasked, about why they are left to the silence of others, who are horrified, embarrassed, or unable to offer words of condolence or even an embrace, or a kind comment. They are left with the assumption by others or themselves that more could have been done and the judgment commences, and the stigma imposed on those bereaved.

## INTERVENTION

“Success is failure turned inside out, the silver tint of the clouds of doubt, and you never can tell how close you are, it may be near when it seems so far. So, stick to the fight when your hardest hit, it is when things seem worst, that you must not quit.” ANON

Bereaved family members of the Suicide Awareness and Support Group in 2000 hoped that they could raise the issues associated with suicide, despite their own personal grief, they did successfully. It was the dedication of families bereaved who continually paved the way for community discussions, as they campaigned for improved services especially at intervention level for those contemplating suicide.

### **Individual Experience**

“I phoned suicide awareness and support group looking for help for my sister who was contemplating on ending her life, I just felt so lost and didn’t know where to turn. We got an appointment for that day and the service we received was amazing. Not only did they do a safety plan with my sister they included me and also offered me support in how to help her. This service saved my sisters life and also give us a toolkit on how to manage and sustain our own mental health.

Intervention has become an important component of our work. We increasingly intervene and provide immediate support for those at risk of suicide. We have gained substantial experience within the field of suicide intervention and we continue to learn and develop our structures by establishing working relationships with other key stakeholders working at suicide intervention level. However, we have learned and know our own limitations regarding intervention. At times however we are required to act very quickly and move the person onto the appropriate services for their specific needs.

When someone at risk of suicide presents themselves to the office or via telephone or through friends or family, they will be seen immediately or given the next available appointment according to their risk. The individual will receive an initial assessment, the person’s risk is deescalated, and a safe plan put into place. Sometimes further support is required, and this is offered in-house were we have the capacity to meet the need. At other times, the person will be sign posted to the specific services they require. The level of intervention activity is reflected in the amount of additional support, Counseling or Complimentary Therapies.

The fact that those at risk of suicide are reaching out for support is always an encouraging sign. By doing so they are availing of services which could effectively save their lives. We have learned about our organizations limitations and are very aware that there are some individuals who present in severe suicidal distress or with mental health issues that cannot be helped at community level. Therefore, their needs are best catered for by professionals within statutory services. They will be given an initial appointment but will be advised to contact their GP or other health professionals.

## PREVENTION

“We may run, walk, stumble, sit, drive, or fly but let us never lose sight of the reason for the journey or miss a chance to see a rainbow on the way.” G. Gaither

According to the World Health Organization suicide is an underestimated community health problem and this has been particularly evident in our community of West Belfast. Preventing suicide requires the collective efforts of all Statutory, Community and Voluntary agencies.

A key part of prevention practice at SA&SG is the need for suicide first aid training for all those who regularly encounter people at risk. Therefore, we have embraced the various training tools designed by Living Works to enhance our prevention ethos. For over thirty years, Living Works Education has been providing evidence-based suicide first aid training programs. The Applied Suicide Intervention Model are core contribution to suicide prevention.

At Suicide Awareness & Support Group we have delivered the program to Community groups, youth workers, health professionals, and front-line medical staff we have found that there is an increasing demand for ASIST workshops, and we continue to cater for this demand.

The ethos behind the Canadian educational model is to bring ASIST workshops to the local community and the standardized model is delivered by local trainers. ASIST is a two-day workshop designed for all caregivers from community, voluntary and statutory sectors. The workshop enhances the skills of caregivers to intervene when someone is in suicidal crisis until the immediate risk of suicide is reduced, or additional life assistance resources can be found. With suicide first aid training, participants learn skills to intervene when someone is in suicidal crisis.

The following are some quotes from some of the ASIST workshops.

“I feel more comfortable talking about suicide.”

“Every one should do this training.”

“Suicide prevention can help save lives”

- S. Stigma associated with suicide is a mark of shame
- T. Taboos create misconceptions and prevent us talking openly about suicide
- I. Imagine a community where stigma surrounding suicide is reduced and understood
- G. Get informed! The best way to counteract suicidal stigma is to get the facts.
- M. Move towards a more tolerant and informed view of suicide
- A. Awareness and information are necessary requirements for understanding Suicide

We continue to be Partners with Kids in Control (KIC) to promote awareness with the young people within our community about the importance of looking after their mental health. We have been successful in securing funding for this year to:

- Raise awareness of SA&SG and other services that support youth who are concerned or experiencing mental health issues.
- Reducing stigma of mental health issues among young people
- To strengthen resilience within young people

This has proven how important partnership working is to instill hope within our communities

**“It’s ok not to be ok and it is absolutely ok to ask for help”.**









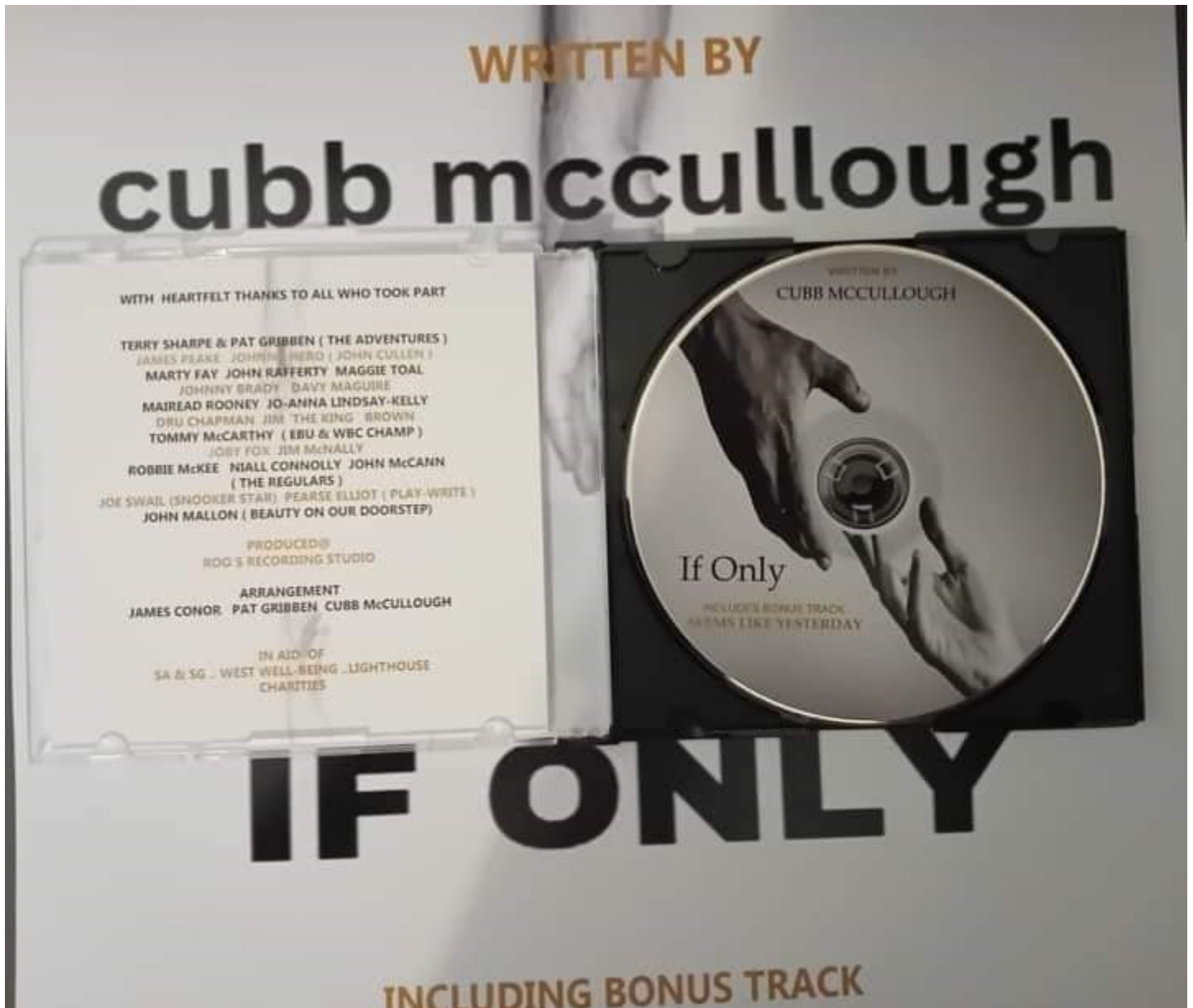


**Suicide Awareness &  
Support Group**

**INVITE YOU  
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OF HO**

**SUNDAY  
12TH NOVEMBER 2023  
3PM**

**CLONARD**









## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

The Management Committee would like to take this opportunity to thank our funders; Public Health Agency (PHA), Belfast City Council (B.C.C) Big Lottery Community Foundation N.I Wesleyann

We would like to acknowledge the many people who have volunteered, fundraised and donated money so that SA&SG can continue to provide support to families affected by suicide within our community and enable us to continue to raise awareness and help in postvention, intervention and prevention, for future generations. We would like to thank all of them for their continued support and generosity. Whilst there are too many to name individually, we hope that this acknowledgement goes some way to showing our appreciation for their committed support.

### **Management Committee:**

Grainne Woods (Chairperson)

Tommy Holland (Vice Chair

Deborah Kelly (Secretary

Esther Meighan (Treasurer)

David Bell

Margaret Walsh

Tim Attwood

Conor Doran



# Are you or is someone you know feeling down or suicidal?



## Recognise the signs

### Feelings

- Agitated
- Hopeless
- Worthless
- Sad
- Withdrawn
- Feeling unloved

### Physical

- Lack of interest in appearance
- Disturbed sleep
- Change/loss of appetite

### Actions

- Withdrawn
- Misuse of alcohol or drugs
- Impulsive behaviour

## Listen

- It's important to listen, it shows you care. A problem shared is a problem halved.
- Don't promise to keep secrets. If you have and you're concerned, it's OK to ask someone for help and is very important for you to have support

"I just can't think straight anymore"

"I can't do anything right"

"All my problems will end soon"

"I just can't take it anymore"

## Talk - Talking is key!

- Engage in open and direct talk
- Don't be afraid to use the word suicide

## Get help - Support is available locally

Lifeline - Available 24/7 - 0808 808 8000

Samaritans - 116 123

Suicide Awareness and Support Group - 02890 239967

Barnardos - 02890 672366

Childline - 0800 1111

Reaching out is a strength, not a weakness



Belfast City Council



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