

## 10.0 Suicide prevention training

People who work with individuals at risk of suicide must have appropriate training to be able to respond effectively in a crisis to ensure the best possible outcome for the suicidal person.<sup>83</sup>

Suicide prevention training for professionals and community members is a fundamental aspect of suicide prevention efforts. Gatekeeper training is a widely used type of suicide prevention training and teaches those who may come into contact with individuals at risk of suicide to be able to identify the warning signs, assess the level of risk, manage the circumstances appropriately and refer on for treatment.<sup>55</sup> Gatekeeper training is effective at increasing suicide related knowledge and skills, including how to undertake appropriate referrals.<sup>92, 93</sup> It has proven effective in reducing suicide and suicide related

behaviours within certain settings including medical clinics, crisis call centres and in the US Air Force.<sup>55, 67</sup> It is important to note that these settings tend to be structured and are very different to the environment of service provision for young homeless people, which is often described as fragmented.<sup>77</sup> Challenges for gatekeeper training are that it is dependent on access to support services which are not always available and that people identified as at risk of suicide may choose not to take up referral suggestions.<sup>55</sup>

### Box 6: A word on self-harm

#### 🌐 Preparing:

Participants are provided an overview of the course and learning expectations.

#### 🌐 Connecting:

Participants discuss attitudes related to suicide and the impact they may have on responding to suicide.

#### 🌐 Understanding:

Gain the knowledge and skills required to help a person at risk of suicide through the identifying risk factors and creating a plan to assist.

#### 🌐 Assisting:

Participants work through a model for effective suicide prevention. Role playing and/or simulation is undertaken to support the learning process.

#### 🌐 Networking:

Information on resources within the community are provided and instructions on how to connect to these resources.

Source: Isaac et al<sup>53</sup>

Applied Suicide Intervention Skills (ASIST) training is the most widely used gatekeeper training.<sup>94</sup> ASIST training is different from many other gatekeeper training programs in that it advocates for a framework that focuses upon connecting with the young person, understanding their circumstance and assisting them to a safer sense of being. ASIST emphasises the importance of empathetic listening and the development of a collaborative safety plan. The purpose of the intervention is to find ways to keep the person safe and to reconnect the person with a form of support that is suitable to them. This may be informal supports such as a friend or family member or formal supports such as a mental health service provider.

The ASIST Suicide Intervention Model has three core aspects of providing care to a person at risk of suicide.<sup>67</sup> These are;

1. **Connect:** The gatekeeper responds to the person's 'invitations'. The term 'invitations' is interchangeable with the term 'warning signs', which are signs that the person may be considering suicide. The gatekeeper will respond to the warning signs and ask about suicide. For more information on warning signs refer to Box 3 in Section 6.0.
2. **Understand:** The gatekeeper will employ listening skills to explore the person's reasons for dying and reasons for living.
3. **Assisting:** At this point a 'safeplan' will be established. This stage will assist the person with connecting to available supports. Follow-up is also an important aspect to ensure that both the gatekeeper and person at risk of suicide have fulfilled their commitments to the 'safeplan'.

ASIST training has been shown to improve suicide related attitudes and knowledge.<sup>67, 94</sup> One promising study on a crisis hotline had compared ASIST trained counsellors with non-ASIST trained counsellors and concluded that people who rang the crisis line and spoke with an ASIST trained counsellor seemed less suicidal and depressive and demonstrated greater feelings of hope.<sup>67</sup> Furthermore, the ASIST trained counsellors had longer call times and increased disclosure from callers indicating an increased connection between caller and counsellor. Exploring reasons for living was linked with more positive caller outcomes and this approach interconnects with CBT in that it encourages people to think of reasons to live as a method of overcoming stressful states of being.<sup>95</sup> Although the findings of this study are encouraging, results may not be applicable across different settings.

The ASIST approach aligns with the understanding that many people who have suicidal urges, including young homeless people, often choose not to access mental health services.<sup>31, 96</sup> Young homeless people are often very independent as they have had negative experiences with relying on people in the past.<sup>97</sup> A result of this independence may be that they try to manage suicidal thoughts or behaviours themselves. This highlights the pivotal role that Youth Workers have in identifying young people at risk of suicide and referring them to appropriate and timely support.

There are a number of suicide prevention training opportunities available in Western Australia. Each of these programs vary depending on approach, duration, delivery style, cultural approach and the experience of the trainer.<sup>55</sup> For a list of suicide prevention training currently available in Western Australia please see [www.yacwa.org.au/youthworkertoolkit/suicide-prevention](http://www.yacwa.org.au/youthworkertoolkit/suicide-prevention).

### **Box 7:** **Skills-based Training on Risk Management (STORM)**

STORM is a suicide prevention training package that focuses on building risk assessment and risk management skills for those directly working with those at risk of suicide.<sup>98</sup> It is similar to ASIST in that it is skills based, utilises role play and has been shown to be effective in increasing suicide related skills and knowledge.<sup>99</sup> While ASIST training is widely disseminated in Australia and has a greater evidence base, STORM training may also be beneficial to Youth Service Providers as it offers a specific module which respond specifically to suicide in children and young adults.

For an overview of ASIST and STORM read *The use and impact of Applied Suicide Intervention Skills Training (ASIST) in Scotland: An Evaluation* available at [www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2008/05/19160110/00](http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2008/05/19160110/00)

## **11.0 Meeting the service needs of young homeless people**

*Young people need to know that there is at least one player in the game that they can rely on to uphold their interests.<sup>83</sup>*

Creating lasting positive relationships between Youth Service Providers and young homeless people at risk of suicide is a major factor in suicide prevention efforts. Young people who are homeless are a particularly difficult group to engage with. This is due to a myriad of reasons including unpredictable living arrangements and the absence of trust in both people and services.<sup>77, 100</sup> To be able to successfully engage this group it is important that services employ approaches that encourage and support positive and lasting relationships.

Table 3.0 outlines key principles of practice to consider when working with young homeless people. These principles were identified in a review by Barker et al<sup>77</sup>. It is important to note that the evidence base for these factors is often from studies on young people, not specifically homeless young people.