

Kieran – WSPD Walk, Melbourne, 8 September 2013

It's OK to talk about suicide

My name is Kieran. I'm dad, a husband, a father. And a person affected by the suicide of a loved one: our son Sean.

Sean was fun loving person; always one to help out, one to share family occasions, a young man who had so much ahead of him. But unfortunately it just didn't work out the way I imagined it would. Sean took his own life at the age of 26. Never did I ever think that I would be in this position. Never did I realize the impact suicide would have on me. For months my wife Geraldine and our daughter Maria and her husband were in shock unable to cope with life and everything became meaningless. Our zest for life evaporated. We cried our eyes out, shed plenty of tears, went to the graveside and just wondered what had happened in our lives.

It took time and effort and help from our family and friends and groups like Support After Suicide to help lift ourselves up off the floor. We were open to different ideas and read about suicide, looked it up on the internet, we went to counseling, met others impacted by suicide, took part in a writing group. All these things helped.

Initially it was very difficult to talk about what had happened. I learnt how to manage situations and conversations about death and grief and suicide. Those awkward conversations about birthdays, how many kids do you have, oh, what happened. But in reality the more I talked about it the more accepting of Sean's suicide I became. I was proud of him, I still had a relationship with him and I still talked to him all in my own head space.

Talking to Sean and talking about Sean helped me and my family come to terms with what had occurred. Talking about suicide became easier; talking helped me remove the shackles of the stigma associated with suicide. Talking about suicide helps in many different ways.

By talking about suicide and talking about our loved one that we have lost to suicide allows us to focus on that loved one and reflect on the happy occasions and those not so happy moments. That's all part of life. We can share those memories and be proud of the ones we grieve for. Talking about suicide helps ease that pain. But talking does more than just ease our pain, it also helps others in similar positions. It delivers an important message, talking about suicide delivers a message to our friends, our colleagues at work, to the public, to the community.

Suicide is not a taboo subject.

Talking about suicide delivers a message that suicide has a huge impact not just on the family but it impacts on our friends, our work, our colleagues, our health, our

careers, our livelihood. This has a ripple effect on everyone around us in the community.

Today we have come here to walk and talk and share our stories. By talking and sharing our experiences both good and not so good we realize we are not alone. Today is also about those of us who are here. It's caring for ourselves, knowing that we're not alone, taking heart from each other, strengthening each other, caring for each other.

Today is about honoring our loved ones – their lives are important, they meant something and we loved them and love them still. They will never be forgotten, their lives weren't wasted – they were loving human beings.

And today is also about the wider community – we're saying to the community that silence doesn't help. The silence and the stigma hurt us and there are ways to speak about suicide, which are safe. We don't need to stay silent about suicide.

This coming week there are events planned and suicide awareness day on Tuesday. This is an opportunity to join together and raise that awareness. Do so with pride thinking about the ones we have lost. Have no doubt the one we have lost to suicide would be proud when we talk on their behalf. I encourage everyone to:

- Talk about suicide
- Talk to our friends about this week's event or grief or how you have been impacted by suicide, raise that awareness
- Use social media
- Write to your local newspapers, write to your new member of parliament
- Contact community groups both in metropolitan Melbourne and in regional areas because suicide knows no boundaries and many in the farming community are struggling.
- Talk to a colleague at work. Not everyone may be ready to listen. But perhaps there someone out there who is looking to reach out in need of assistance will recognize that you have the experience and knowledge and compassion and are prepared to listen to their story. They may just need someone to talk to about suicide.

That person may just need 10 minutes of your time to talk and your conversation may be just all they need or it may help them understand your loss or it may point them in the direction they need.

I'm sure we have all been in the situation where we have been lost and can't find a location we are meant to be at for an appointment or a meeting or something important. We look around for someone to help with directions and often we can't

see the right person to ask. People might look too busy or focused on something else.

But when we make eye contact we know that person is going to help with directions and we talk and explain we are lost. And when we get advice or are pointed in the right direction we gain a sense of relief and the person to whom we have talked and helped feels better that they have helped someone in need. That's all it takes just to talk to someone.

So I encourage everyone here when we return to our work or school or community meeting and when our friends and colleagues ask how was your weekend. Tell them what you did, talk to them about this walk and the purpose, talk to them about your loved one and talk about suicide. Talk about your loss and the impact of suicide. And be proud of them. If we can do that we are raising awareness and ending the silence.

Thank you.