Connecting with People training for Child and Family Health Services (CaFHS) frontline staff

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The suicide prevention approach called Connecting with People is based on principles derived from research. Its development has been informed by extensive consultation and peer-review by international experts in self-harm and suicide prevention, people with lived experience, health professionals and the non-government sector. In 2017 Dr Alys Cole-King, originator of the Connecting with People approach was recipient of the Ringel Service Award from the International Association for Suicide Prevention. This award is for distinguished service in the field of suicidology, presented to individuals who have been involved in the development and implementation of best practice suicide prevention and are acknowledged as leaders in the field as confirmed by opinion leaders (in academic, practitioner, voluntary and/or community sectors) nationally and internationally.

Central to the Connecting with People approach is use of SAFETool as a framework to support a compassionate and structured assessment of someone at risk of suicide. SAFETool is not a risk prediction tool. Rather, all individuals assessed receive a clinically appropriate response based on a person-centred assessment. SAFETool guides a health professional through the process of identifying, capturing and evaluating relevant aspects of a person’s current experiences, past history, background factors, risk factors and details of their suicidal thoughts in order to design a person-centred intervention to mitigate the risk of suicide. The SAFETool assessment ensures that every individual receives assistance in the co-production of a safety plan to identify their own strengths, capacity, assets and personal resources. As a training program the Connecting with People approach is being used by SA Health and its partners to assist individuals vulnerable to, and/or experiencing suicide related distress. It is situated on the premise that suicide is preventable and can be mitigated when clinicians have the appropriate knowledge, attitudes, skills and confidence and access to tools for intervention.

Since March 2018 Child and Family Health Services has been rolling out Connecting with People training for all frontline staff. The training fits well with the CaFHS new model of care which is currently in implementation phase. CaFHS new model of care is person-centred and trauma informed, with a focus on working in partnership with the client in co-creating a care plan. This is supported through a compassionate therapeutic relationship that fosters the use of the clients own strengths, protective factors and resilience.
The feedback from the training has been overwhelmingly positive, and for those who are already comfortable with having difficult conversations, the fact that our organisation endorsed this training gives emphasis to focussing time on the conversation around wellbeing and family safety with our consumers.

Clinical, management and project staff have attended Suicide Response Parts 1 and 2, in either a half day or six-hour format. Sessions in the country were organised in multi-disciplinary/agency sessions where local networking was possible, and bookings were filled quickly. Other sessions were within CaFHS teams, again with staff attending one of the sessions on offer at Glenside Campus. CaFHS managers were given the opportunity to choose a date and location depending on their staff and workplace needs. Feedback was that the six-hour sessions gave time for discussion which was highly valued. Frontline administration staff attended the Suicide Awareness two-hour training. To date, 270 CaFHS staff have received the training in the Connecting with People program.

Below is some of the feedback from CaFHS staff who have kindly agreed to share publicly:

“...The approach presented throughout the training aligns beautifully with the approach of person and family centred care and also the approaches we are working through in the project. We need a greater focus on respecting and understanding the whole person as well as giving people the respect to be the expert of their own lives.”

- Nicole Branch, Project Team

“The Connecting with People training was invaluable, and gave me the confidence to create a plan whenever I’m concerned about a client. It emphasised the value of a safety plan no matter how fleeting or minor the suicidal ideation seems. The speakers re-enforced that suicidal thoughts and their nature exist somewhere along a continuum. Since training, I have used the ‘Beyond Now Safety Plan’ in conjunction with the ‘The Continuum of Suicidal Thoughts’ tool by Cole-King 2009 with every client who expresses any level of suicidality. I put a copy the safety plan in the patient’s file and ask the client to email a copy to their GP and/or mental health care provider in the community.”

- Dr. Jan Maddern, Senior Medical Officer Torrens House

“The information that I found most useful, was being provided with a guide of how to assess a suicidal person, as well as the tools for an assessment. Then the next step was how to create an immediate safety plan. That is really useful for the CaFHS staff who provide direct care, as well as in my role as a Regional Manager.”

- Lynne O’Callaghan Kurtzer, Advanced Nurse Unit Manager, Metro South.

“.....It was actually very confronting, but overall it was excellent training and I would highly recommend it. There wasn’t anything new in it for me and I already feel very comfortable having those conversations with people in
need of connection. The paperwork that they provided was excellent and will be very useful. I really appreciated the opportunity to attend some really useful training.”

- Michelle Shute, Clinical Nurse/Volunteer Coordinator and Family Home visiting Nurse, Metro south

“The knowledge I received has provided me with confidence to use a consistent language with clients and when completing referrals. The questions to ask, while not new, were an affirmation that seeking further information in a compassionate way will not offend or encourage someone who is considering ending their life. The tools while not practical to use with in a CaFHS setting are a framework to guide our thinking and exploring conversation. I felt that all staff are now more aware of the red flag warnings and subtle cues when meeting people for the first time. This will be extremely important in the new model of care when NPDI screening may not be conducted on the first visit.”

- Kathi Sumner, Nurse Consultant, Country North

“This training (was) extremely interesting …to look at the various perspectives each discipline has towards suicide and the reluctance for some to engage with this subject and ask the tricky questions, in case the person is suicidal. So in this respect the training was very worthwhile if only to deliver a tool which provides a safe framework to discuss with clients. Another interesting point was the different interpretations from the case studies and stepping through the case studies to utilise the SAFETool was beneficial and I felt more time could have been given to evaluate the findings of each group.”

- Helen Edmondson, Social Worker, Country North

“The session Suicide Awareness was informative, interactive and empowering. I felt valued and better informed during and after the training. We were advised to seek assistance if we were troubled by any of the content and an email was also sent the following day with resources and contact details if we needed to seek help for ourselves. I thoroughly enjoyed the training and would highly recommend this training as compulsory to anyone on the front-line and all clinicians.”

- Diana Lane, Administration.

The Shared Learning in Clinical Practice Philosophy

Shared Learning in Clinical Practice (SLICP) is a policy relevant and service delivery focussed collaboration to promote best practice in mental health and suicide prevention. The strategic purpose of the initiative is to demonstrate through research and practical example, how much consumers, carers, clinicians, policy makers and academic faculty can achieve working together. Deep discussion, deep connectivity and diffusion of the insights are central to its philosophy. With a nursing focus and multidisciplinary in composition, the aim of each publication, podcast, film, social media communication and symposium is to capture and spread new ideas and know-how in mental health practice and challenge traditional ways of thinking. Shared Learning in Clinical Practice updates are regularly posted on Twitter at @MHRResearchUniSA.

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Mental Health Podcasts Series

The Mental Health Podcasts series is a joint Communities of Practice initiative between people with lived experience, nurse leaders from SA Health and academic staff from the University of South Australia's Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Research Group. It is designed to share fresh thinking in contemporary mental health practice and will involve hearing the voices of consumers, carers, practitioners and policy makers revealing what they think, feel, say and do to achieve best practice.

Nine podcasts are currently available to stream or download on the Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Research Group website, and feature a variety of interviewees and topics including:

- Becoming a mental health nurse
- Care across hospital and home
- Peer work in community rehabilitation
- Carers’ perspectives
- Recovery, participation and care planning
- Peer specialist work in acute mental health care

To read more about the Mental Health Podcasts Series and listen to the episodes, visit the Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Research Group website: [www.unisa.edu.au/research/mentalhealth](http://www.unisa.edu.au/research/mentalhealth)