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## Voices of Insight

### Workshop for Young Adults

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### Acknowledgements

We acknowledge and value the expertise of those with a lived experience of suicide and extend our thanks to the participants of the Voices of In-Sight workshop for young adults for sharing their experience and insights with us.

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## Introduction

As the leading not-for-profit organisation for lived experience of suicide in Australia, Roses in the Ocean (RITO) is focused on building a safe, trained and supported Lived Experience “Workforce” with the expertise and skills needed to bring lived experience of suicide as a voice of change in all aspects of suicide prevention.

This innovation paper outlines the successful planning and delivery of the seminal Voices of In-Sight workshop run by Roses in the Ocean, solely for young adults, in collaboration with yourtown in 2019. Further, this paper offers an opportunity to share key learnings, to assist in increasing the knowledge bank in relation to youth engagement in suicide prevention lived experience advocacy and to make recommendations regarding future next steps.

## Background and Purpose

### Background

Suicide is a leading cause of death in young people, (Kinchin & Doran, 2018). It is widely acknowledged that the active participation of people with lived experience of suicide is critical to suicide prevention. Young adults, many of whom first experienced suicidality as children, have unique insights into factors that can contribute to increased risk of suicide. Children and young people are exposed to many risks including those arising from: family trauma, bullying, (including cyberbullying), (Robinson, Rodrigues, Fisher, Bailey, & Herrman, 2015) sexuality, educational and socio-economic disadvantage, and the pressure to succeed and make important life choices at a young age. Nevertheless, perceived vulnerability means that the voices of young adults remain largely missing from discussions about the policies, services and practices that affect them.

In an effort to address this gap in youth engagement in suicide prevention activities, yourtown, a provider of Kids Helpline and other child/youth and family services in Australia has collaborated with Roses in the Ocean, Australia’s lead organisation for lived experience of suicide, to pilot a fit-for-purpose tailored Voices In-Sight workshop aimed at exploring the lived experience of young adults with diverse literacy levels. The workshop aimed to provide young people (aged 18- 25) who, through a robust screening process were identified as both interested and ready to share their story publicly with the skills and confidence to do so in a meaningful and safe way. Participants of this pilot program included five past and present yourtown clients. It should be noted, that the opportunity to deliver such a program to a solely young adult cohort had not previously presented itself. As such, a pilot program was borne out of such a need.

### An integrated project management approach

It is important to note a large part of the success of this bespoke youth program can be attributed to the fact that the project, while a collaborative effort, was managed from start to finish by one person. The National Program Manager was assigned responsibility for managing all phases of the yourtown project from attending initial meetings with yourtown key staff, conducting and adapting the recruitment and screening process, assisting in the redesign of the program content and performing the role as co-facilitator for the workshop.

What follows below in this innovation paper outlines the three key phases of this project from pre-workshop planning, through to the delivery phase and finally a post-workshop follow-up summary, as an attachment to the paper.

## What we did

### Recruitment

#### Collaboration in action

Roses in the Ocean presented the project overview, including program content to counsellors at yourtown locations, eliciting suggestions from yourtown staff to assist in the redesign of the screening process and workshop content and to flag any foreseeable safety and well-being concerns. Consent forms were deemed an essential first step in tailoring the screening process and enabled responsible handover of important and confidential client information from yourtown to Roses in the Ocean.

Traditionally, the recruitment process for workshop programs is conducted by Roses in the Ocean. However, in this instance and due to the need for additional care and supports associated with delivering a first ever youth program, the recruitment process was managed by yourtown staff. Participants included those recommended by counsellors and utilising those young adults already engaged in yourtown activities.

### Screening

#### A robust screening process

The primary focus in establishing the screening process for this workshop was safety and readiness to participate while building a level of comfort and connection with the participants. The screening process was redesigned, with questions adapted according to age, literacy and physical location of participant when taking the screening call. This represented a shift away from the ordinarily used practice of online completion of Expression of Interest (EOI) to a combined EOI and screening call process. After a number of consultations with yourtown and keeping in mind their knowledge of the participants, Roses in the Ocean screeners followed a three-step screening process which is outlined below.

#### 1) *Completing the consent form – yourtown*

This operated as an introduction to Roses in the Ocean and facilitated the initial discussion regarding lived experience.

#### 2) *Combined screening call & expression of interest – Roses in the Ocean*

This operated as an introduction to Roses in the Ocean and facilitated the initial discussion regarding lived experience.

- Being mindful of the participant's location and support when taking the screening call, a text was sent to participants introducing the screener and confirming a suitable time for the call that was both convenient and safe for each participant.
- The calls ranged anywhere from 20 – 45 minutes.
- The offer of helpline information was made at beginning and end of each call and questions were worded in such a manner that would limit emotional distress/pain.
- Participants were advised during the call they were able to withdraw at any stage of the process.

#### 3) *Readiness to be Involved – Roses in the Ocean*

- Each step of the screening incorporated similar questions being asked in more detail at each phase to ease the participant into their lived experience story telling.

- There were varying degrees of experience when talking about their lived experience. While some participants had spoken in a public forum on a number of occasions others had little practice talking about their lived experience.
- After the screening calls had been made, final checks with yourtown staff and counsellors concluded the screening process.

## Communication

### The importance of regular ongoing communication

It was felt regular communication with participants would promote greater rapport building and help to establish connections. It should be noted, that post-workshop discussions revealed participants were ambivalent about their preferred method of communication but advised the text reminders were helpful.

## Support

### Providing emotional support

Yourtown provided a Kids Helpline counsellor at the workshop each day with follow-up calls from counsellors made each night and at a mutually agreed upon time. Roses in the Ocean recommended counsellors sit in the workshop to be on hand and be cognisant of the discussion and content that may precede a need for their services. Their inclusion did not restrict the free flow of discussion amongst participants. Counsellors were utilised on both days by participants.

### Other supports

The workshop was deliberately conducted during the week to ensure the participants were supported in the day following the workshop. Transport to and from the workshop was provided for one participant and a letter of absence from work to allow attendance was utilised for another participant.

## Facilitation

### Skilled facilitators

Facilitators were selected based on skills and experience with young people. Layne Stretton the Senior Facilitator is the principal workshop content writer for Roses in the Ocean. Kathy Poulton worked in school settings for a number of years. Both facilitators have a lived experience of suicide.

## Content & Process

### Redesigning workshop content

Workshop content was adapted to reflect age, literacy levels and to reduce the overall program length over the two-day workshop. Changes made were designed to ensure group energy and participation could be maximised and provide ample opportunity to keep the discussion simple and driven by the participants.

After consultation with educators and literacy experts, assessments were made during screening calls with regard to levels of assistance writing their story with two participants indicating they would like support with writing. All participants indicated their preferred method of storytelling in the screening calls was writing. Laptops were provided for those who struggled with the physical aspect of writing, this was taken up by one participant, scribing was offered and utilised by two participants. A modification to an interview style of



storytelling was taken up by one participant and worked well. This was repeated at an event at yourtown a couple of weeks after the workshop.

## Attrition

### Attrition rates

Eleven participants were initially proposed by yourtown including five males and six females. Ultimately, seven of the eleven participants progressed through to the next stage as a result of a comprehensive screening process. Of the original 11, two did not meet the criteria for self-care and readiness and two were not screened as they withdrew due to work and family commitments in the week prior to the start of the workshop.

## Mentoring

### Mentoring services

As per the Roses in the Ocean Mentoring Call Back service, mentoring has been offered to all participants with one participant requesting mentoring for an event at yourtown in the fortnight following the workshop.

## Challenges and opportunities

### Flexible administration processes

Screening was primarily done by the National Programs Manager, Kathy Poulton, who was the project manager and therefore already had well established relationships with yourtown. Screening questions were deliberately kept short and simple to allow for short answers intentionally designed to reduce any unintended triggering emotional impacts.

Whilst, this process ensured excellent outcomes for the program and program participants, it must be noted it proved time consuming. Of note, participants were reluctant to complete the regular paperwork and forms etc. The readiness form was ultimately the only form completed by participants themselves prior from the workshops (two participants required assistance completing this form also). All other information was obtained either over the phone or at the workshop. Participants were also ambivalent about their preferred method of communication but advised that the text reminders were helpful. Whilst, this all worked well, it does emphasise the increased level of labour (hours of work needed) to administer such a program, which of course has cost implications for future bespoke programs.

### Modifying the program content design and delivery

The meet and greet which is normally held the evening before the start of a workshop was rescheduled as a breakfast to limit travel for the participants and to give them a chance to get to know each other before the workshop commenced on the day. It was thought a nightly event could possibly be poorly attended due to a range of factors, including issues relating to travel, the uncertainty of meeting new people in a social setting and perhaps even financial constraints. To enable a warm handover the breakfast was also attended by key project staff from both organisations.

Yourtown suggested the program be scheduled for mid-week so that participants could attend their regular programs at yourtown e.g. TTW. However, this was when planning for participants aged under 18 years of age. Ultimately, this cohort were all over 18 years and a couple had jobs which adversely impacted their ability to work the next day.

The content was modified to adjust for various learning levels, youth preferred learning styles and the reduced workshop length. However, post workshop, participants advised they found the story structure difficult and felt time pressured. During the workshop only two laptops were available for use. Participants advised they found this to be a laborious process and, in some instances, reported it was triggering activity, as it reminded them of school. This issue alone can easily be addressed via the provision of more laptops to speed up the exercise completion process.

## Key learnings

Delivering the seminal youth program represented a unique, albeit challenging opportunity to work closely with a new cohort of lived experience people, namely young people. Whilst, the entire project was some 12 months in the making and undoubtedly labour intensive, it has reaped many rewards. Importantly, of these benefits none is more important than building the skills and confidence of young people so that if and when they choose to do so, they can assume their rightful place in advocating for suicide prevention. Perhaps of even higher value in terms of importance positive outcomes is of course the intentional outcome of helping this group of young people to continue to explore their own lived experience stories which intrinsic, and arguably, has restorative growth and healing value.

## Recommendations

Whilst, the paper seeks to convey some of the important project management and process steps in redesigning and innovating a youth program, it is arguably as important that this project is used as a catalyst for future innovation surrounding other bespoke programs and how to engage vulnerable and often marginalised populations. Similarly, the project and the high level of genuine collaboration required demonstrates that Roses in the Ocean should continue to pursue further opportunities to collaborate with organisations that provide complimentary or 'like-minded' service offerings. Finally, whilst this innovation paper briefly describes the planning and delivery of the youth program for yourtown, it is important that, at a minimum, some form of project evaluation be conducted.

## Conclusion

As a leading lived experience of suicide organisation in Australia, Roses in the Ocean, firmly believes youth, like all other demographic and population groups, should be encouraged and supported to participate in suicide prevention activities. The seminal Voices In-Sight bespoke program recently delivered demonstrated the organisation's commitment towards striving for this inclusion of all voices in suicide prevention in Australia.

## Reference List

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- Robinson, J., Rodrigues, M., Fisher, S., Bailey, E., & Herrman, H. (2015). Social media and suicide prevention: findings from a stakeholder survey. *Shanghai Archives of Psychiatry*, 27(1), 27–35. <https://doi.org/10.11919/j.issn.1002-0829.214133>