



Support to no longer suffer in silence

After Peter-Josef Miesen's partner Des took his own life in 2015, Peter "suffered in silence" for months.

"I saw one or two doctors but they just wanted to give me anti-depressants. I took them but nothing made me feel better. In a way they made me feel worse – it's not a chemical imbalance in my brain, it's grief," says Peter.

Peter and Des had been together for 19 years and Des' loved ones, including Peter, were unaware he was suffering before his death.

"He never sought any help for mental health, he never said he was depressed. People often say to me 'he must have been sick' and I can honestly say I don't know."

About three months after Des died, Peter found himself "at the end of my tether" and struggling to manage his deteriorating mental health.

"I really thought I was going to self-harm and do something stupid to myself. I just couldn't cope with the grief, the stress and everything associated to it," he says.

Through a family friend, Peter found out about Jesuit Social Services' Support After Suicide program.

Since 2004, the program has provided support including counselling, group support and online resources for people bereaved by the loss of a loved one, as well as delivering training to health, welfare and education professionals.

In 2018-19, Support After Suicide directly assisted 913 children, young people and adults bereaved by suicide.

"I remember ringing the program and just crying – I couldn't get anything else out. They told me to come in later that day and it was the first time I saw someone. All the pressure up until that point was unbearable."

According to the latest data by the Australian Bureau of Statistics, more than 3,000 Australians took their own lives in 2018.

Peter attended Support After Suicide's bereaved partners group, which convenes monthly, for about 18 months.

Meeting other people who had experienced a similar tragedy was an important step in Peter navigating the complex grief and trauma associated with suicide.

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Peter lost his partner Des to suicide

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Our work is never complete

As another busy year draws to a close, it is an opportune time to stop and reflect on some of the things we are grateful for and some of the challenges that still lie ahead.

In 2019, our work has expanded across Victoria, New South Wales and the Northern Territory. We have established new initiatives and continued to advocate for evidence-based and humane approaches to supporting people on the margins of society.

Jesuit Social Services has been working for decades to prevent suicide. We continue this work through our Artful Dodgers Studios, Connexions program and other work where mental illness often collides with other forms of disadvantage and disconnection.

We also advocate to government to develop and fund a range of programs designed to drive down rates of suicide. We made a submission earlier this year to the Royal Commission into Victoria's mental health system and hold hope that its findings and recommendations will improve mental health outcomes for thousands. One vital, yet often overlooked, part of the puzzle is support to those left behind after the suicide of a loved one.

In this newsletter, you will read the heartbreaking story of Peter, who lost his partner of 19 years, Des, to suicide four years ago. Peter attended our Support After Suicide program, which offers counselling, outreach and support services, to help him navigate the grief and trauma associated with suicide.

You will also read how participants of our programs are expressing their lived experience through creative mediums such as a play and a podcast series, and how our supporters – people like you – are helping us to make a difference to the lives of people like Peter every day.

On behalf of everyone at Jesuit Social Services, I wish you and your loved ones a safe and happy Christmas and express my gratitude to you for continuing to stand in solidarity with us and the people with whom we work.

Julie Edwards

Chief Executive Officer

Support to no longer suffer in silence

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"I didn't realise how many people took their own lives, I didn't realise how many people are affected and the fact it cuts across every socio-economic group, age, race and sexuality. Suicide doesn't discriminate in any way, shape or form.

"I really needed the reassurance that I wasn't the only person going through this because I really felt like it was so intense."

Support After Suicide remains significantly underfunded. The program receives no state Government funding and there is a lack of certainty regarding ongoing funding provided by the Federal Government.

Please turn to the back page to find out how you can support Support After Suicide this Christmas.

Support After Suicide participants share stories for new production

Participants of Jesuit Social Services' Support After Suicide program shared their experiences of bereavement to inform the creative process of contemporary new drama *2:20AM*.

The powerful theatrical production received funding from Creative Victoria earlier this year and recently completed an eight date tour of Victorian locations Dandenong, Traralgon, Swanpool, Mildura, Ringwood, Thomastown, Frankston and Kyneton.

The play revolves around four people bereaved by suicide, who meet at a creative writing class. Playwright Rebecca Lister interviewed a number of Support After Suicide participants during the creative process.

"Suicide is not an easy subject to talk or write about. People choose to take their own lives for a myriad of reasons and it can be painful, complex and devastating for their loved ones," says Rebecca.

"This new work shines a compassionate yet sobering light on the torment, bewilderment and ultimately the inspiring resilience of those left behind after suicide."

Feedback from audience members highlighted that the production tackled the subject of suicide with truth and humour.

For more information, visit www.anvilproductions.com.au

Artful Dodgers Studios' new podcast captures stories of young people

Jesuit Social Services' Artful Dodgers Studios recently released the podcast series *Braided*. The nine-episode series matches young people who experience barriers to community participation with Victoria's leading audio storytellers to conceive, record, produce and ultimately bring to life the stories they want to tell.

The series was made possible by Seed Innovation funding from the Lord Mayor's Charitable Foundation.

This excerpt from episode six, *The Bipolar Experience*, features participant Kaeleb Ngatai talking about his experience of Bipolar Disorder.

"I was diagnosed with Bipolar Disorder in April 2018. It started after a short trip to Sydney. Looking back, I realise that I had increasingly more energy and needed less sleep each night. I also noticed my actions were becoming quite wild and erratic.

"I knew something was different when I started seeing colours more vibrantly. All I knew at this point is that I needed to keep moving and always doing something. I felt incredible – I had no idea what was going on. I thought it was a gift from God at the time.

"This feeling lasted a couple of weeks and then a full blown manic episode came. One day I was at my Aunty's place and I wasn't listening to anyone. This is when the psychosis hit me. I was terrified. My Aunty called my Nan in New Zealand and called a couple of doctors to see me at 1am. I was afraid. I needed to be in the light or the darkness would get me, so I had to turn on all the lights.

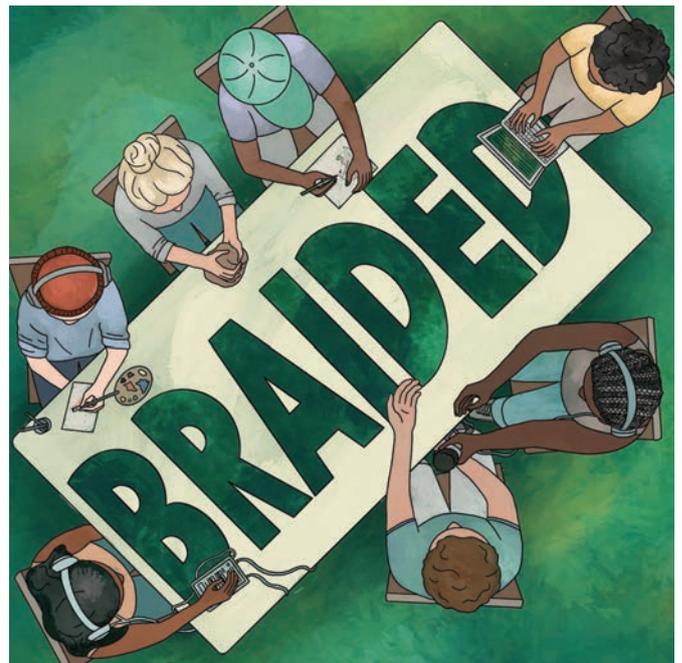
"The police ended up coming over and taking me to the hospital because my Aunty was scared. They put me into the mental ward. In hospital I kept running circles in the courtyard and when I got tired I had a drink and kept running.

"There was no convincing me I had Bipolar – it took me six months to a year to accept it. I still have manic episodes where I feel in a state of depression.

"You just have all this energy and you want to do everything, all at once. When you see something, you want to know it, and do it, and be amazing at it. Then something else comes along and you want to do that too. Then you sort of get stuck in a loop and it keeps going.

"Right now this is my level state, when I'm normal me. I don't feel hyper or depressed. I'm pretty content where I am in life. I get out of bed and I'm ready for the day. I want to reach my potential, I want to work every day on becoming a better version of myself."

To hear the series, visit www.braidedpodcast.com



Podcast provides suicide bereavement support

A new podcast, co-produced by our Support After Suicide program, Joy 94.9 and Switchboard Victoria, provides support, conversation and comfort to people affected by suicide.

Let's Talk about Suicide, a 13-episode podcast launched in October, has a particular emphasis on suicide bereavement in the LGBTIQ+ communities.

Research shows that young LGBTI people aged 16 to 27 are five times more likely to attempt suicide in their lifetime compared to the general population.

While the ultimate goal must be to significantly reduce the number of suicides in the community, postvention services that support those left behind after the suicide of a loved one are critically important to help navigate complex emotions and to reduce the risk of further suicide.

Four current and former participants of Support After Suicide share their experiences of being bereaved by suicide with the series, which is separated into topics such as 'understanding guilt,' 'preparing for special occasions' and 'supporting a person who has lost someone to suicide.'

Program participant Lara lost her best friend Ingrid to suicide in 2018.

"We were extremely close, [it was] one of the closest relationships in my life. The day Ingrid suicided, I found Ingrid... she spent three days in hospital before her life support was turned off. It was a really tricky time for everyone involved and I went into a state of deep shock and trauma," she says.

"Because she can never return to us, I know I'll have to deal with the loss for the rest of my life. I think I am aware that she's always gone and that it's always going to be sad and hard.

"The effect it has on your life, and how changed my life is, I found that really tricky. I know there is a lot of stigma around suicide, the more people that speak out and break that taboo is hugely important."

Support After Suicide Manager Louise Flynn, who has more than 25 years of experience as a psychologist, provides expert advice throughout the series.

To listen, visit www.joy.org.au/letstalk

For more information about Support After Suicide, visit: www.supportaftersuicide.org.au



Supporting people facing barriers to training and employment

The current state and federal focus on mental health offers a critical generational opportunity to drive systemic and cultural change. Last year, the Victorian Government initiated a Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System and the Australian Government's Productivity Commission is undertaking an inquiry into the *Social and Economic Benefits of Improving Mental Health*.

For an effective reform path to become a reality, we must take a broad view that encompasses a holistic understanding of the social determinants of, and effective responses to, mental ill-health.

A range of long-standing problems have been identified as contributing to poor outcomes in our mental health system. Similarly, there is widespread acknowledgement that substantial reform of our mental health system is required and that there is no quick solution.

Suicide, for example, is a particular issue that impacts many Australians. Figures from the Australian Bureau of Statistics Causes of Death, Australia 2018 are stark: 3,046 people died by suicide across Australia – eight deaths per day. Males continue to be three times more likely to die by suicide than females. Suicide accounts for 1.9% of all deaths in Australia.

The Productivity Commission's draft report notes that "There is no single measure that would prevent suicides but reducing known risks (for example, through follow-up of people after a suicide attempt) and becoming more systematic in prevention activity are ways forward."

Jesuit Social Services has delivered Support After Suicide throughout Melbourne and regional Victoria since 2004. In 2018/19, Support After Suicide directly assisted 1,100 children, young people and adults bereaved by suicide.

We know that the experience of bereavement after suicide is complex and prolonged and people who don't receive the help they need from specialists in the postvention field often have mental health issues in the long-term. It is critical to recognise the risk of suicide amongst those who are bereaved by suicide. The reality is that some of our participants present as suicidal. However, we know from our experience that postvention support delivered by experienced practitioners reduces this risk. Through Support After Suicide, we work closely with people to address psychological distress and trauma, promote general health and well-being, and

encourage social and community engagement. With the right support we can help make a difference – 88 per cent of our participants have reported an improved view of self and 84 per cent improved hopes for the future.

In our advocacy we call on governments to develop a comprehensive suite of initiatives to drive down rates of suicide and improve mental health support for all members of the community. Understanding this is a long-term goal, we also call on government to deliver secure, long-term funding for postvention, early intervention services for suicide bereavement, and increase access to suicide bereavement services for regional and rural areas. We also call for funding for a dedicated research stream to develop an evidence base on the impact of suicide and the effectiveness of postvention services in reducing risk.

We must take stock now, review what works, and be bold in creating a new blueprint that can help everyone reach their potential.



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Community Profile - Greg

Our Community Partners provide valuable support for our work through their monthly donations. Greg shares his motivation for supporting the work of Jesuit Social Services in this way.

Social justice has been bred into me from my days at St Joseph's College in Geelong. Care for others, respect and tolerance were values taught at school. My family was poor, and in my youth, this was not uncommon in Geelong. Gough Whitlam changed society so much, which taught me that opportunities are for all, or should be for all.

The Jesuits have always believed in the power of education, and my experience at Newman College reinforced this belief. Jesuit Social Services is a practical realisation of their social justice beliefs, empowered by the well-known and formidable Jesuits' smarts.

I helped out as a receptionist at the Brosnan Centre, and met heaps of people there. Ironically, Fr Brosnan was a mad Geelong fan, and knew my mother many years ago, so there was a link there. The plight of some of our youth is so disturbing, and I greatly respect those at the Centre who are helping in whatever way to improve young lives.

I am proud to be a community partner and to help in a very small way funding the work of Jesuit Social Services. I selfishly think it is excellent value for my money as well. The work requires funding, and more funding! To be a force in this service, money is required to support the advocates, the social workers and the many others involved in the causes.

For more information or to become a Community Partner, please call us on 03 9421 7600.

Sydney parishes provide invaluable assistance

This year, four Sydney Catholic parishes have partnered with Jesuit Social Services' Ignite Food Store, inviting us to share our story during the Mass and asking parishioners to donate food and financial assistance.

The parishes of Our Lady of the Way North Sydney, St Joan of Arc Haberfield, Sacred Heart Catholic Church Mosman and Holy Name of Mary Hunters Hill have collectively donated over \$72,195 in financial donations as well as provided thousands of food items to the Ignite Store.

We have been overwhelmed by the generosity of these communities, not only with food and money but particularly in regards to the genuine concern and interest so many expressed for the communities we work in. So many people offered ongoing help and support; all of which gave us a real sense that we are supported by communities of justice.

Mount Druitt is among the three per cent of most disadvantaged areas in New South Wales. The region has high unemployment rates and low levels of education attainment. The Ignite Food Store relies on the support of generous partners and donations. With this support, we are able to provide low cost, healthy, fresh food to low income families within the community so they can meet their day to day needs.

Dave Hammond, General Manager in Western Sydney says "This practical and financial support is absolutely critical to be able to maintain work in the area. We are grateful to partner with parishes who support us in our work. We look forward to continuing these special relationships into the future."



Jesuit Social Services General Manager - Western Sydney Dave Hammond with Haberfield Parish priest, Fr Phillip Zadro

National Justice Symposium

Jesuit Social Services hosted the fourth National Justice Symposium in Melbourne on 12 and 13 September.

The Symposium provided opportunities to discuss the emerging adult – 18 to 24 year old – cohort in the criminal justice system.

The recidivism rates of this age group, meaning people who return to prison within two years of exiting, are significantly higher than for other age groups. In Victoria, 52.7 per cent of prisoners under the age of 25 return within two years, which is 10 per cent higher than the rate for the general population.

Keynote speaker Vincent Schiraldi, Senior Research Scientist at New York's Columbia School of Social Work, presented on recent US reform initiatives to addressing the churn of emerging adults in the justice system.

Leigh Marsh from New Zealand's High Impact Innovation Programme gave an overview of how that initiative has improved operational efficiency to reduce the strain on the prison system and support people in the community.

A range of high calibre panellists also discussed topics including the vital role that civil society institutions can play in making a fair and just society, and approaches to reduce violence and other harmful behaviours prevalent among boys and men.

Resources including presentations can be found at www.jss.org.au/justice-symposium



Vincent Schiraldi was keynote speaker at our National Justice Symposium

35 years of generous and ongoing support

We are very grateful for the commitment and loyalty of the Peninsula Support Group over the past 35 years. In that time, the group have raised a generous \$90,000 in support of our work, particularly Brosnan Services.

Such commitment is integral to the work we do and vital for the young people we work with.

On 1 November Daniel Clements, General Manager, Justice and Crime Prevention, and his team hosted a wonderful luncheon for the group, which was supplied by volunteer Maureen Peebles.

Members of the Peninsula Support Group showed such enthusiasm and compassion for our work and, in addition to presenting a \$3,600 cheque to the organisation, also provided two boxes of Christmas presents to be distributed to program participants.

Shane Healy, Board member and Chair of Jesuit Social Services' Fundraising Committee, and Cath Neville, Executive Director, Advocacy and Strategic Communications, spoke to the group about the important role they play in supporting many of our young people and thanked them for their generous contribution over the years.

Guests were also entertained by a performance from Aaron, a participant of our Artful Dodgers Studios.

We pass on our gratitude and thank everybody at the Peninsula Support Group for their ongoing commitment to our work.



Peninsula Support Group members visiting our Brosnan site in Brunswick

SAVE THE DATE

Jesuit Social Services Annual Dinner – 14 March 2020

**We ask that you save the date for our Annual Fundraising Dinner!
The event will be held at the Members Dining Room, MCG.**

Our special guest speaker will be announced soon.

Stay tuned for more information on our website www.jss.org.au

**Thousands of families will be facing complex grief and great sadness
this Christmas with the loss of a loved one to suicide.**

**The future of Jesuit Social Services' Support After Suicide program
is uncertain. Please give generously to our Christmas appeal and
help us to support those left behind after suicide and provide hope
to the many vulnerable people we work with every day.**

Want to help Jesuit Social Services?

Together we can build a just society by advocating for social change and promoting the wellbeing of disadvantaged people, family and communities.

I would like to make a donation of:

\$75 **\$150**

\$500 **\$1000**

\$

Please send me information about leaving a gift in my Will.

Contact and payment details

Surname

First name

Address

Telephone

Email

Cheque enclosed OR VISA Mastercard

Card number

Expiry

Signature