

**Submission
No 9**

PREVENTION OF YOUTH SUICIDE IN NEW SOUTH WALES

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Position: Chief Executive Officer
Date Received: 28 August 2017



Committee on Children and Young People

Parliament of New South Wales

Macquarie Street, Sydney NSW 2000

Dear Committee Secretary,

I am writing to you as the CEO of Mind Blank and wish to provide input into the current Inquiry into Youth Suicide in NSW.

About Mind Blank

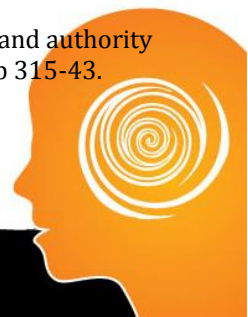
Mind Blank's aim is to reduce the risk of youth suicide through interactive performances in schools and communities. We are a not-for-profit organisation that generates awareness and innovative education of mental health topics in youth across Australia. Our business aims to partner with service providers to 1) enhance young people's knowledge around mental health issues and 2) make sure young people know where to seek support. Since 2011, we have reached over 24,500 young people at Mind Blank events Australia wide.

Our Methodology:

- Showcase story of lived experience with mental ill health.
- Alongside Service Providers we create theatre-based performances with audience interaction
- 1 hour (45 min of forum discussion and interaction)
- Featuring 4x professional youth actors
- Performance topics include; Depression, Anxiety or Custom script
- Audience size is up to 200

The process we utilise promotes self-agency by placing our audience of young people in control of the action and choices¹. The audience are actively engaged and consider the thoughts, feelings and motivations of the characters, in order to actively influence the characters' (and their own)

¹ Groat, M., Allen. G., (2011) Promoting mentalizing in experiential psychoeducational groups: From agency and authority to authorship. *Bull Menninger Clin.* [online] <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/22166129> Dec. 75(4) p 315-43. Accessed 13.08.2017





choices. Our experiential learning style delivers activities that allow students to rehearse social problem-solving skills such as help seeking behaviours and promotes improved outcomes².

Kerry Searle Registered Psychologist & Master of Science (Research) Candidate has conducted some initial research (2012- current) of our work through Illawarra Health and Medical Research Institute and School of Psychology, University of Wollongong.

“My qualitative research suggests that this approach has the ability to reduce levels of stigma surrounding mental health problems. There are many reports of young people being increasingly engaged in discussion around the mental health problems of themselves or their peers. Young people are reported to be more comfortable with the fact that they have mental health problems and feel more justified in seeking assistance. One teacher described a Mind Blank show at his school as a ‘life changing’ event for one of his troubled students.”

Evidence Based Creative Arts Practice

Through partnership we have been collecting evaluation data.

- 90% of young people enjoyed our performance
- >65% of students learned new skills
- >65% felt more confident to seek mental health support
- 100% of teachers satisfied with the program and would consider booking again

Based on 2017 NT survey results

“The actors were excellent in interacting with the students we have at our school. The show was the best I’ve seen in my 3 years at school... The topics covered were age appropriate and addressed the social skills we need in our area. Well done to everyone!! The students talked about the actors long after they had left. Their presence made a big impact on our students.” Tipperary Station School.

When asked if the end message of the program was clear, the Batchelor School commented: *“I asked some of my students what they got out of the performance and this is exactly what they*

² Wilson, C(2011) Predicting adolescents’ future intentions to seek help for mental health problems. *Youth Studies Australia[online]* UOW <https://works.bepress.com/cwilson/25/> Accessed: 13.08.2017





said- there's always someone to help- you just have to ask. You have to communicate if you want people to know how you feel and to help you."

The issue at hand

Every 3hrs in Australia someone takes their life by way of suicide (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2015³), and 15 more 12-17year olds make an attempt (Orygen, 2017⁴).

In the 2016-2017 annual year our team serviced nearly 40% of our work covering NSW's areas. We are finding we are called into low socio-economic areas in Western Sydney as well as rural country areas of NSW (for example: Bega, Leeton, Albury, Goulburn etc.).

Mind Blank is finding that we often receive urgent calls to do something to support young people in community areas after a tragedy has hit. This is a time when a town or community are active in wanting to make future plans to support their young people. Service Providers are wanting to bring resilience building activities and proactive solutions to encourage young people to reach out for help. We are able to respond to this cry by bringing fun, engaging and interactive methods of health promotion directly to schools. Ideally however, we would love to take an early intervention approach and integrate our services as a preventative matter. The major challenge our team faces is ongoing funding which is a priority for the Mind Blank board.

An example of a community that reached out to our team is Grafton. On Aug 9, 2016 Mind Blank received an enquiry from a local GP in Grafton as a cry out for help to support their local young people. *"I must have one new suicide attempt a week amongst my patients. I would love to engage the local schools about suicide prevention strategies."* It was only March 2017 when Bowden⁵ published ABC headlines such as: *"Desperate families in northern New South Wales are calling for help to end a spate of youth suicides around Grafton, with at least six teens taking their own lives in the past 12 months."*

Through several months of communication back and forward Mind Blank responded with positivity, promise and proactivity. Collaborations started to form with Our Health Clarence Steering Committee, Clarence Valley Youth Interagency, the Rural Adversity Mental Health Program and Clarence Youth Action Group. On Aug 8th 2017 our team went on tour to Grafton and the

³ Australian Bureau of Statistics (2015) Causes of Death, Australia Statistics.[online] <http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/Lookup/by%20Subject/3303.0-2015-Main%20Features-Intentional%20self-harm:%20key%20characteristics-8>. Accessed 19.07.2017

⁴Orygen, (2017) Raising the bar for youth suicide prevention. Orygen, The National Centre of Excellence in Youth Mental Health. [online] <https://www.orygen.org.au/Policy-Advocacy/Policy-Reports/Raising-the-bar-for-youth-suicide-prevention/orygen-Suicide-Prevention-Policy-Report.aspx?ext=> . Accessed 19.07.2017.

⁵ Boden (2017) Youth suicides: Grafton community calls for help over lack of mental health resources. ABC [online] <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2017-02-06/grafton-locals-call-for-help-over-youth-suicides/8243618>. Accessed 13.08.2017





surrounding areas. We directly impacted 700+ young people and we are pleased to share that the partnerships in the areas are working towards creating sustainable options for 2018 and beyond.

In a component of a National Survey of Mental Health and Wellbeing, researchers found that, of those children and adolescents who had a mental disorder *and* who scored in the clinical range on the Child Behaviour Checklist *and* whose parents reported they needed professional help, only half had attended a service to get help for their problems. Parents were asked about barriers to obtaining help for their children, with 48% saying they didn't know where to get help and 25% stating that the child did not want to attend services.⁶ It is clear that more work needs to be done to remove the stigma of seeking help and to promote existing services among both the target group – children and young people – and those who assist them, be that parents or other adults.

Given the range of motivations that may influence individuals, Mind Blank is of the firm belief that young people should be encouraged to seek help for any issues affecting their health and wellbeing, and at the earliest point of concern. We promote social connectedness and other protective factors that can assist young people in coping with everyday stress and accessing support to work through any issues affecting their mental health and wellbeing.

In conclusion

Mind Blank is encouraged to see that the NSW Government has already sought to promote awareness of mental health issues for young people by funding and implementing initiatives such as the Black Dog Institutes trial of the SEYLE⁷ model, using role play to educate early interventions in schools. It is also great to see a wealth of practical information online made to promote help seeking behaviours for young people living in the NSW.

Mind Blank intends to develop extensive partnerships with these Service Providers to extend knowledge and awareness of mental health issues, and promote and form help seeking behaviours with our audiences. Specifically, we would like to contribute to increased personal and community resilience, and to see an increased focus on help seeking behaviours as well as services funded specifically to meet the needs of young people at risk through early intervention initiatives and strategies, in a variety of school, community and health settings.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment.

Kind regards,

Ally Kelly CEO – Mind Blank

⁶ Rickwood, D., Deane, F. P., Wilson, C. J. & Ciarrochi, J. V. (2005). Young people's help-seeking for mental health problems. *Australian e-Journal for the Advancement of Mental Health*, 4 (3), 1-34.

⁷ Wasserman, D., Hoven, C., Wasserman, C., Wall, M., Eisberg, R., Hadlaczky, G., Kelleher, I., Sarchiapone, M., Apter, A., Balazs, J., Brunner, J., Corcoran, P., Cosman, D., Guillemain, F., Haring, C., Iosue, M., Kaess, M., Kahn, J., Keely, H., Musa, G., Nemes, B., Postuvan, V., Saiz, P., Reiter-Theil, S., Varnik, A., Varnik, P., & Carli, V., (2015) School Based suicide prevention programmes: the SEYLE cluster-randomised, controlled trial. *The Lancet*. 385. pp1536-1544.

