

**Submission
No 26**

PREVENTION OF YOUTH SUICIDE IN NEW SOUTH WALES

Organisation: Awaken Youth PL
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Position: Owner and Director
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To whom it may concern,

Thank you for inviting Awaken Youth P/L to make a submission to the Committee on Children and Young People for the inquiry into the Prevention of Youth Suicide in New South Wales.

The following submission specifically relates to the following term of reference: g. approaches taken by primary and secondary schools

Summary of Key Points in Submission

1. The importance of providing high quality and relevant gatekeeper training for Primary and Secondary Teachers
2. The importance of providing high quality and relevant gatekeeper training for senior students in schools.
3. The importance of collaboration between schools, parents and external service providers to achieve the best mental health outcomes for students.

1. In 2004 Awaken Youth PL recognized a concerning absence of training for primary and secondary teachers, who play a highly formative and influential role in the lives of young people. In an effort to address this specific area of need, a series of specialised Gatekeeper Training Workshops for Primary and Secondary Teachers were designed and developed by Donna Redman, a former teacher and school leader, who has a great depth of knowledge regarding student welfare and staff management within the school setting.

The Awaken Youth workshops take into consideration the unique factors associated with the school context, the parameters within which schools operate and the need for schools to work in close collaboration with external service providers and parents. The workshops build the confidence of teachers and school support staff, enabling them to understand the warning signs of suicidal ideation in young people, providing them with effective strategies for intervention and follow-up that operate within the parameters of their professional boundaries. As teachers work so closely with young people (and know them exceptionally well), we believe it is a moral imperative that teachers are equipped with these necessary skills so that they are able to prevent youth suicide through early detection and effective referrals to professionals who work in the area of youth mental health. Further to this, Awaken Youth PL acknowledged the importance of professional accreditation in line with the Australian National Standards for Teachers and all of the workshops are accredited by the Quality Teaching Institute and hours spent in training are accredited by the New South Wales Education Standards Authority (NESA).

2. Broadening the scope of the workshops we deliver to students, Awaken Youth PL now also delivers the Living Works SafeTalk Suicide Alertness Program to senior students in secondary schools. This initiative was instigated in collaboration with the South West Sydney Primary Health Network in collaboration with Lifeline Macarthur. We believe, in

addition to providing high quality and specialised gatekeeper training to teachers, it is also imperative that students are provided with the necessary skills to assist them to recognise warning signs of suicidal ideation in their peers and connect them effectively to professional services who can provide them with appropriate support.

3. Mental Health and student welfare is an area that often overwhelms schools. Awaken Youth PL assists leadership teams in this area by working with schools to evaluate and improve their processes and policies. Within this model, there is a specific focus on helping schools to improve their methods of collaboration by ensuring that they are working consistently and effectively with the best service providers in their local area. This enables them to be more proactive when referring students and also respond more swiftly when a student presents with specific needs as there is already a thorough knowledge of the best and most appropriate services in the local area. The model also helps schools work more collaboratively with parents, opening the lines of communication allowing strategies recommended by mental health professionals to be more effectively integrated within the school setting.

In summary, schools play an extremely important role in the lives of young people. I believe there is significant, untapped potential for schools to provide more effective support to families and young people by equipping their staff and students with skills through gatekeeper training and through the enhancement of procedural response and collaboration between parents and external service providers. These three focus areas are of extreme importance and, if enhanced, I believe they would greatly improve the support offered to young people, potentially contributing to a significant reduction of the youth suicide rate in New South Wales.

Yours sincerely,
Donna Redman