

XXV WORLD CONGRESS ON SUICIDE PREVENTION OF THE INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION FOR SUICIDE PREVENTION URUGUAY 2009 27-31 October 2009



Montevideo, the capital of Uruguay

by LPP Manager, *Laurencia Grant*

IT'S NOT every day that you get the opportunity to travel overseas to present at an International Conference. So I am extremely grateful to MHACA's Management Committee and to Claudia for agreeing to send me there. My co-presenter was Charles Hodgson who has a keen interest in helping to reduce the rates of suicide among Aboriginal men through his work in suicide prevention and men's health. Here is a summary of our travels ...

The XXV World Congress on Suicide Prevention is an initiative of the International Association for Suicide Prevention (IASP) which was founded in 1960. This organisation is dedicated to preventing suicidal behaviour, alleviating its effects, and providing a forum for those in academia, mental health professionals, crisis workers, volunteers and those with an experience of suicidality or those bereaved by suicide.

Why Uruguay?

So why was it held in Uruguay and where exactly is it? Uruguay is in South America on the South Atlantic Ocean between Argentina and Brazil and has a population of approximately 3.3 million. Spanish is the main language, with 88 percent of the population reflecting the waves of Spanish and Italian immigration that established Uruguay as a nation in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The country has experienced numerous devastations, including hail storms and flash floods in recent years causing damage to crops and livestock. **Uruguay is also in economic decline having experienced the most significant socio-economic crises in the country's history in 2002.** Over 20 percent of its workforce is unemployed and another 30 percent hugely under employed. This has



caused thousands of people to leave the country in search of other places to work. Most countries in Latin America experience relatively low suicide rates. However, Uruguay has a significantly high rate, especially since the economic downturn. It is also less religious than other Latin American nations.

The Conference was held in the Radisson Hotel in Montevideo. Initially there were some logistical hiccups related to standard of accommodation and proving that we were registered. Also I had received strict instructions about keeping to time for our presentation and Charlie and I practiced until we got it to within 15 minutes. However, there was very little strict time-keeping which was unfortunate because consequently no sessions ran according to the proposed time schedule. So it meant that if you changed rooms so that you could hear another speaker in the middle of all the morning sessions, it was very hit and miss.

What Did I Learn About Suicide Prevention?

- ◆ Refugees can become vulnerable to suicide due to trauma, long periods in detention or resettlement stress. Germany takes more refugees than any other developed country and most refugees are women and children.
- ◆ Religion is a protective factor for suicide and it seems that Muslim countries have low rates of suicide. However, there are hidden statistics and mis-classification and high levels of stigma and taboo.
- ◆ Burning charcoal in a small tin drum in an enclosed space is a recent concerning trend for suicide in Hong Kong. The high rates of suicide coincide with high unemployment and the economic turmoil that has occurred from 1997 to 2007.
- ◆ High rates of suicide among indigenous men throughout the world are linked to their changing status and confused cultural identity. Harnessing their skills and expertise is an important suicide prevention strategy.

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Charlie and Laurencia presenting Suicide Story

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◆ Employment is a protective factor for suicide. However, within the professions the highest rates of suicide occur in construction, transport and agricultural industries, related to occupational stress, isolation, drug and alcohol misuse, and availability of toxic substances.

◆ There is a lack of evidence base from non-Western countries and an academic bias in accepted research for publication in academic journals. Psychiatry focuses on neuro-biological research rather than human beings in their context.

◆ A North Pakistan study looked into the incidence of 50 women dying from drowning after jumping into a lake, hanging and poisoning. The majority were between 16 and 25 years, with 73 percent in marriages. These deaths were related to depression due to arranged marriages with older men, no opportunity for education, lack of rights, abuse and ownership by husbands.

◆ Use of Western instruments to measure depression and suicide risk in people in non Western countries is problematic. Marriage is a protective factor for suicide in Western countries, but can put women at risk in India, Bangladesh, Pakistan and China.

◆ Rates of suicide among First Nations people in Canada are related to a tragic history of land grabs, colonisation and racist Government policy that was very similar to the circumstances for Aboriginal Australians.

◆ There are no post-vention studies into indigenous population groups.



◆ 60 percent of suicides in Asian countries are a result of poisonings using pesticides.

Good Work Down Under

A last night conference dinner was held at a function residence and we danced to the Village People and other hits of the 70's and 80's. We had two entire tables of Australians and one of New Zealanders. We were definitely well represented here and this reflected well on the breadth of work being undertaken in both these countries. At one point I found myself in a conga line with the likes of Professor Diego De Leo and Dr Michael Dudley and some of the lads from Suicide Prevention Australia—an important therapeutic intervention for a week of academia focused on suicide.

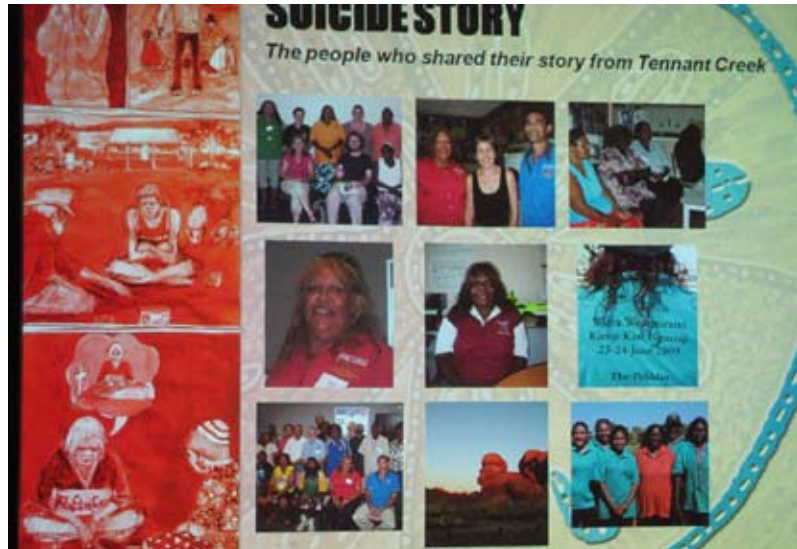
Charlie and I presented what I think was one of the more appealing presentations of the event. Audience members were moved by the stories of Aboriginal people and we received some encouraging words from those

present about our work here in Central Australia. Having sat through many Powerpoint presentations, I'm not convinced it's the best program to use. I was struck by how information could be so poorly presented by even the more experienced of academics. Some were also excellent.

A Little Sightseeing ...

Apart from listening to talks on suicide, we did have some fun! Charlie soon learnt where and how to buy cigarettes, how to call his family and where the local Pentecostal Church was. I attended a symphony orchestra complete with tango dancing at the local concert hall. Charlie, Lindy MacGregor, Gaynor Hicks (Sydney gals who are also ASIST trainer extraordinaires) and Sandi Ford (Anglicare-NT) travelled to Collonia Del Sacramento for the day. We hired two buggies and had a beautiful day in this old seaside settlement.

Sandi and I went to Buenos Aries in Argentina and spent the day in the San Telmo district where there are





markets on Sundays and beautiful and varied Spanish, French and Italian styles of architecture. In La Boca we were told to be careful and stay within the confines of the tourist district to avoid the possibility of theft or assault. Here the national dance, the tango, is milked for all its worth in the streets and the restaurants. The pressed tin houses are painted a rainbow of colours, and muralists have turned the district's side-streets into avenues of colour.

Buenos Aires is the capital city of Argentina and, with a population of around 13 million, is the third-largest city in Latin America. Buenos Aires is considered the wealthiest city in South America which is reflected in the beautifully restored buildings and city streets such as Florida St. However, the 'porteños' (people from the port) have had a difficult political history and this is reflected in the political graffiti around the town, and an economic downturn in 2001 is still being felt in this country.

Our diet in these two countries consisted of beef, more beef, ham with a slice of queso (cheese) in between, fritas papas (fried potatoes) and more beef. Eventually I sought out Italian dining of pasta or pizza as a preference. The people were very friendly, were mad soccer fans and, despite the language barrier, tried their best to help us out. The driving was appalling. Charlie and I tried to laugh as taxis crossed lanes without indicating and travelled way too close to other vehicles.

Back in Alice Springs I am motivated to finalise Suicide Story and begin the task of delivery and evaluation. We plan to hold an official launch for Suicide Story in early February 2010.

Thank you again to MHACA for this wonderful opportunity. ✂

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10 Tips to Build Your Resilience ...



We can all build and improve on our ability to be resilient when faced with stressful and difficult situations. Here are some helpful tips that you can use to build your resilience ...

1. Have the courage to be imperfect

Continually striving for perfection in everything you do can lead to stress. Try to aim for "not bad at all" or "really quite good" instead of "perfect".

2. Take time for yourself

Do you have little or no time left over at the end of the day for yourself? Are you all things to all people? Allow yourself time to do things that you especially enjoy. If you create boundaries around your time and stick to them, others will respect them.

3. Sign up for that course, join that club

Getting involved in community activities can help develop your connections with others, create skills and boost your physical and mental wellbeing - all things that improve your resilience.

4. Be active every day in as many ways as you can

Being physically healthy is an important foundation for your resilience. The National Physical Activity Guidelines recommend 30 minutes of moderate intensity physical activity a day.

5. Spend time with people who make you feel good

Nurturing a positive view of yourself is important for resilience. Spend time with people who help build your confidence and belief in yourself.

6. Laugh out loud each day

Laughing out loud can be a helpful way to reduce stress levels, so look for opportunities to introduce some humour into your day. Life can be truly absurd

sometimes, so don't forget to laugh at it and look for the lighter side of frustrating situations.

7. Invite a friend over for a cup of tea

Research shows that relationships are one of the cornerstones of wellbeing. Close relationships and broad social networks are both important.

8. Do one thing now you've been putting off

Procrastination can be a major barrier to wellbeing, leading to stress and preventing us from doing the things that are important to us and good for us. Ask your friends for their best strategies for getting motivated.

9. Remember - 'This Too Shall Pass'

One way to build resilience is to keep things in perspective. If you can, avoid being overly negative about things that may be happening in your life. Even during the toughest times, try to keep an eye to the future and the likelihood that circumstances will change for the better.

10. Focus more on things you can control

There are many things in your life that you have no direct control over. Resilience involves being able to adapt to change with a minimum amount of stress. Instead of resisting or trying to manipulate things beyond your control, look at them as opportunities to learn and grow. Focus your attention on areas where you can make a difference.

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