



CELEBRATING SIX YEARS OF THE UNIVERSITY OF WORCESTER SUICIDE SAFER PROJECT: 2013 - 2019

FOREWORD

The University of Worcester has a long-held, deep commitment to mental health and wellbeing.

This vitally important area has been a core focus for many years.

Worcester has offered specialist wellbeing support to students since 2000.

In 2004 we became one of the very first UK universities to appoint specialist Mental Health Advisors. Simultaneously, our Students' Union became deeply involved in this work, and has been ever since.

Our Suicide Safer initiative, launched in 2013, has pioneered the way for greater understanding and awareness in this most important area. This vital project makes a crucial local and national contribution to student suicide prevention through early intervention. Through public lectures, joint initiatives and campaigns, and training, colleagues at Worcester have contributed so much to support students and student services teams

in other universities, as well as being deeply involved in developing national change, championing best practice and contributing creatively to national task groups. The University's work has been identified as a best practice example in numerous national guidance, student-led and Higher Education professional publications.

At a time when levels of mental illness, mental distress and low wellbeing are increasing in society as a whole, I am very proud of all those many members of the University, students, staff, Governors and Fellows who have contributed so much to this vital work.

Suicide can and must be prevented. Life is so very precious. I commend this guide to all.

**Professor David Green CBE,
Vice Chancellor and Chief Executive,
University of Worcester**

INTRODUCTION

Somewhere in the world one person takes their own life every 40 seconds, according to the World Health Organization (WHO). For every death by suicide, there are many more people who attempt to take their own life every year. Globally, suicide is the second leading cause of death amongst young people aged 15-29, whilst in the UK, men are three times more likely to die by suicide than women.

Behind each piece of data in these troubling statistics lies somebody's life story, and not just one person, but all those whose lives are affected by suicide. A loss from suicide is like no other, and for those left behind, the grief can be especially difficult and traumatic.

While student suicide rates remain below the rates for people of a similar age in the general population, they have risen in recent years and greater attention has been given nationally to the issue.

The University of Worcester was one of the first universities nationally to have a specific focus on student suicide prevention when, in 2013, it established the Suicide Safer Project Group, led by Professor Jo Smith.

Six years on, here are six of the project's most significant achievements to date.



Above: The University of Worcester's Study Happy campaign, supporting students towards healthier, happier and smarter study.



Right: University of Worcester PhD student Chantal Vinyard's images of research poster 2017.

1 FINDING THE RIGHT FORMULA

‘Suicide Safer’ at Worcester was established as a multi-agency project. The aim was two-fold: to draw in external expertise to help provide the best possible support for students across the University, and to, in turn, create a route through which we could share the findings of the project and support the development of similar provision elsewhere.

The Suicide Safer Project Group, Chaired by Ross Renton, Pro Vice Chancellor, and led by Professor Jo Smith as the Project Lead, comprises University of Worcester academic and support staff; local FE college staff; representatives from Worcestershire County Council Public Health, Worcestershire Health & Care NHS Trust; and third sector organisations such as Worcester Community First, Samaritans and POPYRUS.

The founding aim was that the project should work to build a ‘Suicide safer’ University and, in a phased plan, to a ‘Suicide safer’ city and county, through collaboration with WCC Public Health and other regional stakeholders.

The project has been orientated around 4 key work strands:

- Campaigning and awareness raising about mental health and student suicide
- Education and training on mental health and suicide for staff and students
- Developing and promoting a range of new resources
- Developing and contributing to relevant academic research

Suicide Safer’s multi-agency approach and emphasis on collaboration has certainly borne fruit. Over the last six years, considerable progress has been made in each of these four areas.

“Our University has benefitted from your valuable work and insight into this most complex and sensitive area. Your contribution to the thinking within the HE sector has been considerable.”

Professor Rama Thirunamachandran, Vice-Chancellor and Principal, Canterbury Christ Church University

“You have had a tremendous impact on raising the awareness of and influencing institutions to take steps to prevent suicide.”

Nic Streatfield, Head of Student Services, York St John University

“I remember coming along to an Alliance for Student Led Wellbeing meeting many years ago and hearing about the work at Worcester and being completely blown away by the high level of work happening in one university.”

Stuart Reid, Service Delivery Manager, Mind



Noticeboard at City Campus as part of Time to Talk, February 2018



Yarnbomb heart tree on World Mental Health Day, October 2017



Professor Jo Smith, Suicide Safer Project Lead

2 TACKLING THE STIGMA AND JOINING THE DOTS

Suicide Safer's campaigning and awareness raising activity seeks to tackle the stigma surrounding mental health and suicide, whilst simultaneously signposting university staff and students to available sources of support. The University of Worcester has held regular activities throughout the year, some tying in with events like World Mental Health Day and 'Time to Talk', whilst others have targeted key points in the academic year such as Welcome Week and during exam season. Examples include:

- Working in collaboration with Rethink Mental Illness to screen the film 'Finding Mike' on campus along with a Q+A discussion for staff and students with the documentary's director and producer, as well as a suicide survivor and a family member bereaved by suicide.
- A 'yarn bombing' on World Mental health Day with over 1,000 hearts that displayed positive messages and signposted staff and students to available services.
- Publishing a series of personal blogs on mental-health under the banner 'This Is Me'.
- Running a public lecture series at The Hive on a range of subjects: menstruation and the menopause, eating disorders, and Men, Muscle and Mental Health.
- In collaboration with Coventry Public Health and NHS Trust, Coventry University, University of Warwick, University of Gloucestershire and Time To Change West Midlands, the University of Worcester Students' Union has participated in the 'It Takes Balls' (ITB) campaign for the last two years. ITB uses sporting events – such as BUCS contests and varsity - as a vehicle for promoting mental health awareness and suicide prevention.
- In 2018, the University of Worcester was a co-applicant on a successful bid to host a 'Time to Change' Hub in Worcestershire, led by Worcestershire County Council Health and Wellbeing Board.



Yarnbomb heart positive message campaign

- University staff have secured Time to Change funding to run campaigns and events encouraging staff and students to talk about

mental health including a tea party, Swedish 'fika' gatherings and a 'Kiss and Tell' mental health messages event.

- The University has partnered with 'Off the Scale', who use a converted bus - stocked with vintage clothing and equipped with a stellar sound system - to engage young people in casual conversations about mental health. The Off the Scale bus is now a regular visitor to campus, always attracting a large crowd.
- The Suicide Safer Project Group have actively sought to raise awareness by seeking opportunities to engage with local and national media, from The Guardian to BBC News. The University Of Worcester Suicide Safer project will also be profiled in a film documentary by One Voice Digital on student suicide, due to be released on social media later in 2019.



'Off the Scale' vintage clothing bus as part of World Mental Health Day



Student nurse helpers on Mental Health Awareness Week 2018



Professor Jo Smith features in BBC News report on student suicide, June 2018

"I for one can say that this has been an absolute inspiration to me and has motivated me to take the suicide prevention agenda on at WSFC."

Julie Ferman, Senior Lead for Student Well-being & Head of Year, Worcester Sixth Form College

"The yarnbombing was very successful, people were positively moved when they chose the heart they wanted, and read the positive message. By 12.30 all the hearts had gone, taken away by students, staff and visitors."

Feedback following Yarnbombing Heart Campaign, World Mental Health Day 2015

3 BUILDING A SUPPORTIVE UNIVERSITY COMMUNITY

The education and training activities of Suicide Safer have targeted a broad range of staff and students from across the University, with a view to building a compassionate, skilled and supportive community that is able to respond early to help those who may be at risk. A mixed approach of targeting specific groups who may find themselves in the position of first responders – such as Facilities staff, as well as rolling out broader training opportunities throughout the University, has been employed to try to ensure as comprehensive coverage as possible.

The University was a pilot site for Charlie Waller Memorial Trust (CWMT) online mental health training modules for staff, which are now embedded into staff induction and other training courses. We have also recently signed a partnership agreement with CWMT as a HE pilot site for a new FE/HE mental health training partnership.

We have also run several Mental Health First Aid (MHFA) training courses with staff and students.

A very productive partnership with West Midlands PAPYRUS has led to ASIST (Applied Suicide Intervention Skills Training) workshops being delivered to staff from various departments, including Facilities, Student Services, Worcester Students' Union, and academic and support staff members in mental health leadership roles. We have also run three PAPYRUS SP-EAK Suicide Prevention: Explore, Ask, Keep-Safe half day workshops for Student Services and Students' Union staff.

The University Counselling and Mental Health team have introduced 'Counselling skills for non-counsellors' workshops for Academic tutors, Students' Union bar staff and those with first-line student contact.

We have introduced 'Look After Your Mate' peer support training for all SU Clubs and societies in partnership with the Students' Union, who also now stipulate that all clubs and societies must have a designated welfare rep.

Designated Student Wellbeing Champions - who work with our Student Services department - also undertake the 'Look After Your Mate' training. The Student Wellbeing Champions, in turn, run a range of courses and events for

their fellow students throughout the year. These activities have also been rolled out to local Sixth Forms as part of our community outreach programme.

As a further part of the drive to spread the benefits of a strong and supportive community approach to mental health, several academic Schools have embedded mental health and suicide training in to their curricula, including the School of Education, whose inclusion of relevant training in the curriculum for all third year trainee teachers means that the next generation of teachers will be equipped with the skills and understanding to help support any young people facing crisis that they may meet in the course of their work.



Student support infographic



Student support signposting guide for staff

"There are some really impressive examples of good practice in universities. For example Worcester University have adopted a 'whole University approach' to suicide prevention."

Royal College of Psychiatrists Written Submission to the All Party Parliamentary Group Suicide Prevention Inquiry (2016)

"The high level collaboration has meant a more joined up approach to supporting students in their mental health. The Suicide Safer project group has created a wide network and has allowed us to tap into resources outside of the University with greater ease."

Sophie Williams, CEO Students' Union, UW

4 NOT JUST 'TALKING' ABOUT IT, BUT 'DOING IT'

Training and campaigns work to help build a solid foundation of skills and awareness, but the Suicide Safer team also recognised the need for practical interventions that could tackle the question of mental health and suicide head on.

One of the first tasks undertaken by the project group was to recruit student volunteers to launch a University of Worcester Nightline listening service in 2015. The listening service run and staffed by trained student 'listeners' was supported by the University Counselling and Mental Health Service. The Nightline service operated overnight from 8pm to 8am on weekdays and ran successfully for 3 years. Ultimately, the Nightline proved difficult to sustain due to difficulties recruiting student volunteers, especially at times when many students are out on placement.

Instead, this current semester sees the launch of a University of Worcester free 24/7 crisis text line service for students.

This is the product of a partnership with Mental Health Innovations and Crisis Text Line who launched a nationwide crisis texting service called SHOUT earlier this year. We are one of the first universities in the UK to pilot the SHOUT service.



The Counselling and Mental Health team within Student Services have introduced a daily triage service for crisis assessment and immediate support, whilst, working in conjunction with colleagues in Student Services, we have also developed guidance and support materials for students, parents and academic staff.

Other forms of support include residential student ambassadors within halls of residence who are trained to provide on hand first line peer support to their fellow students, whilst staff in the Facilities department now have student wellbeing integrated in to their job descriptions, requiring them to report any concerns regarding student wellbeing through a daily reporting system.

75% of students who have accessed the University's student support services say that they feel more hopeful about their future than they did before support began.

"Everything about the experience I have had has been excellent. The service I have received has been the most significant thing that has enabled me to complete my course."

"I was taught skills to overcome the burden of constant worrying and anxiety."

"Honestly one of the best teams of mental health people I've ever seen..."

Students feedback, Student Services, University of Worcester

"We've been supporting staff to have the confidence to engage in these conversations with students, knowing how and where to refer, and being confident that the University has processes in place to deal with some of the most difficult circumstances."

Director of Personal and Organisational Development, University of Worcester



Fancy a Cuppa support for students

5 SHAPING THE FUTURE

High quality effective research is a key component in driving social change. The Suicide Safer project has embraced the power of research to effect real change and shape the future direction of provision with two PhD studentships. One, led by PhD student Chantal Vinyard, is exploring the current picture regarding suicide prevention and response strategies within the UK HE sector. Chantal's work has received national support from Universities UK, Public Health England, the Department of Health and the Office for National Statistics. A second studentship led by PhD student Hilary Causer, is exploring postvention support needs and roles for staff in HE following a student suicide. An initial paper from Hilary's work has already been accepted for publication. Both PhD students will present their work at the International Association for Suicide Prevention (IASP) World Congress in Northern Ireland in September 2019.

Other research activities include:

- Participation in a European Horizons 2020 RCT study called PLUS, which aimed to evaluate the effectiveness of a web-based online transdiagnostic mental health problem prevention programme.
- Working with Public Health England, Department of Health, Universities UK and the Office for National Statistics (ONS) on a high profile report on student suicide rates in 2018.
- Contributing to a successful UK Research & Innovation funding bid to establish a national research network called SMARTEN, led by King's College London, focusing on Student Mental Health in Higher Education.



University of Worcester PhD students Chantal Vinyard (left) and Hilary Causer (right)

"We know when it comes to suicide you can make big improvements in prevention. This can only be done when you have accurate and reliable data. So Universities UK, Public Health England and the ONS are now working with researchers from the University of Worcester to encourage more accurate reporting of student suicides."

Jeremy Hunt, Times HE, September 20 2017.

"Your work has made a real difference in this space – work that will be added to by your two PhD students in coming months."

Prof David Gunnell, Professor of Epidemiology, University of Bristol

6 SPREADING THE WORD

The Suicide Safer project has always sought to build the strongest possible foundations to help improve mental health provision within our own University community, but also to broaden these foundations by working collaboratively on both a national and international scale.

Key examples of this approach - which embraces collaboration and promotes dialogue – include:

- Contributing to Public Health England Higher Education suicide prevention master classes.
- Participation in a range of conferences and events, including delivering a workshop at the National Suicide Prevention Alliance (NSPA) Conference at the Kia Oval in January 2018, and at Universities UK first student suicide national conference in April 2018.
- Co-facilitating a ‘Zero Suicide’ Summit in Atlanta in 2015, and a follow up summit in Rotterdam in 2018.
- Delivering the opening keynote address at an international suicide prevention conference in Belfast in 2016, as well as convening a symposium on student suicide at the International Association for Suicide Prevention (IASP) World Congress in September 2019.
- Working with a number of other universities, FE and sixth form colleges to help them develop their own suicide prevention plans, including the Universities of York, Canterbury, Swansea and Aston; Cirencester, Shrewsbury, Richard Huish and Taunton FE Colleges; Christopher Whitehead Language College and Worcester Sixth Form College. We have been an active member of local, national and international groups concerned with student mental health and suicide prevention including Worcestershire County Council Suicide audit and suicide prevention planning groups, The Alliance of Suicide Charities (TASC), The Alliance for Student-Led Wellbeing (ASLW) and the international ‘Zero Suicide in Health Care’ movement.
- The University of Worcester has also participated in key UUK national task groups, including ‘Step Change’, ‘Minding Our Future’, Public Health England’s Student suicide group, and a ‘Suicide Safer’ Universities working

group with UUK and PAPYRUS. The University of Worcester’s work has been identified as a best practice example in several sector publications and extensively in local and national media, including the NUS Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Guide (May 2016); Public Health England Suicide Prevention national guidance (November 2016); Student Minds Student living: collaborating to support mental health in university accommodation (April 2017); Universities UK Step Change framework (September 2017); Institute for Public Policy Research Not By Degrees: Improving student mental health in the UK’s universities (September 2017); Universities UK and PAPYRUS Suicide Safer Universities Toolkit (September 2018).

- We have also had a book proposal accepted by Jessica Kingsley Publishers: ‘Student Suicide in FE and HE: what do we know, what can we do?’ which will be co-edited by Professor Jo Smith from the University of Worcester, with Dr Sharon Mallon from the Open University.
- The Suicide Safer project was also shortlisted for the Times Higher Education’s Outstanding Support for Students Award in 2018.



The University of Worcester’s Suicide Safer project has featured as a case study in national guidance

“This has delivered real impact for our local higher education community and also formed an important part of a broader county alliance giving priority to suicide prevention, which has played a part in our being recognised as a Time to change pilot site, enabling further success in reducing the stigma of mental ill-health.”

Dr Frances Howie, Former Director of Public Health, Worcestershire County Council

“You have led and developed quite the legacy here – one that has achieved its own momentum and gathered a group of colleagues together who are passionate and committed to the continued growth and development of Suicide Safer.”

Gian Fazey, Assistant Director of Student Life, University of Worcester

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Charlie Waller Memorial Trust (CWMT)
PAPYRUS (West Midlands)
Rethink Mental Illness
Student Minds
National Union of Students (NUS)
Universities UK (UUK)
Nightline
Samaritans
Time to Change (TTC)
Grassroots, Brighton
Devon County Council and University of Exeter
'It Takes Balls' Universities Consortium members
'Off the Scale'
Mental Health Innovations
MHFA England
MIND
The Alliance of Suicide Charities (TASC) members
The Alliance for Student Led Wellbeing (ASLW) members
Worcestershire Community First
Worcester Sixth Form College
Worcestershire County Council Public Health
Worcestershire Health and Care Trust
Zero Suicide Alliance
Health Education England
SMaRteN research network
National Suicide Prevention Alliance (NSPA)
Public Health England
Cameron Grant Memorial Trust
Connecting with People (CwP)
Matthew Elvidge Trust
Zero Suicide in Health Care movement (www.zerosuicide.org)

Ross Renton, Pro Vice Chancellor and Suicide Safer Project Group Chair
Professor Jo Smith, Suicide Safer Project Lead