

Training & events programme

25th & 26th February - ASIST in Bute
25th & 26th March - ASIST in Lochgilphead
19th & 20th May - ASIST in Dunoon
20th & 21st August - ASIST in Oban
21st & 22nd October - ASIST in Helensburgh
17th & 18th November - ASIST in Inveraray
Contact us if you would like a safeTALK or Tune-up in your area
We are also recruiting people who have been through the ASIST 2 day workshop to deliver suicideTALK. We will provide a one day Training programme to help get you ready.



ASIST (Applied Suicide Intervention Skills Training) is a two-day intensive course giving suicide first-aid skills to recognise when someone may have thoughts of suicide.

There is also a half-day **ASIST tune-up**, where previous participants can get a refresher and re-connect with other suicide first-aiders.

The one day **Dealing with Self-harm** course is suitable for anyone working

or living with someone who self-harms. Participants gain more understanding into the reasons for self-harm and some helping strategies. We are also running a shorter self-harm awareness session.

SuicideTALK is a one-and-a-half to three hour session on suicide prevention and **safeTALK** helps you to become a suicide alert helper in two to three hours.



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Working to reduce suicide and self-harm

chooselife

in Argyll
and Bute

Hanging tough

B **EING** stuck in the office can have most people climbing the walls, but that took on a whole new meaning when Tracy organised a stand for us at Bute's annual Take Time event.

The information day for school pupils and members of the community was organised by Careers Scotland.

Various organisations had stands from universities to local health and voluntary initiatives. But the highlight of the day, especially for the

younger visitors, was definitely the imported climbing wall. And when Tracy challenged me to a race to the top, I couldn't resist.

The buzz of trying something new made me remember how enthusiastic the delegates were at our conference when we asked them to think about their life-sustaining stuff.

We hope you will join us in taking time to enjoy more of your life-sustaining stuff to mentally flourish in 2009.

By Marie Park



No cop out: p2&3 ❖ Flourishing: p4&5 ❖ Connecting : p6&7

Newsletter Winter/Spring 2009

Conference worked a real tree-t

OUR conference in Argyll for International Suicide Prevention Awareness Week in September enticed delegates from all over the country.

They were most intrigued with our theme of Mentally Flourishing Trees.

Choose Life Co-ordinator Dave Bertin explained in his welcome how trees might look healthy above ground, but often we don't know what is going on underneath.

Sometimes the roots

can be damaged or maybe the right nourishment isn't getting through and it can be the same with our mental health.

To encourage everyone to

think more creatively about their "life sustaining stuff", we got out the glue sticks, glitter and googly eyes so everyone could personalise their own leaf to display on our tree of life.



Marie Park, Tracy Preece and Richard Leckerman

The wooden display tree was expertly made by the Woodland Project at the Argyll & Bute Hospital.

It was such a fun part of the day, but with the very powerful message that we should be doing more of the stuff we want to do and less of the stuff we feel we have to do.

The various activities were also interspersed with music from Pink Floyd to The Fray and the conference's success

4 is mainly attributed to the

delegates' willingness to participate.

One delegate said: "Appreciated a difficult 'heavy' subject presented in an engaging manner...and the emphasis that we can all make a difference in different ways - both professionally and personally."

We were also joined on the day by a number of very knowledgeable speakers.

Tracy Preece and Dave Bertin set the scene, then Cameron Stark, Public Health Consultant for NHS Highland gave us a very comprehensive outline of suicide in rural settings. He covered various models of suicide, mental ill health, geographic and gender factors.

Rose Kirk from the national Choose Life team gave us a national overview

of suicide prevention work across the country.

And Richard Leckerman from Breathing Space entertained us all with tales (tails) of elephants while informing us of the vital work the national helpline is achieving.

The setting of the Stonefield Castle Hotel at Tarbert undoubtedly helped everyone to chill out and we can't thank the staff enough for their attention to detail.

Already thoughts are turning to this year's conference - just wait and see what we have in store for you....



A Scot in Newfoundland

I HAVE many pictures to remember my amazing time in Newfoundland at the annual ASIST trainers conference, but there's one picture that I couldn't catch on camera, but is etched in my heart forever.

Looking up at the entire Milky Way in the Newfoundland sky with my new friend Christine, an ASIST trainer from New Brunswick. It's an awesome memory that encapsulates my unforgettable time in Newfoundland and the experience of feeling completely connected - to the universe and the remarkable people I've had the privilege to share time with. It may sound a little over the top, but to those of us who work in suicide prevention, feeling the life force so powerfully is indeed



something that sustains us in our lives and our work. The ASIST trainers community in Newfoundland share a special connection with each other because they invest time and effort in the things that make life worth living - friendship, caring, laughter

(by the salt-water-filled-bucket-load), generosity, hospitality, honesty and sometimes the chance to dance the night away.

This annual conference is just part of the work by Gerry Dooley and his team which binds together those invested in saving lives in this

weather-beaten remote part of Canada. I felt honoured to be welcomed into their circle, to share tears of sadness and joy, to be challenged and inspired. But these

for suicide training

Cont from p2

Thankfully, through utilising his new found skills, he was able to prevent a needless death and direct that person to the help they needed.

It is situations like this, and others that we deal with, that reaffirm my belief that all Police Officers should have at the very least a safeTALK input.

Senior Officers in Argyll and Bute have given their full support, with the next stage being for Gordon and myself to start training as many Officers as possible.

Police Officers in Argyll and Bute do not simply work in their community, they and their families are part

of the community. We all want to make a difference and safeTALK can and will achieve this.

Chief Inspector Andrew

Mosely from Dunoon added: "This is a great example of the police opening their minds to new training with new partners."

"I

embrace this opportunity for my staff, further courses will take place over the coming weeks and months for staff at Dunoon building our knowledge and meaningful partnership links."

Mark and Gordon pictured.
By Mark Wilson
Communities Unit Sergeant,
Argyll and Bute



There's no cop out

IT'S 2am in rural Argyll and Bute, and a member of our community is having thoughts of suicide.

Whatever invitations they are putting out in an attempt to secure help, we have to remember that this is rural Scotland. Who is available to offer that help and ensure the safety of the person at that moment in time?

As a Strathclyde Police Sergeant within the Communities Unit of Argyll and Bute, this is something that we see all too often - the local Police being called, because we are there and available 24 hours a day.

One of the over riding principles of Policing is to 'protect life' and this is a belief that I still have after

14 years in the job.

This belief led me to Choose Life and the ASIST 2 day course and SafeTALK training, which has now led to myself and my colleague, Gordon Stewart from Rothesay, successfully completing the safeTALK T4T course.

We have seen the benefits of these excellent training and awareness courses and what they have to offer, along with what, as Police Officers, we can offer in return.

My colleague Gordon Stewart, Communities Constable on the Isle of Bute, found this out first hand, as the very day after his ASIST training, he was called to a person threatening suicide.

OVER the past few months we have trained up another six safeTALK trainers and two more ASIST trainers with another gearing up for T4T in the next few weeks. If you are interested in becoming a suicide prevention trainer or running a suicideTALK T4T in your area, please get in touch with us.

sentiments are not on the surface, they run deep in these folks' hearts with a genuineness that is both disarming and engaging.

There is real action behind the talk with the highest number of people per head of population trained in suicide awareness, alertness and intervention skills.

What makes this body of work more remarkable is that there is little government or statutory financial support, no suicide prevention strategy to pull in funding, just the sheer hard graft of those who care so deeply that they will plough their own resources back into the task of making their community safer from suicide. Every life lost to suicide is felt

deeply, but the ripples seem to stretch far and wide in a community which continues to be so closely connected.

This year's conference followed the theme of Healing Voices and included the nitty

gritty of ASIST delivery as well as topics from the menopause to youth work, postvention to laughing your way to a happy marriage, music, mayhem and leg-wrestling pastors. There were many healing voices to be heard over our time together including Inuit throat singers, poetry, a barber shop quartet and of course, the karaoke. The support that trainers draw from each other at this annual conference is a key element in sustaining them for the difficult work that they do every day.

The welcome was at times overwhelming, but when you get a bunch of ASIST trainers in a circle, something amazing happens. I was welcomed



into people's homes and hearts, with a common understanding of our work. I felt completely at home in a place that was several plane rides away from Scotland.

By Marie Park