

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

PROPOSED YOUTH SANCTUARY

What is being proposed?

Plans are under way for a new Youth Sanctuary in Subiaco, offering help and support to young people experiencing suicidal thoughts. It will be a residential centre and will provide early intervention for people aged between 16 and 24 who are experiencing suicidal thoughts. The service is not an acute medical facility. It is primarily for young people who are mentally well but need a place to reflect and learn coping skills.—This is an opportunity to work with them before they reach crisis point.

Why is it needed?

Suicide is the leading cause of death among young people in Western Australia. Suicide rates among young people have been increasing steadily over the past 10 years and the significant rise in the number of young people with suicidal thoughts or ideation has prompted increased investment in youth mental health in WA.

Where will it be located?

It is proposed that the Sanctuary will be set up by converting Samaritans House in Subiaco. Samaritans WA has been based at this site since 1967, running their helpline, range of training services and face-to-face emotional support.

Who will design and deliver the service?

It is being co-designed by three organisations with leading expertise in youth suicide support – Ruah Community Services, Samaritans WA and Telethon Kids Institute with input from young people with lived experience of suicidal thoughts and behaviour. Ruah and Samaritans WA will bring a wealth of experience to the Sanctuary and to the support services which will be available to the residents. Research evaluation will be provided by Telethon Kids Institute through its Embrace team, which has a particular focus on youth mental health research.

How will young people find it?

The Sanctuary will be a discreet service and existing signage will be removed. GPs, other health professionals and counsellors will be aware of the service and can discuss it with young people they feel may be suitable. However, the address of the residence will only be provided to guests who have been screened and approved to be suitable for the service. It is not a drop-in centre and the location will not be made public

Where will the young people staying at the Sanctuary come from?

They could come from anywhere. Youth suicide is an issue that can affect us all – it could be your sister, daughter, friend who needs support, or someone just like them. Suicide knows no socio-economic or geographical boundaries. The Sanctuary will be available to any young person who is suitable and will benefit from its support. There will be a thorough screening process prior to entry to ensure the service is appropriate for them.

How long will they stay there and what help will they receive?

The Sanctuary will provide a residential, non-medical, care program for young people who will stay there for four nights, receiving early intervention and support from experienced staff. The program will be based on the Maytree model from the UK, which has been operating successfully for 20 years.

Who will be eligible for the service?

The Sanctuary is designed to help young people, aged between 16 and 24, who are experiencing suicidal thoughts. They won't need a mental health diagnosis to use the facility and can be referred there by anyone, including family, friends or health professionals. Young people can also refer themselves. Currently young people experiencing suicidal thoughts have limited options, and often end up in a hospital emergency department, which is far from ideal. All referrals will be assessed by trained staff prior to admittance, to ensure they are eligible for early intervention, and do not require crisis care.

How many people will go to the Sanctuary each day?

The Sanctuary will accommodate up to five clients and five staff at any one time. There will not be a drop-in facility, and visitors will be limited.

Residents will not be able to have a car at the centre. They will be dropped off and collected by their families during day-time hours. The existing car bays are adequate for the small number of staff working on site, and shift changes will be fewer and less frequent than was the case during the building's previous use. There are no shift changes planned after 10pm or before 6 am.

The discreet and highly contained nature of the service, along with the small number of places, means there will be little impact, if any, on local residents. In fact, there will be far fewer people coming and going than during the site's previous use, which has been the headquarters for Samaritans WA since 1967, from which they ran their helpline, range of training services and face-to-face emotional support services.

What will be done to make sure there is no anti-social behaviour?

Young people who are displaying anti-social behaviour or experiencing suicidal ideation in the context of alcohol and other drug use, or psychosis, will be screened prior to admittance and will not be invited to attend. These young people will be referred to other services specialising in crisis care.

The Sanctuary will be as the name suggests – a quiet, peaceful, temporary home for five young people who will be getting support to help them through a difficult period. They will be supported by trained staff and volunteers and the focus will be on the young people and their recovery. The service will be discreet, with no visible street-facing signage.

What disruptions will there be during renovations?

All the work involved in the conversion will be carried out inside Samaritans House, with no changes needed to the exterior of the building, other than removal of the signage. The work involved is likely to be no different to minor alterations at any other home in Subiaco, so the conversion process should have little or no impact on local residents.

Where are the plans up to at this stage?

The Development Application for the Subiaco site was lodged with the City of Subiaco on 2 September 2022. Key to the application is the change of use of the existing building from 'Office' to 'Residential Building' and internal alterations to the existing building – the City of Subiaco has determined the Residential Building zoning as the most appropriate. The site is 802 square metres and has a 2014m frontage to Bagot Road. The Certificate of Title does not contain any limitations, interest, encumbrances or notifications.

The proposed land use involves short-term accommodation for people aged 16 to 24. The building is a single storey with pedestrian and vehicle access from Bagot Road. It is not heritage listed nor located in a heritage area. It is currently zoned 'Urban' under the Metropolitan Region Scheme (MRS) and 'Residential' with a density of R20 under the Local Planning Scheme No. 5 (LPS5).

How much parking will be provided?

The current plan includes four standard car parking bays and two drop-off (or short stay) bays. Residents will be dropped off to the site by friends/family/others and the people dropping off the residents are not permitted to stay on-site. Residents will only arrive during normal business hours and not after 5pm or on weekends.

The four car bays will be adequate for the small number of staff/volunteers working at the site at any one time.

Who is paying for the Sanctuary?

The State Government is providing \$3 million to set up this pilot scheme, in response to the growing mental health crisis and the lack of services currently available for young people.