

## **YOUTH SANCTUARY PLANS – TO SAVE YOUNG LIVES**

***A new service aimed at tackling the critical issue of youth suicide is taking shape in Perth.***

***It is a low-profile, self-contained residential Youth Sanctuary, proposed to be located at Samaritans House in Subiaco.***

***This important service will provide early-intervention support for up to five young people at a time, aged between 16 and 24, who are experiencing suicidal thoughts.***

***This service – delivered by Ruah Community Services and Samaritans WA, co-designed and evaluated by Telethon Kids Institute, and funded by the State Government – will save young lives.***

### **The great need**

Suicide is the leading cause of death among young people in Western Australia, surpassing even the number of young people who die on our roads.

It knows no socio-economic or geographical boundaries – and there may be no outward signs of a young person in crisis or at-risk. It could be your sister, daughter, friend – or someone like them – needing support.

Suicidal ideation or thoughts are not confined to people who are suffering from mental illness or in acute distress. Currently, young people experiencing suicidal thoughts have limited options, and are likely to be taken to a hospital emergency department (ED).

EDs can be confronting places and are not designed to offer ongoing support or follow-up young people experiencing suicidal thoughts.

This service is being established in response to the growing mental health crisis and lack of services currently available for young people. This new service will be an early intervention. The critical difference with this service is that it is *not* an acute medical service, young people in WA will not require a medical mental health diagnosis in order to access it. They can be referred by anyone including family or even themselves (self-referral). This means that young people will be able to receive active support and intervention before reaching crisis point.

At present there is a huge unmet need for ‘non-medical’ options such as the Youth Sanctuary. The service is expected to help up to 300 young people and their families each year.

The Youth Sanctuary fills an important gap in support for young people. As evidenced by the Maytree model that has been successfully supporting people for the past 20 years, Youth Sanctuary will offer a quiet, discreet place for young people that are thinking of suicide.

### **Good neighbours**

A sense of welcoming community is important for all of us.

Residents at the Youth Sanctuary, and those people who work with them, want and need a welcoming community – and, in return, will be good neighbours too.

The residence in Subiaco will be a short-term home for up to just five young people and only five staff and/or volunteers at any one time.

The Youth Sanctuary is not a drop-in service and the address will only be provided to service users who have been pre-qualified as being eligible for early intervention support. The small number of places provided, and the discreet nature of the service, means the sanctuary will have minimal, if any, impact on local residents.

In fact, it is expected the residence will have less impact and be a less obvious presence than the location's previous use as a headquarters for Samaritans WA to support vulnerable members of our community, as well as a training centre.

It is appreciated that the location is already a busy thoroughfare, particularly during peak hour, however the use of this Samaritans WA site as a Youth Sanctuary will make no material difference to traffic in the area.

Residents will not be able to park on site and 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 the building's previous use. There will be no shift changes after 10pm or before 6am.

Residents, with the support of experienced staff and volunteer counsellors, will be working quietly and calmly on their health and wellbeing. As this is an early-intervention service, with guests thoroughly screened to determine that they are not in acute crisis, no disruption to neighbours is expected due to antisocial or distressed behaviour.

#### **How it will work**

The Sanctuary is being established by organisations which have expertise in youth suicide support, mental health services and research evaluation – Ruah Community Services, Samaritans WA and the Telethon Kids Institute.

It is based on an international model, operated by Maytree UK, which has been working successfully for 20 years.

Young people experiencing suicidal thoughts will be able to access The Sanctuary without a medical mental health diagnosis.

They can be referred by anyone including family, or they can refer themselves and get active support and intervention before reaching crisis point. The approach will be non-medical, offering a trauma-informed therapeutic environment - early intervention in a safe space.

The residents will be able to stay for a maximum of four nights, during which they will have 24/7 support and supervision. Other than the residents and staff/volunteers, visitors will be limited.

Residents can arrive during normal business hours, but not after 5pm or on weekends. The proposed plan includes four standard car parking bays and two drop-off (or short stay) bays.

The Sanctuary will have all existing signage removed, will not be advertised and it will not be a 'drop in' service. All residents will be carefully assessed to ensure they are appropriate for The Sanctuary.

Young people who are in crisis or experiencing suicidal ideation in the context of alcohol or other drug use, or psychosis, will be identified by the assessment process as not appropriate participants for this service and will be referred elsewhere.

### **Experienced providers**

The Youth Sanctuary has \$3 million in funding from the State Government and is being delivered by three outstanding community service organisations:

#### **Ruah Community Services**

Ruah has the largest Peer workforce in WA. It will provide people with lived experience to work at the Youth Sanctuary, connecting and supporting the young residents in a unique and effective way.

Ruah Community Services has been supporting and empowering vulnerable and disadvantaged people to create positive change in their lives for more than 60 years – leading innovation and delivering tailored, wrap-around support for people experiencing mental health challenges, homelessness, family and domestic violence, and, as a result, needing legal advice and support.

#### **Samaritans WA**

Samaritans WA is a part of the worldwide network of more than 400 centres that have been working in suicide prevention space and wellbeing for over 50 years and its one of the oldest phone helplines in Australia. Samaritans WA will provide trained volunteer counsellors to provide humanistic person-centered emotional support to Youth Sanctuary residents.

Samaritans WA approach recognises recovery as an individual, unique and deeply personal process that fosters connectedness, hope, meaning and empowerment. The goal is not only reduction of negative feelings but rather to promote personal wellbeing, build capability and foster resilience. Ultimately, having a sense of purpose and believing that the life is worth living.

#### **Telethon Kids Institute**

The Telethon Kids Institute is one of the largest and most successful medical research institutes in Australia, comprising a dedicated and diverse team of more than 1,000 staff and students focused on making a difference in the lives of children and young people through excellence in research.

The Institute has a particular focus on youth mental health research and evaluation through its [Embrace](#) team, which aims to identify the origins and causes of mental health difficulties in children and young people, develop and test new interventions, and facilitate effective and efficient translation of findings into clinical practice and policy. Under Prof Ashleigh Lin and [Dr Nicole Hill](#) – recognised as a national leader in youth suicide prevention research and evaluation of community programs in this space – the Institute has extensive expertise in evidence-based approaches to youth suicide prevention.

#### **Timing**

Funding has been received and the residential facility has been designed, with no external changes required of the building. The development plans for the internal alterations and Change of Use application from 'Office' to 'Residential Building' are currently with the City of Subiaco with the matter listed on the agenda for the Council Meeting scheduled for February 21.

It is hoped that the Youth Sanctuary could be operational by the second half of 2023.

#### **Further information**

If you would like further information about this service, or to make a comment, please email [zrinka@thesamaritans.org.au](mailto:zrinka@thesamaritans.org.au)