

## **YOUTH SANCTUARY – EARLY INTERVENTION SUPPORT TO SAVE YOUNG LIVES**

***A new service aimed at tackling the critical issue of youth suicide is set to launch in October 2023.***

***This important service will provide early-intervention support for up to five young people (aged 16–24) at a time, 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 diagnosed with mental illness or those 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 limited services currently available for young people. This will be an early intervention service. 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 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 be a therapeutic space offering opportunity for young people experiencing suicidal thoughts to reflect and learn new skills.

### **How it works**

The Sanctuary has been co-designed and will be delivered by organisations which have world-leading expertise in youth suicide support and mental health services – Telethon Kids Institute, Ruah Community Services and Samaritans WA. Research evaluation will be provided by Telethon Kids Institute through its Embrace team, which has a particular focus on youth mental health research.

The Sanctuary 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 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, supervision and therapeutic care from a trained team of staff, including a clinical psychologist, support coordinators, Peer workers and support counsellors. Other than the residents and staff/volunteers, visitors will be limited.

All residents will be assessed to ensure they are appropriate for the Sanctuary.

Young people 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 to support the pilot program and \$508,000 from Lotterywest for refurbishment of the premises. The service 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 with and supporting the young residents in a unique and effective way.

Ruah Community Services have 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 the suicide prevention and wellbeing space for more than 50 years and provides one of the oldest phone helplines in Australia. Samaritans WA will provide trained volunteer support counsellors to provide humanistic, person-centered emotional support to Youth Sanctuary residents.

The 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 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 1,300 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 Professor 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**

Development approval for the Youth Sanctuary site has been received and the residence is currently undergoing internal renovations to make it fit for purpose.

Renovations are on track to be completed by October 2023 and the service will be operational from then.

Referrals will be open approximately six weeks prior to opening.

Notifications of service and referral opening will be posted on the Ruah Community Services and Samaritans WA websites.

## **Further information**

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