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**Acting for the Future – A Model of Best Practise for using drama workshops and professional theatre performances to promote positive mental health and to raise awareness of issues surrounding suicide and suicide prevention**

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# Acting for the Future

A Model of Best Practice for using drama workshops and professional theatre performances to promote positive mental health and to raise awareness of issues surrounding suicide and suicide prevention

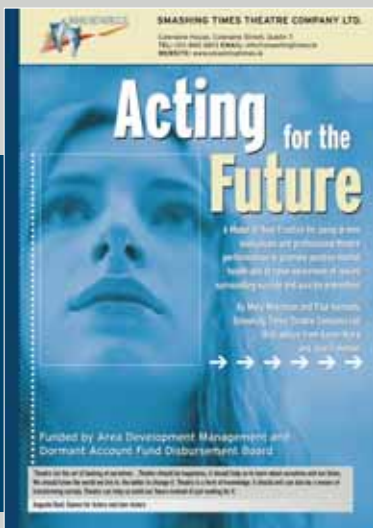
By Mary Moynihan and Paul Kennedy  
Smashing Times Theatre Company Ltd  
With advice from Karen Ward  
and Joan Freeman



Funded by Area Development Management and  
Dormant Account Fund Disbursement Board

'This is theatre – the art of looking at ourselves ...Theatre should be happiness, it should help us to learn about ourselves and our times. We should know the world we live in, the better to change it. Theatre is a form of knowledge; it should and can also be a means of transforming society. Theatre can help us build our future instead of just waiting for it.'

Augusto Boal, Games for Actors and non-Actors



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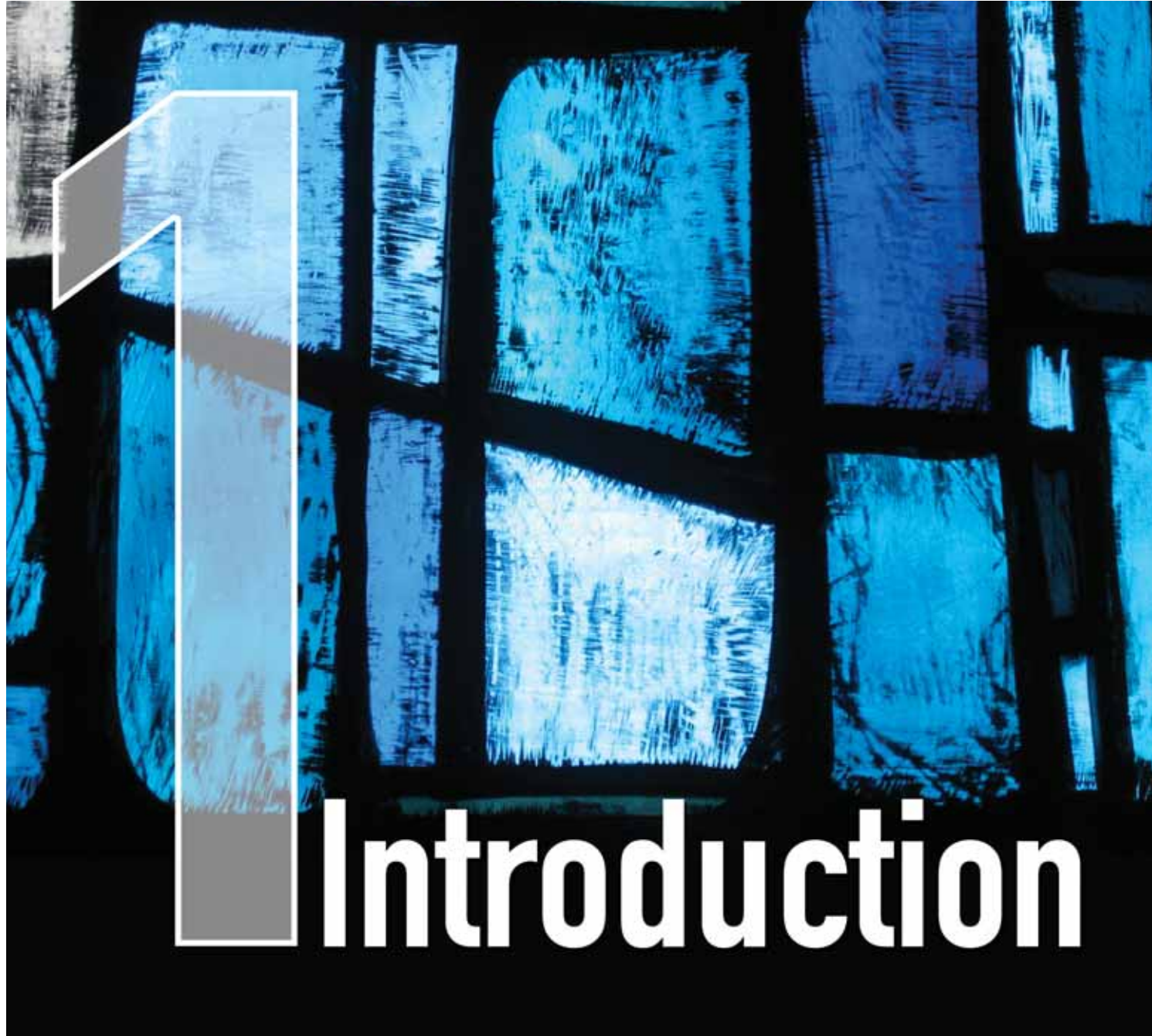
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## USING THIS BOOKLET

### This booklet contains:

- A documentation of the Acting for the Future project which used participative drama workshops and a professional theatre performance to raise awareness of issues surrounding suicide and suicide prevention and was implemented by Smashing Times Theatre Company from January to December 2005. The project was funded by Area Development Management and Dormant Account Fund Disbursement Board.
- A Model of Best Practice for conducting drama workshops with adults and young people to promote positive mental health

and to raise awareness of issues surrounding suicide and suicide prevention. The drama workshop models were developed as part of Acting for the Future.

- Additional support information including terms of reference and lists of recommended reading and support organisations.

Acting for the Future is innovative in that it uses drama and theatre as artistic and creative processes in their own right and makes use of those processes to raise awareness of a specific issue – positive mental health and suicide prevention. Young people and adults have access to a quality arts experience while developing a stronger awareness of the issues raised.

### This booklet can be used as:

- A resource document for individuals and organisations that details a Model of Best Practice for using drama workshops and a professional theatre performance and additional events to raise awareness of a specific theme.
- A guide for professional drama facilitators and other suitably qualified personnel wishing to carry out drama workshops to raise awareness of positive mental health and suicide prevention. The booklet is a guide only and we would recommend that drama facilitators undergo training with Smashing Times Theatre Company in how to conduct the drama workshop models outlined in this booklet.



# SMASHING TIMES THEATRE COMPANY LTD

**S**mashing Times Theatre Company is a professional theatre company committed to innovation, the creative process, artistic excellence, and equal participation for all. Our vision is for a creative society where theatre is open for all to make or enjoy.

The company was established in 1991 by a group of women actors, who met at the Focus Theatre, Dublin. These women were interested in challenging the elitist position that drama and theatre sometimes holds in Irish society.

- Artistic Director:** Mary Moynihan
- Company Manager:** Freda Manweiler
- Patrons:** Maeve Binchy  
Tim Pat Coogan  
Brian Friel  
Robert Kee
- Board Members:** Margaret Toomey  
Gillian Hackett  
Eric Weitz  
Patricia Kennedy

Smashing Times runs Drama in the Docklands, an on-going Dublin Docklands Development Authority programme that promotes creativity and access to theatre skills in the docklands area of Dublin and is run with City Quay National School and St Joseph's National School, East Wall.

Smashing Times runs two accredited training programmes in partnership with the Mid-Ulster Women's Network and The National University of Ireland/University College Dublin – the accrediting body. The programmes are the Certificate in Community Drama and the Diploma in Community Drama Facilitation Skills. The latter is the first ever course in Ireland to provide accredited training at university level for drama facilitation within a community context. The training is funded by the Cross-Border Consortium under the EU Peace 11 Programme as part-financed by the UK and Irish Governments and aims to develop the use of drama and theatre to address peace building and reconciliation.

Smashing Times Theatre Company is supported by Dublin City Council.



**Dublin City Council**  
Comhairle Cathrach Bhaile Átha Cliath

### Irish Association of Suicidology

- President:** Dan Neville, T.D.
- Chairperson:** Professor Michael Fitzgerald
- Secretary:** Dr. John F. Connolly
- Website:** [www.ias.ie](http://www.ias.ie)
- Address:** 16 New Antrim St, Castlebar, Co Mayo.
- Phone:** 094 9250858
- Fax:** 094 9250859





*Smashing Times Theatre Company: (left to right) Mary Moynihan, Artistic Director; Paul Kennedy, Drama Facilitator; Kate Murphy, Project Coordinator; Freda Manweiler, Company Manager.*

**The Irish Association of Suicidology (IAS) is an all-island association founded in 1996 and has the following objectives:**

- To facilitate communication between clinicians, volunteers, survivors and researchers in all matters relating to suicide and suicidal behaviour
- To promote awareness of the problems of suicide and suicidal behaviour in the general public by holding conferences and workshops and by communication of relevant material through the media
- To ensure that the public is better informed about suicide prevention
- To support and encourage relevant research
- To encourage and support the formation of groups to help those bereaved by suicide

## **SAMARITANS**

Samaritans provides 24-hour confidential emotional support to anyone experiencing personal crisis via its helpline 1850 60 90 90 or email support service [jo@samaritans.org](mailto:jo@samaritans.org). Samaritans volunteers believe expressing difficult or painful emotions and being accepted in confidence can help alleviate crisis and feelings of suicide. Samaritans want to make emotional health and encouraging helpseeking behaviour a mainstream issue. If you would like to find out more about providing time and space for people in crisis, please contact Samaritans' volunteering hotline on 1890 200091.

### **Drama and Theatre as an Art form**

For the purposes of this booklet, the term drama refers to the drama workshop process; the methodology is drama and there is usually not an audience, everyone takes part in the workshop. It can be described as "a collaborative event" (*House of Games*, page xv) which might have one of the following objectives: recreation, learning, experimentation, debate, confidence-building, research into social conflict or even devising a play. The professional drama facilitator guides the drama workshop process and "facilitates, that is, 'makes easy' the task of seizing the theatre language" (*House of Games* page xvi), "not quite a teacher nor a director" (*House of Games*, page xiii). The people taking part in the drama workshop are referred to as participants. The term theatre refers to the production and presentation of a professional piece of work by one or more actors to a public audience.

# Documentation of Acting for the Future

**F**rom January to December 2005 Smashing Times Theatre Company Ltd implemented a project titled **Acting for the Future**, which used participative drama workshops and a professional theatre performance to raise awareness of issues surrounding suicide and suicide prevention. The project was funded by the Area Development Management and Dormant Account Fund Disbursement Board.

## AIMS

To use participative drama workshops and a professional theatre performance to raise awareness of issues surrounding suicide and suicide prevention.

## OUTCOMES

- Ongoing process of research, consultation and interviews.
- Ten participative drama workshops conducted with a range of organisations in which participants were facilitated to explore, through the medium of drama, issues surrounding suicide and suicide prevention.
- Development of an original script addressing issues surrounding suicide and

bereavement by suicide, presented as a professional theatre performance for five performances from 15-19 November, 2005, at The Space, The Helix, DCU, Collins Avenue, Glasnevin, Dublin 9.

- Performances at The Helix followed by post-show discussions during which audience members were invited to discuss the issues raised by the performance with invited guest speakers.
- Five performances on tour to youth and community-based organisations and followed by post-show discussions.
- Distribution of an Information Pack at workshops and performances.
- Presentation of a Documentation Brochure detailing a Model of Best Practice to be made available as a tool for raising awareness of the issues surrounding suicide and suicide prevention. A video of the theatre performance was also presented.
- Presentation of a final report including an independent evaluation.

## RESEARCH, CONSULTATION, COLLABORATION

At the beginning of the project, Smashing Times Theatre Company undertook an

intensive period of research into the issue of suicide, suicide prevention and positive mental health. Ongoing research continued throughout the project. The company contacted a range of support organisations and sourced books, documents, reports and websites in relation to the issue of suicide, suicide prevention and positive mental health.

For each stage of the project, Smashing Times made contacted with a wide range of organisations including support and counselling services, community and educational companies and other interested groups in order to disseminate information on the project. The company contacted a range of organisations to source suitably qualified counsellors to take part in the project and also carried out extensive outreach to identify organisations and schools for the ten participative drama workshops and the outreach performances. Smashing Times and each host organisation worked together to plan and implement the drama workshop, to provide follow up support services and to evaluate how the work went.

Smashing Times established a detailed



plan of action, management and accounting procedures, and full documentation and evaluation procedures for the project. The company contracted an independent evaluator, Rose McCarney BBS (Hons) MMIII (Grad), of T.F.M. Ltd, Derryvally, Ballybay, Co Monaghan and also conducted internal evaluations, both formal and informal throughout the duration of the project.

### PANEL OF ADVISORS

Representatives of organisations working in the area of suicide prevention, research, counselling and the provision of emotional support were approached and invited to sit on a panel of advisors to Smashing Times Theatre Company for the duration of the project. The aim of the panel was to assist Smashing Times, through guidance and advice, in the delivery of the project. The panel members are Dr. John Connolly, Irish Association of Suicidology, Caroline Lennon Nally, Mental Health Promotion/Suicide Prevention Officer, Northern Area of the Health Services Executive, David Binchy, Deputy Director, Dublin Branch Samaritans, Karen Ward, psychotherapist and Dr. Ella Arensman, National Suicide Research

Foundation. A document was drawn up to outline the role and responsibilities of a panel member. Three full panel meetings were held and Smashing Times staff also consulted with individual panel members throughout different stages of the project for guidance and advice. The Panel of Advisors provided an invaluable service throughout the project.

### KEY PERSONNEL

The main artists were Mary Moynihan, writer and theatre consultant; Paul Kennedy, writer and drama workshop facilitator; Ena May, director and Joe O'Byrne, writer. The company manager was Freda Manweiler and Kate Murphy was the project coordinator. The counsellors for the drama workshops and post-show discussions were Karen Ward and Joan Freeman.

### PARTICIPATIVE DRAMA WORKSHOPS AND PARTICIPANT GROUPS

Ten participative drama workshops took place with schools, colleges and communities in Dublin. Mary Moynihan and Paul Kennedy developed the drama workshop model with advice from Joan Freeman and Karen Ward and from the

panel of advisors. A trained drama facilitator working in partnership with a qualified counsellor conducted the workshops. The drama facilitator was Paul Kennedy and the counsellors were Joan Freeman, Karen Ward and Maria Plunkett.

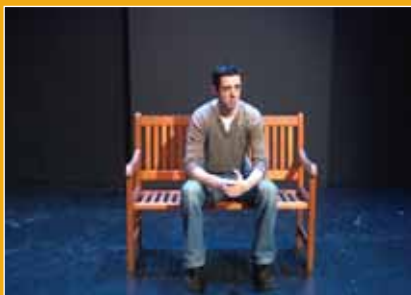
The overall aim of the workshop was to use drama to raise awareness of issues surrounding suicide and suicide prevention and to raise awareness of related mental health issues. They were promoted as accessible and informative – participants did not need to have any previous knowledge of drama and the workshops were open to all those interested in taking part. The drama workshop for schools was aimed at transition, fifth and sixth years only and participation in the workshops was always on a voluntary basis. The workshops were conducted with the following

### Community and educational organisations

- Dublin Institute of Technology, Conservatory of Music and Drama
- HACE, St. Vincent's Trust, Henrietta Street, Dublin
- Axis Arts and Community Centre, Main



## Documentation



Sean O'Boyle (top) and Margaret Toomey (below) performing in *Testimonies* at the Helix Theatre, Dublin.

Street, Ballymun, Dublin and attended by representatives from a range of organisations in Ballymun.

- Pathways Project/A.C.R.G., 1A Parnell Court, Dublin
- Shanty Education Project, Tallaght, Dublin
- Ringsend and District Community Centre, Thorncastle Street, Ringsend, Dublin

### Secondary schools

- St. Paul's CBS, North Brunswick Street, Dublin
- Westland Row CBS, Dublin
- Blakestown Community School, Dublin (three workshops)

In keeping with best practice, Smashing Times put in place a substantial support structure around the drama workshops and performances and also distributed an information pack including an *Information Leaflet on Suicide Prevention* to all those who attended the drama workshops, performances and post-show discussions.

The workshops provided a professional quality learning experience and were participant-centred and included active participation to suit those involved. The drama workshop environment was supportive to all those in attendance and was found by participants to be empowering.

### MODEL OF BEST PRACTICE

Smashing Times has documented Acting for the Future in order to disseminate best practice methodologies and materials and lessons learned. The drama workshop model developed as part of Acting for the Future has also been documented within this booklet as a model of best practice.

### INTERVIEWS

As part of this project, Smashing Times conducted a series of interviews with people who have suffered loss by suicide and with people who have been through a suicidal crisis and survived. With their permission, the stories were then adapted and became the basis for the performance script of *Testimonies*. We would like to offer our sincere thanks to those who took part in the interview process.

### PROFESSIONAL PERFORMANCES

A rehearsed reading of a full-length play *The Empty Chair* by Joe O'Byrne was developed as part of the project and presented at Pearse Street Library on 11th November 2005. It was directed by the writer and the cast was Gail Fitzpatrick, Phelim

Drew, Rebecca Ryan and Stephen O'Rourke. A professional theatre performance of *Testimonies* by Mary Moynihan and Paul Kennedy was developed as part of the project for performance at the Helix Theatre and consists of three dramatic monologues adapted from the experiences of those who have lost loved ones to suicide and from the experiences of those who have been through a suicidal crisis and survived. The script was developed from research conducted by both writers, from feedback from the ten participative drama workshops and from the interviews referred to above.

*Testimonies* was presented at the Helix Theatre, Dublin from the 15th to the 19th November 2005. Outreach performances took place with three Dublin secondary schools (listed above) from the 7th to the 9th of November and with St. Vincent's Trust, Dublin on Thursday 10th November 2005 – presented in association with HACE. Each performance of *Testimonies* was followed by a post-show discussion with counsellors (Karen Ward and Joan Freeman) and invited guest speakers from the Samaritans and other organisations. Audience members were invited to discuss the issues raised by the performances. The *Information Leaflet on Suicide Prevention* was also distributed at each performance.

*Testimonies* was directed by Ena May, the cast were Sean O'Boyle, Bibbi Larsson and Margaret Toomey, lighting design was by Eamon Fox and costume design by Maria Blaney. The first monologue, *A Day Out* by Paul Kennedy, was performed by Sean O'Boyle and tells the story of two friends in their twenties and their last day together. The second monologue, *In One Breath* by Mary Moynihan, was performed by Bibbi Larsson and portrays a woman in the eye of the storm, battling mental illness. The third monologue, titled *Is There Anything We Can Do?* by Paul Kennedy, was performed by Margaret Toomey, and is a dramatic performance of a mother fighting the spectre of suicide hanging over her family.

The following are sample quotes from press coverage of *Testimonies* highlighting the success of the work:

### Colin Murphy, *Village Magazine* 17-23 November 2005

"The three actors have the gift of immediacy and authenticity and pull the audience in...credible and compelling...outstanding



*Bibbi Larsson and Naoise Moynihan Ó Bradaigh in a publicity still for Testimonies.*

performances...crafted, nuanced, searing...raw power... the monologues (are) compelling... moving... this play should find an engaged and passionate audience for its sensitive storytelling."

"Companies like Smashing Times... consistently produce work that is self-consciously political, work that seeks to provoke and engage debate about the way we organise society and our lives. They take a risk; the risk of being worthy, earnest and didactic; the risk of failing to resolve their chosen issues into a coherent and compelling drama; the risk of wearing their woolly liberal hearts on their sleeves, of being, fatally, uncool. In *Testimonies*, Smashing Times have courted those risks and survived. The three monologues that make up *Testimonies* each deal with suicide. What is amazing is they manage to do so without being maudlin, angst-ridden or sentimental..."

These are the people left behind, not gifted with some knowledge or insight from beyond the grave as to what slowly and then finally drove their loved ones to kill themselves. The struggling to understand and labouring with guilt is the most moving aspect of the piece."

**Gerry Colgan, *The Irish Times*, 21st November 2005**

"Smashing Times Theatre Company has a deserved reputation for exploring social issues with sensitivity and in depth. This new work deals with the difficult aspect of suicide in three monologues based on interviews with people who lost loved ones to self-destruction... let me say first that the plays, directed by Ena May, are true theatre, reaching out and embracing their listeners. On that bedrock, the ensuing conversations were structured and meaningful...the exchanges were extraordinary. Individual members of the audience spoke with courage about their experiences and found sensitive and experienced listeners on the stage...this work points the way rather than draws maps. Smashing Times must continue with it."

**Jerome Reilly, *Sunday Independent*, 13th November 2005**

"A new play about suicide...has turned into an unexpected theatrical hit among young people... the biggest response to the play has been amongst young people... when we brought the play to schools we have been surprised by the awareness of the problem and the intelligence of the

questions in the post-play discussions. It has really struck a chord" .

**POST-SHOW DISCUSSIONS**

After each performance of *Testimonies* and the rehearsed reading of *The Empty Chair*, a post-show discussion was facilitated to explore the issues raised in the plays. The discussions were chaired by selected chairpersons and a panel of experts (minimum of three) took questions and comments from the audience. A counsellor was present on the panel each night to take questions as well as to be available privately after the performance. Panel members included representatives from the Samaritans, the Rhiannon Clinic, Unity Counselling and Aware and also members of the Panel of Advisors for the Acting for the Future project and members of Smashing Times Theatre Company. The writer Paul Kennedy and the actors also sat on the panel and took questions from the audience.

**Quotes from Audience Members at the post-show discussions**

"Well done, it was excellent, very, very moving."

"The show was extremely powerful,

## Documentation



*Bibbi Larsson in Testimonies (top) and panel members and actors at post-show discussions.*

congratulations to the actors and company.”

“For the very first time Smashing Times are taking this show out and children are having the opportunity to talk openly about the effects of suicide.”

“The Department of Education, they should fund this show to go into every school in the country, it is excellent and extremely important.”

“This work is excellent...we don’t do enough emotional training (in schools) and that is why drama is so important, particularly for young people in schools.” (from a secondary school principal)

“This work is so powerful, I wish there was more of this (in schools).” (from a secondary school teacher)

“What Smashing Times are contributing to theatre is cutting edge work currently not being done by anybody else; no one is addressing themes in this way. Theatre can be multi-faceted and this is an input that is extremely important. This is serious thought-provoking and provocative work that is really impressive and valid.”

“Taking on a huge social problem yet not beating you over the head, subtle, character-driven work, well done.”

### PUBLICITY

The company conducted an ongoing PR strategy including mail-outs to a range of organisations, contact by press release and telephone with the press (newspapers, radio and television), the distribution of posters and fliers for the drama workshops, rehearsed reading and public performances and public advertising in the newspapers for the performances.

### EVALUATION AND DOCUMENTATION

An evaluation form was included in the information packs distributed at the end of each drama workshop. The aim of the evaluation form was to provide the opportunity for participants to comment on the presentation of the drama workshop, the level of increased awareness of the issues explored in the drama workshop and to make any further comments or suggestions. The evaluations were reviewed by Smashing Times and the workshop model was developed by incorporating feedback from previous sessions so as to develop and ensure best practice. Documentation procedures included photographs, detailed monitoring and ongoing preparation of management and financial reports. A professional video of *Testimonies* was made and edited by High Wire Creative Editing.

Based on feedback from the evaluation forms, the majority of participants indicated that their awareness of the issues surrounding suicide and suicide prevention had increased as a result of attending the workshops. The following are a sample of quotes from the evaluations:

#### Participants, Pathways Project

“I thought it would have been a sensitive subject to deal with but I enjoyed it and I learned a lot.”

“I learned a lot about suicide and would be less fearful in talking about it and more tolerant.”

“Good feeling generated. Encouraged people to participate.”

#### Participants, DIT Rathmines

“I’m more aware of practical things to look out for – thank you!”

“I am delighted this project is going ahead because awareness and willingness to approach the subject is urgently needed in many geographical and social areas, thank you.”

#### Participants, St. Vincent’s Trust

“Facilitators established really safe atmosphere and good progression into a meatier section of the workshop.”

“It made me aware of the many issues that can create the way to suicide.”

“Good participation of the people and a very interesting topic.”

#### Participants, Axis Arts and Community Centre, Ballymun

“I will be more aware of the tell-tale signs and hope to react to them differently instead of giving the brush-off.”

“I like the idea of looking at serious issues in a creative way. Somehow that approach seems less intrusive.”

“A great idea – it should be brought into secondary schools.”

#### Participants, An Cosán/Shanty Education Project, Tallaght

“What about presenting this workshop in schools, particularly in rural areas where levels of suicide are high? Also perhaps they should be aimed at young men.”

“I learned that it’s very important not to promise secrecy to the suicidal person, that it’s important to share it with someone else – to seek help yourself.”

#### Participants, Ringsend and District Community Centre, Ringsend

“Very worthwhile – I would like to see



more of this work available to more people."

"Suicide was something I haven't really had any thoughts on. The workshop made me more aware of the issue."

"The medium of drama is a very powerful way of amplifying issues central to suicide."

#### **Westland Row Christian Brothers School**

"This is a great workshop and everyone should get to do it. I would love to do it again."

"I think it helps to talk about it because it's like going around with a weight on your shoulders which affects every part of your life, your social life and your school work."

"Now we know what kinds of signs to look out for. We knew some of the stuff before but we know more now."

#### **St. Paul's Christian Brothers School, North Brunswick Street, Dublin**

"I felt that this workshop was excellent as it dealt with a serious issue in a positive and light way."

"I thought it was brilliant because we all had to work as a group and help each other."

"It was a great experience."

"I thought it was excellent as it was very physical and I really liked the trust exercises."

"The activities for the drama group were good and the information given on suicide was good to help awareness."

"I felt good after the workshop as it was fun to improvise and act out a drama for an audience and the activities were creative and fun."

"I liked the drama workshops as we played many trust games that were fun. I also enjoyed the acting when we performed a small play at the end."

"I thought the drama workshop was excellent because the whole class got to act and make up their own plays. Not having to remember lines took the pressure off us."

"I found out that people that talk about suicide are more likely to commit suicide. I also learned to trust people."

"I learned a lot about suicide and how to prevent it, like to talk to people and also that you should tell someone if someone else is going to die by suicide."

"I would really like to do it again because it was a fun experience."

"I would like to thank the two helpers who came to our school and gave us a really good understanding of suicide."

"I really enjoyed it and would love to attend again."

#### **Blakestown Community School, Blanchardstown, Dublin 15**

"I enjoyed it greatly and the people were extremely nice."

"I enjoyed it very much and I think it was really fun. There were so many activities that we have learned, how to concentrate and how to trust each other."

"I thought it was excellent because it was good fun and a laugh. It made people more confident and it helped you to speak to people that you never spoke to before."

"The drama was very good and interesting and funny."

"It was very good because it showed us what to do if one of our friends was ever to attempt suicide and who to talk to about it."

"It was a great way to get to know more people in my year. It was good to pull together and help each other. Also making up our own plays was really interesting."

"I haven't been able to act in front of people since I was in 2nd class but I was able to yesterday because I felt very relaxed."

**Companies like Smashing Times consistently produce work that is self-consciously political, work that seeks to provoke and engage debate about the way we organise society and our lives**

*Village Magazine 17-23 November 2005*

"The techniques that were taught made me feel more confident about myself and made it easier for me to talk in front of a large crowd."

"I loved the acting especially at the end where we were able to make up our own play."

"I learned some ideas about suicide prevention or positive mental health from this workshop. I learned that if someone is talking about suicide and keeps on talking about it that it means that no one is listening and that you should try to help them."

"I've learned how to recognise if someone is suicidal and I've learned how to cope with that and what steps to follow."

"I thought the drama workshop was very good, I really enjoyed the trust exercises and I felt really relaxed and was really able to put all my trust in the other person."

"I thought it was a great experience and I was glad to be part of it."

"I think using drama to discuss important issues is a good idea because it has a

greater impact when you see things happen than when you hear of something that happened."

#### **SUCCESSFUL FEATURES OF THE PROJECT**

The drama workshops were attended by 210 adults and young people and over 1,000 people benefited directly from this project. Overall project outputs were ten participative drama workshops with the distribution of an information pack at each workshop, the presentation of five professional performances at The Helix theatre, Dublin and five outreach performances on tour with all performances followed by post-show discussions with invited guest speakers, the making of a video on the performance of *Testimonies* and the presentation of a documentation brochure and model of best practice.

Feedback from formal and informal evaluations indicate that the work was of a

high quality and that people had access to a quality arts experience while developing a stronger awareness of the issues raised. There was a quality, empowering experience within each drama workshop and the performances and post-show discussions. Most importantly, feedback and evaluations strongly indicate that awareness of the issues surrounding suicide and suicide prevention has increased as a result of attending the drama workshops, performances and post-show discussions. Drama and theatre have proved to be a powerful and accessible medium for dealing with such a sensitive subject.

Following the run in the Helix Theatre, Smashing Times were invited by the Samaritans to present *Testimonies* at the launch of their Suicide Awareness Month. The performance took place in the Bank of Ireland Arts Centre, Dublin on 28th January 2006 and was attended by the Lord Mayor, Councillor Catherine Byrne. Smashing Times have also been invited to present a



Bibbi Larsson performing in *Testimonies*.

monologue from *Testimonies* at the newly-opened Irish Centre for the Prevention of Self-Harm to an invited audience of doctors, psychiatrists, counsellors and other professionals working in or interested in the area of suicide prevention.

Smashing Times representatives were asked to speak at the Irish Association of Suicidology conference *Partnerships for Reducing Youth Suicide*, which took place at the Ormond Hotel in Kilkenny on 9th December 2005. The speakers found the response to the project to be very positive.

There has been a great response to the project from schools, support organisations and individuals. Following the media coverage of the plays and public attendance at the shows, Smashing Times Theatre Company received many requests to deliver workshops or perform the plays at various venues and schools around the country. Smashing Times is currently facilitating the training of six professional drama facilitators in how to use the drama workshop model developed through Acting for the Future.

Smashing Times Theatre Company has delighted to continue ongoing collaboration with three professional support groups, the Samaritans, the Irish Association of Suicidology and the Irish Centre for the Prevention of Self-Harm, to promote each of the organisations' own work by using

and counsellors for their wonderful expertise and support over the past year. We extend a very special thanks to all those who took part in the interviews and to all those who took part in the drama workshops and theatre performances. We extend a very sincere thanks to all the

**The drama workshops were attended by 210 adults and young people and over 1,000 people benefited directly from this project**

elements of the project Acting for the Future. The company continues to receive full praise and support from individuals and organisations in relation to the quality of the work and its continuation.

Smashing Times Theatre Company Ltd would like to thank our panel of advisors

artists involved in the project for their expertise and commitment. Finally we would like to thank the Dormant Account Funds for supporting this very worthwhile project.

# Drama Workshop

## Models



### INTRODUCTION TO THE DRAMA WORKSHOP MODELS

The two drama workshop models outlined in this document are introductory workshops only, a first step in raising awareness of a particular issue. A range of themes are introduced in order to begin a journey of questioning and exploration. Additional workshops are required to develop these themes further and Smashing Times are aiming to develop further workshops in these areas particularly in relation to positive mental health.

Both models require a minimum running time of three hours. Each model can be adapted to run for more than one session, which allows for more time for discussion and improvisation. Both workshops are open to all those interested in taking part. The drama workshop for young people is designed to take place in secondary schools and is aimed at transition, fifth and sixth years only. Participants do not need to have previous drama and theatre experience. Participation in the workshop should always be voluntary. The recommended maximum number in attendance is twenty (minimum eight).

Each workshop does not aim to deal with the following areas: bereavement counselling; therapeutic issues in relation to suicide; psychoanalytical or psychiatric aspects of those at risk of suicide. The emphasis in the workshop is squarely on issues of awareness and it should not be seen as having a strong therapeutic element. Therefore it may not be suitable for those who have recently lost a loved one through suicide.

### SUPPORT STRUCTURE AND GUIDELINES FOR PLANNING A DRAMA WORKSHOP TO PROMOTE POSITIVE MENTAL HEALTH AND TO RAISE AWARENESS OF ISSUES SURROUNDING SUICIDE AND SUICIDE PREVENTION

Smashing Times put a strong support structure in place around each drama workshop, performance and post-show discussion. It is the responsibility of the drama facilitator and host organisations to ensure emotional safety and best practice would be to make sure there is a strong support structure in place within and around each workshop to include:

- Each drama workshop facilitated by an

experienced drama facilitator and accompanied by a qualified counsellor.

- Counsellor available to talk to people during and after each workshop.
- Counsellor available **on call** for a minimum period of twenty-four hours after each workshop.
- Distribution of an **information pack** to participants containing essential contact references and support information (see below).
- Detailed **pre-planning** is essential. This includes meetings, ongoing correspondence and discussion prior to and after each workshop. Areas you need to clarify include contact personnel, aims and objectives, outcomes, a profile of the host organisation and/or participants, length and number of workshops, numbers attending, support structures, evaluation procedures etc.
- A main contact to be identified within each organisation hosting a workshop and this person is available to participants as a contact in the days and weeks after the workshop (particularly important for schools).
- Each workshop presented as part of a **series** of workshops/events. For example Smashing Times provide a performance



## Drama Workshop Models

and post-show discussion plus follow-up workshops conducted by the Samaritans and the Irish Association of Suicidology.

- The workshops in schools should be linked to the SPHE programme.
- The information pack for the schools should be given to the identified contact within each school and to the teachers well in advance of the workshop taking place and a structure put in place for students to work on the information pack with their teachers outside of the workshop.
- Full **documentation** and **evaluation** procedures implemented for each workshop

Many of the above points may also apply to the professional theatre performances and post-show discussions.

The **Information Pack** for the drama workshop contained:

- *Information Leaflet on Suicide Prevention* (see page 28) prepared by Smashing Times with advice from the panel of advisors and containing:
  - A guide to some common myths and facts about suicide
  - Signs for suicidal intent
  - Taking Action
  - List of support services
- *Don't let your Tensions Take Over* leaflet from Mental Health Ireland
- An information leaflet from the Samaritans
- A workshop evaluation form to be completed and returned at the end of each workshop (see sample evaluation form on page 27).

The pack for the schools also contained a copy of *Young People's Mental Health – A report of the results from the lifestyle and coping survey*, prepared by the National Suicide Research Foundation, 2004. The report is available to download from the National Suicide Research Foundation website or by contacting them at 1 Perrott Avenue, College Road, Cork.

**Tel:** 021 4277499

**Email:** nsrf@iol.ie **Web:** www.nsrff.ie.

This report contains information on strategies for dealing with issues such as bullying, drugs and alcohol addiction, bereavement, relationships, etc.

### Additional Guidelines for Planning a Drama Workshop

- If you are unfamiliar with the **venue**, it is advisable to make arrangements to see it in advance of the workshop to ensure, for example, that chairs are available, the

space is big enough and pieces of furniture can be moved out of the way. Ensure the room is private and quiet and not in public use. Always check accessibility for people with disabilities. Always give yourself plenty of time to get to the venue with plenty of time to set-up beforehand. Advise participants in advance to wear comfortable clothing and practical shoes and, where necessary, ensure they have contact details for the venue.

- Plan well in advance to ensure any equipment you may need is available and to ensure handouts are ready.
- Are childcare facilities available, if required?
- Have relevant **health and safety statements** or codes of practice been identified and is there appropriate **insurance** in place to cover all relevant personnel?
- What are your procedures for **documentation**? For example (and where applicable) recording aims and objectives, schedules, contracts and agreements, minutes of meetings, keeping correspondence, documenting codes of practice and evaluation procedures and organising photographs, audio or video recordings.
- It is important to **evaluate** your work so as to work towards and maintain best practice. For example do a head-count at the start of each drama workshop, take down people's names and contact details, give time at the end for verbal feedback, distribute an evaluation form at the end of each workshop, carry out self-evaluations and ensure there is ongoing communication with the host organisation. Incorporate feedback from previous workshops so as to develop and ensure best practice. Aim to identify what is working well and what areas can be improved on. If funding permits, employ an **independent evaluator**, particularly if you are doing a series of workshops or a larger project and this should be planned well in advance. Always **prepare** well in advance and ensure your workshop plan is of a **high quality** and has the **ethos** of empowerment, partnership, equality and inclusiveness.

### Role of the Counsellor

The counsellor is present at the drama workshop in a three-fold capacity:

- To deliver section two of each workshop 'Input from the Counsellor' and to discuss the content of the workshop handout, the *Information Leaflet on Suicide Prevention*. The counsellor speaks about suicide

prevention and intervention highlighting assertive behaviour and coping skills for the workshops in schools and highlighting misplaced guidelines and prevention and intervention skills for the workshops with adults.

- To 'tune into' the group and present and 'steer' the above section in a manner and language that will be heard by the group whether it is adults or students.
- To be present in case any part of the workshop brings up peoples 'personal processes' that may lead them to require the need of a counsellor on site. And also, to present the 'face' of counselling as an empathic, 'normal' person. If counselling is required this takes place privately outside of the drama workshop space.

The counsellor needs to be fully experienced in the area of suicide prevention and suicide awareness. As a good working relationship develops between the counsellor and the drama facilitator, the counsellor may take on a more active role, for example he/she can assist the drama facilitator when giving guidance to the groups as they prepare their improvisations. However, especially at the beginning, it is important for roles to be clearly demarcated. The drama facilitator is the person **leading** the workshop and the counsellor provides assistance within clearly defined areas. The counsellor must be present for the full duration of every workshop and takes an active part in the games and exercises.

### A MODEL OF BEST PRACTICE FOR CONDUCTING A DRAMA WORKSHOP WITH ADULTS TO PROMOTE POSITIVE MENTAL HEALTH AND TO RAISE AWARENESS OF ISSUES SURROUNDING SUICIDE AND SUICIDE PREVENTION

**The overall aim of the workshop is to use drama to raise awareness of issues surrounding suicide and suicide prevention and to raise awareness of related mental health issues. Please refer to Support Structures and Guidelines for Planning a Drama Workshop on page 12.**

### WORKSHOP AIMS

Using drama games, exercises and improvisation to:

- Explore issues around suicide prevention and positive mental health
- Examine some common myths and facts

about suicide

- Begin an exploration into factors that may contribute to suicide
- Identify guidelines for intervention
- Investigate the implementation of the guidelines for intervention
- Examine some of the cultural factors in Ireland which may make it difficult to discuss issues of mental health

## LEARNING OUTCOMES

On completion of the drama workshop participants will have a knowledge of:

- Issues around suicide and suicide prevention and positive mental health
- Guidelines for intervention
- A list of support services that are available

The workshop is divided into three sections:

### Section One: Drama Games and Exercises

This section, which lasts approximately one hour, is facilitated by the drama facilitator and requires a level of physical activity from the participants. Its purpose is to help participants relax, to build up group morale and trust, and to explore various issues around the theme of suicide intervention and mental well-being.

### Section Two: Input from the Counsellor

This section, lasting thirty minutes, is facilitated by the counsellor who discusses the content of the workshop handout, the *Information Leaflet on Suicide Prevention* (see page 28). The main myths and facts surrounding suicide are discussed as well as key signs of suicidal behaviour and guidelines for taking action.

### Section Three: Improvisations

This section lasts for ninety minutes. Participants prepare and act out short improvisations (short scenes that participants prepare and act out in their own words) on one of the contributory factors to suicide and explore how the guidelines for intervention may be implemented. The workshop concludes with a **wind down** and **evaluation**.

## SECTION ONE: DRAMA GAMES AND EXERCISES

The drama games and exercises should be taken in the following order. They require a level of physical participation and each exercise is followed by a short discussion (outlined below):

### Energy Circle

- 1) Form a circle.

- 2) Drama Facilitator makes eye contact with the person to his/her immediate right and claps his/her hands.
- 3) This person then makes a similar gesture to the person on their immediate right, passing the clap on.
- 4) Allow the clap to move all around the circle a number of times.
- 5) Drama Facilitator then changes the direction of the clap so that it passes to the person on their immediate left and passes all the way around.
- 6) When this is clearly established, the facilitator then explains that each individual in the circle can then pass the clap energy to his/her immediate right **or** left.
- 7) When this is established, the facilitator introduces a sound, for example 'yo' or 'ho' or 'ha', so that participants clap and make this sound simultaneously as they pass energy around the circle.
- 8) Facilitator can then replace the word 'yo' with 'hello'.
- 9) When group are proficient at this, facilitator can then establish the rule that 'hello' is sent in a right direction and the word 'goodbye' is sent in the left direction.

The function of this exercise is to help participants to relax, to overcome inhibitions, to foster team spirit and to raise their energy levels. The emphasis should be on participation rather than on doing the exercise in an exact way. For people who may be nervous about the workshop, it is an easy way to become involved without anybody being under the spotlight.

### Walking with Eyes Closed – Trust Exercise Number One

- 1) Participants walk around the room randomly, always walking towards an empty space.
- 2) They are asked to stop and break into pairs with the person standing nearest them.
- 3) Each pair chooses to be either A or B.
- 4) A places their hands on B's shoulders and B is asked to close his/her eyes.
- 5) A places a slight pressure on B's shoulders. B begins walking and is guided around the space by A (A is the 'seeing' partner and B is being lead). When this is established, facilitator then asks A to momentarily take their hands off B's shoulders, while B continues to walk without being guided and still with eyes closed. Eyes must be kept closed throughout the exercise.
- 6) A should only allow B to walk a few paces at first and then reapply hands to shoulders. However as they become more

trusting, A can allow B to walk unguided for longer periods. A always walks behind B, even when B is walking unguided.

- 7) A and B can then swap with another pair, C and D (C is leading D). A makes eye contact with C. By nodding their heads, they agree to swap over, so that A now leads D and C now leads B. Allow this to continue so that each pair has swapped over a number of times.
- 8) When this section is completed, go back to the original pairs i.e. A/B, C/D, etc. and reverse positions so that B now leads A and D leads C and carry through steps 4 to 7 with these new combinations.

The function of this exercise is to engender trust in the group and to help people overcome their fears. The facilitator can now begin to explore the concept of trust with the group. The following questions can be asked of participants:

- Who felt very secure doing this exercise with their eyes closed?
- Who felt very insecure?
- What did you feel when your eyes were closed? Fear? Anxiety? Distrust? Safe?
- Where you aware of different people guiding you? The pressure of their hands? Do you feel safer with some people guiding you and less safe with others? Why?
- Does 'trust' play an important part in our overall mental well-being? Why?
- If we are not able to trust others does this cause us to become isolated?
- Can isolation be a factor in causing people's mental health to deteriorate?

The overall thrust of the feedback section from the participants is to get them

- To talk about their feelings. For example they may say 'I felt very anxious walking with my eyes closed' or 'It felt good when I could finally trust someone to guide me safely' and
- To explore some of the mental health consequences of not being able to trust...fear, isolation, loss of confidence, reduced contact with others.

### Running with Eyes Closed – Trust Exercise Number Two

- 1) The group forms a semi circle/horseshoe shape at one end of the room.
- 2) Facilitator explains that he/she will ask someone to volunteer to go to the opposite end of the space directly facing the group and to run towards the group with their eyes closed.
- 3) Facilitator explains the safety features of

## ■ Drama Workshop Models

this exercise. People standing in group in the semi-circle/horseshoe shape should brace their right leg and bend their left leg forward. They should then reach forward a little and extend their arms in an outward direction. Facilitator should conduct the exercise once, allowing the person running to do it with their eyes OPEN. This is to make sure that everyone fully understands the nature of the exercise and its safety features.

- 4) The person who volunteers to run towards the group with their eyes closed should run at a normal pace and not sprint. Establish as a rule that if for any reason the facilitator shouts STOP, that person must stop immediately. The group stays silent as the person runs.
- 5) Explain that the person should have an **objective** (see page 24) as they run and their objective is to sustain the run until the very end/until they are stopped by the group. At this stage the facilitator explains that having an objective is an important concept in drama and theatre and will be referred to again when working on improvisations. The facilitator gives a brief explanation as to what an objective is and why it is important. This is laying the groundwork for later work on improvisations.
- 6) The facilitator tells the person who is going to run to START. The entire group fully extend their arms. As the person runs towards the group, they reach out their hands towards that person's waist and make sure that the person comes to a stationary position safely. Other people in the group can then volunteer to do this exercise. If some people in the group don't want to volunteer to run, that's fine.

The function of this exercise is to help the group to bond and to trust each other. It is more high focus than the previous exercises. At this stage the facilitator can invite the participants to give some feedback on the exercise.

- How did you feel when you were running towards the group with your eyes closed? Fear, anxiety, elation, trust, etc. Again, this is a key question for participants, because they are being encouraged to respond to the exercise at an experiential level.
- When you were running, did you feel the same emotion all the way through, or did it change as you got nearer completion? Usually, people start off confidently, but become more fearful as they approach the moment where they are stopped by the group.

- When you were running with your eyes closed did it feel like you were running a longer distance than you had imagined? Is there a difference between the objective understanding of the distance and the subjective feeling of how far we have run? Usually, the participants will say that the distance seemed (with their eyes closed) to be a great deal longer than they had imagined (with their eyes open). Facilitator can then talk a little about the difference between our objective view of the world and our subjective view of the world. This correlates approximately to the difference between our understanding and our emotional experience. We can often understand something clearly, but our emotional reaction can be more complex and in some ways distorted.

### Singing Circle

- 1) Form a circle.
- 2) Starting with vocal warm up exercises, as you inhale, raise your arms upwards. As you lower your arms, exhale. Repeat. Then inhale again, raising the arms upwards and as you lower your arms and exhale, make an 'aaah' sound on the out breath, very slowly, lasting as long as the breath does. Repeat.
- 3) Facilitator then asks group to make a humming noise as they exhale. Repeat and gently extend the sound so the humming noise lasts a little longer as you exhale using only one breath.
- 4) Facilitator then gives an example of the next step in this exercise: he/she walks into the centre of the circle and raises his/her right hand to chest level with the palm facing outwards and fingers pointing upwards towards the ceiling. The facilitator then breathes in and exhales making a humming sound as he/she walks around inside the circle. Group is asked to observe when the facilitator's breath is about to run out. Just before the breath runs out, someone must volunteer to enter the circle and touch the facilitator's raised hand and commence the humming sound as if the sound passes straight from one hand into the other the moment the touching of hands takes place. That person then makes the humming noise for the duration of one breath as they walk around inside the circle (after passing the sound on the facilitator has returned to a standing position in the circle). Then a third person should enter the circle when the second person's breath is about to run out and so on.
- 5) Continue the exercise until all of the

group has had the opportunity to enter the circle. The effect of the exercise is that the sound is being passed from one person to another, so that it seems like a continuous sound. To end explain to people that they have been making sound and movement in an empty space in front of an audience (the rest of the group), in other words they have been 'performing'!

This exercise is more high focus than the previous exercises because participants are asked to enter the circle on their own, while making a sound. There is an element of 'performance preparation', as they are entering a high focus space while doing a gesture and making a sound. The exercise also helps participants to disinhibit and feel more at ease with the other people in the group.

The facilitator can begin to explore the meaning of this exercise particularly in relation to the idea of INTERVENTION. No explicit references to Guidelines for Intervention need to be made at this point. Those connections can be made at a later stage of the workshop. The facilitator can ask the following questions to the group:

- How did you feel when you were in the centre of the circle?
- Did the person in the centre of the circle give any indication, in terms of body language, when they were coming to the end of their breath?
- There are usually signs of this: the person in the centre will make eye contact with the people around him/ will be a slight raising of the pitch of the sound. Or some people's facial expressions will change to show that they are running out of breath and they want someone to intervene. Or sometimes participants will nod their head and solicit someone to enter the circle.
- Did the participants on the outside of the circle assume that someone else would intervene? How did you know it was the right moment to intervene? Often participants will say that 'I thought someone else was going to intervene so that's why I didn't make a move' or they might say 'The person in the centre came to the end of their breath very quickly. I didn't realise they were running out of breath'. This leads to the more basic question; 'Can we recognise the signs or signals that somebody needs assistance?' The issues covered in this part of the discussion on this exercise will be made more relevant to the issue of suicide awareness and intervention by the



counsellor at a later stage in the workshop.

- This exercise helps people to understand the idea of intervention. When people signify they need assistance, correlate this to people who are suicidal giving signs and that it is crucially important to be aware, to be open, to listen, etc.

### SECTION TWO: INPUT FROM THE COUNSELLOR

The counsellor brings everyone together in a small group and establishes an atmosphere that is intimate and quiet. The time for this session is 30 minutes maximum and the drama facilitator can gently call time after 25 minutes by saying five minutes remaining. The counsellor's input is based on the workshop handout, the *Information Leaflet on Suicide Prevention* and is divided into three sections:

- A Guide to some common myths and facts about suicide
- Signs for suicidal intent
- Taking Action (Guidelines for intervention)

With regard to the common myths and facts about suicide, the counsellor can approach this section in two ways. He/she can state a myth or a fact (as listed in the *Information Leaflet on Suicide Prevention*) and ask the audience whether they think the statement is true or false, and then go on to discuss and explain it.

Alternatively, the counsellor can place three large sheets of paper on the floor. On the paper will be clearly written 'I AGREE', 'I DISAGREE' and 'I DON'T KNOW'. When the counsellor calls out each statement, participants in the room walk over and stand beside their chosen piece of paper on the floor. A short discussion on each statement can then take place and the counsellor can explain why the statement is a myth or a fact.

The counsellor then discusses key signs of suicidal behaviour and guidelines for taking action as outlined in the information leaflet and refers to suggested contributory factors (see below) that may lead people to take their own lives. To finish, there is a short question and answer session.

### SECTION THREE: IMPROVISATIONS

This section consists of:

- Choosing a theme and structuring an improvisation: 15 minutes.
- Breaking into groups to prepare improvisations: 20 minutes.
- Presentation of improvisations and feedback from the audience: 50 minutes.

The time allocations are guidelines only.

### CHOOSING A THEME AND STRUCTURING AN IMPROVISATION

The drama facilitator explains that participants will break into groups and each group will prepare an improvisation. Each group chooses one of the six suggested contributory factors to suicide as the theme for their improvisation. These factors are:

- 1) Bullying
- 2) Binge drinking/drug abuse
- 3) Inability to cope with stress
- 4) Issues around sexual identity
- 5) Break up of a relationship
- 6) Depression/isolation

Participants are asked to create a story which should involve a character who is experiencing one of the above problems, for example a person who is being bullied by their boss at work, someone who has a drink problem and is not coping well with problems in their lives or a person who is having difficulties coming to terms with their sexual identity.

#### Recapping on Taking Action (Guidelines for Intervention) and dramatising 'Misplaced' guidelines:

The aim of the improvisations is twofold: first, to develop an understanding of the **Guidelines for Intervention** which were discussed earlier in the workshop by the counsellor and second, to initiate discussion on an active approach to positive mental health. At this stage, the drama facilitator recaps on the **Guidelines for Intervention**:

- Believe It. Take seriously what the person is saying.
- Be calm. Don't Panic.
- Listen.
- Do not leave the person alone.
- Seek professional help.
- Do not promise confidentiality

The drama facilitator then explains that when planning the improvisation, particularly when choosing the theme and establishing a storyline around the issue, each group is to create a story where the people around the main character in the improvisation DO NOT implement the guidelines. **Each group is to incorporate specific 'misplaced' guidelines into the improvisation, to dramatised 'misplaced guidelines'.**

For example, if the main character in the play is talking about feeling low and depressed, the other characters just say 'Ah, pull yourself together' or 'You just have to get on with life' instead of listening and taking seriously what is said. When the

improvisation is performed, the audience can then look at how the scene was played and identify how people around the main character **could have acted differently**. Another example is if the main character talks about suicidal intent and one of the other characters promises confidentiality the audience may identify this as a **'misplaced'** guideline and suggest an alternative course of action.

The reason for dramatising 'misplaced' guidelines is because this structure allows the audience to become active participants and encourages them to see alternative ways of acting. After the improvisation has been performed, the audience is being asked to identify moments in the drama where the characters around the central character failed to act constructively and, more importantly, to then suggest **alternative actions**. This encourages the audience to become critical viewers of the drama and it encourages them to become the authors of their own approach. However, it should be stressed that the **Guidelines for Intervention** are 'guidelines' only and may be helpful in some cases. It is important to acknowledge that even if someone adheres exactly to the guidelines, you can still lose someone to suicide.

It must be stressed that the drama facilitator is NOT asking participants to create a play in which a character dies by suicide. The enactment of a suicide is NOT the central element of the improvisations. Rather, the inability to cope with the problems above can be explored, particularly in the context of deteriorating mental health. The main character may at some point express a desire not to go on living or may mention some aspect of suicidal intent, but the plays are not focused on the act of suicide itself. The drama facilitator should also clearly explain that the six contributory factors outlined above are taken from studies done on the issue of suicide and they are not definitive or set in stone. They are used in the context of the drama workshop simply as suggestions for improvisation. It is important to highlight that a person can suffer from or experience one or more of these contributory factors and may not be suicidal.

After discussing the above, the drama facilitator then discusses **Structuring an Improvisation** (see page 23).

### BREAKING INTO GROUPS TO PREPARE IMPROVISATIONS

Participants are divided into four groups of

## Drama Workshop Models

five (usually there will be up to twenty participants and four groups of five is the most effective way of dividing the group). The groups spread out around the room and have twenty minutes to develop a clear and detailed story and improvisation structure. The drama facilitator moves from group to group going over the points discussed above, making sure everyone is clear on the focus of the improvisation and offering advice and encouragement as required.

### PRESENTATION OF IMPROVISATIONS AND FEEDBACK FROM THE AUDIENCE

Seats for the audience are arranged so that they face onto the designated playing area. The drama facilitator decides the running order and the first group lays out the playing area, putting chairs, props etc in place and they take up positions to begin. The drama facilitator tells the participants that they will have an opportunity to comment after each play has been performed. On a pre-agreed signal from either the drama facilitator or the group, the play begins. After each improvisation is performed, the audience is then invited to comment on the pieces performed. This is a very important part of the process.

The facilitator can ask the following questions to the audience after each improvisation:

- Can you identify the 'misplaced' guidelines and identify a more appropriate course of action?
- What factors in the play made it difficult for the supporting characters to talk to the main character?
- Did the supporting characters effectively listen to the concerns of the main character? Why? Why not? Was the main character effectively able to express his/her feelings? Why? Why not?
- What elements in our culture in general make it difficult for us to talk about our feelings? When someone has a problem do we tend to say 'Pull yourself together' rather than really listen? Were these cultural traits present in the play? What is active listening? (This is not just hearing but empathically listening to what is behind the words spoken and the body language and facial gestures allowing the person to feel they can speak in a safe and trusting environment.)
- How do we need to change the way we view problems around issues of mental health and mental well-being?

The facilitator is asking the audience to

identify alternative actions, or things that could have happened or should have happened within the play. Because the improvisations are dramatising 'misplaced' interventions, the objective of this part of the workshop is to ask them to identify the 'misplaced' interventions and **suggest more appropriate actions**. For example if the main character talks about suicidal intent and one of the other characters promises confidentiality the audience may identify this as a 'misplaced' guideline and suggest an alternative course of action, they can suggest the guideline 'Do not promise confidentiality'. Part of the improvisation (one specific scene or incident) can then be **re-enacted** with this new guideline in place. Remember that feedback after improvisations should focus on the 'theme' being explored and should be non-judgmental; it is not a criticism of players.

### WIND DOWN

Allow five minutes at the end of the workshop for participants to give verbal feedback or ask for further information. The counsellor is also available to take questions either within the group or on an individual basis. The information pack is given to each participant. A written evaluation form and pens are distributed to participants to complete.

### A MODEL OF BEST PRACTICE FOR CONDUCTING A DRAMA WORKSHOP WITH YOUNG PEOPLE TO PROMOTE POSITIVE MENTAL HEALTH AND TO RAISE AWARENESS OF ISSUES SURROUNDING SUICIDE AND SUICIDE PREVENTION

**The overall approach to the drama workshop model for young people is to place the emphasis on an introduction to positive mental health and coping strategies. As part of the workshop young people will gain a deeper understanding of issues surrounding suicide and suicide prevention. The drama workshop for young people is designed to take place in secondary schools and is aimed at transition, fifth and sixth years only. Please refer to Support Structures and Guidelines for Planning a Drama Workshop on page 12.**

### WORKSHOP AIMS

Using drama games, exercises and improvisation to:

- Explore positive mental health

- Examine some common myths and facts about suicide
- Identify and begin an exploration into contributory factors that may cause young people to take their own lives
- Explore the importance of coping skills for young people

### LEARNING OUTCOMES

On completion of the drama workshop participants will have a knowledge of:

- Coping strategies and the importance of having a strategy or plan as part of our coping skills
- The importance of contacting a responsible adult if someone is talking about taking their own life
- Issues around suicide and suicide prevention
- A list of support services that are available

Unlike the drama workshop for adults, there will not be a strong emphasis on intervention. The issue will be covered in a simpler format of "to take it seriously if and when someone you know talks about taking their own life **and to contact a responsible adult**". The workshop is divided into three sections:

#### Section One: Drama Games and Exercises

This section is facilitated by the drama facilitator and lasts sixty minutes. It consists of drama warm-up games and exercises and requires a level of physical activity from the participants. Its purpose is to help participants relax and to become disinhibited in terms of expressing themselves. This section includes trust exercises that explore positive mental health values and a juggling exercise in which participants come up with a **strategy** to make the game work more effectively. This idea of '**coming up with a coping strategy**' is developed later on in the workshop. After section one there is a **break of ten minutes**.

#### Section Two: Input from the Counsellor

This section, lasting thirty minutes, is facilitated by the counsellor who discusses the content of the workshop handout, the *Information Leaflet on Suicide Prevention* (see page 28). The counsellor then refers to contributory factors that may lead to suicide while stressing that these **can be** contributory factors and by themselves do not lead people to take their own lives.

#### Section Three: Introduction to Acting and Improvisation

This section lasts eighty minutes and is facilitated by the drama facilitator. First of

all participants carry out a basic acting skills exercise using scenes that are general and not about the theme of suicide awareness. This exercise has a positive mental health value as participants are briefly introduced to the idea of 'assertive behaviour'. Participants then prepare and act out short improvisations (short scenes that participants prepare and then act out in their own words) that are based on the idea of coming up with coping strategies for one of the suggested contributory factors identified above.

The drama workshop facilitator and counsellor need to be familiar with strategies for dealing with the issues raised. This information is contained in the report *Young People's Mental Health – A report of the results from the lifestyle and coping survey*, which is distributed to participants at each workshop – for further details please see page 13. Students work on this report after the workshop with their teachers.

### SECTION ONE: DRAMA GAMES AND EXERCISES

These drama games should be taken in the following order. They require a level of physical participation and each exercise is followed by a short discussion (outlined below):

#### Energy Circle

- 1) Form a circle.
- 2) Drama Facilitator makes eye contact with the person to his/her immediate right and claps his/her hands.
- 3) This person then makes a similar gesture to the person on their immediate right, passing the clap on.
- 4) Allow the clap to move all around the circle a number of times.
- 5) Drama Facilitator then changes the direction of the clap so that it passes to the person on their immediate left and passes all the way around.
- 6) When this is clearly established, the facilitator then explains that each individual in the circle can then pass the clap energy to his/her immediate right **or** left.
- 7) When this is established, the facilitator introduces a sound, for example 'yo' or 'ho' or 'ha', so that participants clap and make this sound simultaneously as they pass energy around the circle.
- 8) Facilitator can then replace the word 'yo' with 'hello'.
- 9) When group are proficient at this, facilitator can then establish the rule that 'hello' is sent in a right direction and the word 'goodbye' is sent in the left direction.

The function of this exercise is to help participants to relax, to overcome inhibitions, to foster team spirit and to raise their energy levels. The emphasis should be on participation rather than on doing the exercise in an exact way. For people who may be nervous about the workshop, it is an easy way to become involved without anybody being under the spotlight.

#### Walking with Eyes Closed – Trust

##### Exercise Number One

- 1) Participants walk around the room randomly, always walking towards an empty space.
- 2) They are asked to stop and break into pairs with the person standing nearest them.
- 3) Each pair chooses to be either A or B.
- 4) A places their hands on B's shoulders and B is asked to close his/her eyes.
- 5) A places a slight pressure on B's shoulders. B begins walking and is guided around the space by A (A is the 'seeing' partner and B is being lead). When this is established, facilitator then asks A to momentarily take their hands off B's shoulders, while B continues to walk without being guided and still with eyes closed. Eyes must be kept closed throughout the exercise.
- 6) A should only allow B to walk a few paces at first and then reapply hands to shoulders. However as they become more trusting, A can allow B to walk unguided for longer periods. A always walks behind B, even when B is walking unguided.
- 7) A and B can then swap with another pair, C and D (C is leading D). A makes eye contact with C. By nodding their heads, they agree to swap over, so that A now leads D and C now leads B. Allow this to continue so that each pair has swapped over a number of times.
- 8) When this section is completed, go back to the original pairs i.e. A/B, C/D, etc. and reverse positions so that B now leads A and D leads C and carry through steps 4 to 7 with these new combinations.

The function of this exercise is to engender trust in the group and to help people overcome their fears. The facilitator can now begin to explore the concept of trust with the group. The following questions can be asked of participants:

- Who felt very secure doing this exercise with their eyes closed?
- Who felt very insecure?
- What did you feel when your eyes were closed? Fear? Anxiety? Distrust? Safe?

- Where you aware of different people guiding you? The pressure of their hands? Do you feel safer with some people guiding you and less safe with others? Why?
- Does 'trust' play an important part in our overall mental well-being? Why?
- If we are not able to trust others does this cause us to become isolated?
- Can isolation be a factor in causing people's mental health to deteriorate?

The overall thrust of the feedback section from the participants is to get them

- To talk about their feelings. For example they may say 'I felt very anxious walking with my eyes closed' or 'It felt good when I could finally trust someone to guide me safely', and
- To explore some of the mental health consequences of not being able to trust...fear, isolation, loss of confidence, reduced contact with others.

#### Running with Eyes Closed – Trust

##### Exercise Number Two

- 1) The group forms a semi circle/horseshoe shape at one end of the room.
- 2) Facilitator explains that he/she will ask someone to volunteer to go to the opposite end of the space directly facing the group and to run towards the group with their eyes closed.
- 3) Facilitator explains the safety features of this exercise. People standing in group in the semi-circle/horseshoe shape should brace their right leg and bend their left leg forward. They should then reach forward a little and extend their arms in an outward direction. Facilitator should conduct the exercise once, allowing the person running to do it with their eyes OPEN. This is to make sure that everyone fully understands the nature of the exercise and its safety features.
- 4) The person who volunteers to run towards the group with their eyes closed should run at a normal pace and not sprint. Establish as a rule that if for any reason the facilitator shouts STOP, that person must stop immediately. The group stays silent as the person runs.
- 5) Explain that the person should have an **objective** (see page 24) as they run and their objective is to sustain the run until the very end/until they are stopped by the group. At this stage the facilitator explains that having an objective is an important concept in drama and theatre and will be referred to again when working on improvisations. The facilitator gives a brief explanation as to what an

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objective is and why it is important. This is laying the groundwork for later work on improvisations.

- 6) The facilitator tells the person who is going to run to START. The entire group fully extends their arms. As the person runs towards the group, they reach out their hands towards that person's waist and make sure that the person comes to a stationary position safely. Other people in the group can then volunteer to do this exercise. If some people in the group don't want to volunteer to run, that's fine.

The function of this exercise is to help the group to bond and to trust each other. It is more high focus than the previous exercises. At this stage the facilitator can invite the participants to give some feedback on the exercise.

- How did you feel when you were running towards the group with your eyes closed? Fear, anxiety, elation, trust, etc. Again, this is a key question for participants, because they are being encouraged to respond to the exercise at an experiential level.
- When you were running, did you feel the same emotion all the way through, or did it change as you got nearer completion? Usually, people start off confidently, but become more fearful as they approach the moment where they are stopped by the group.
- When you were running with your eyes closed did it feel like you were running a longer distance than you had imagined? Is there a difference between the **objective** understanding of the distance and the **subjective** feeling of how far we have run? Usually, the participants will say that the distance seemed (with their eyes closed) to be a great deal longer than they had imagined (with their eyes open). Facilitator can then talk a little about the difference between our objective view of the world and our subjective view of the world. This correlates approximately to the difference between our understanding and our emotional experience. We can often understand something clearly, but our emotional reaction can be more complex and in some ways distorted.

### Colombian Hand Hypnosis

- 1) Participants walk randomly around the room always walking towards an empty space.
- 2) Facilitator says 'stop' and participants pair off with the person nearest them.

- 3) Facilitator chooses one person to illustrate the exercise with; Facilitator places the palm of his/her hand one foot in front of the participant's face. Facilitator explains that the participant is now 'hypnotised' to the facilitator's hand and the distance of one foot must always be maintained between facilitator's hand and participant's face. Facilitator then moves his/her hand back and forwards and participant should move too. Facilitator can walk forwards or backwards, move up or down, etc.
- 4) Pairs then decide who is A and B. A places his/her hand in front of B's face, with the tops of the fingers level with the hairline and one foot away from the face. A leads B around the room always ensuring that B's face is one foot from A's hand and avoiding other players.
- 5) When A and B have had sufficient time to practice, the roles are reversed so that B now leads and A follows.
- 6) Facilitator asks for three volunteers. A extends both of his/her arms so that palms are facing outwards. B and C are then placed one foot from both hands. As A moves hands B and C move accordingly. Participants can then be divided into groups of three and this part of the exercise can be practiced. Reverse roles so that all three in each group have a chance to lead.

This is a low focus exercise and it is about 'give and take' as the pairs must work with each other to maintain on-going movement. The function of this exercise is to help the group become disinhibited and to explore some issues around power and abuse of power in the context of mental health and mental well-being. In general terms, this exercise also exercises the body and develops physical awareness of your body in space, and develops concentration.

Some questions the facilitator might ask:

- Which part of the exercise did you find easier? Leading or following?
- Did the leader make it easy to follow or did they make it difficult? How did they make it difficult? By moving their hand too quickly so that it became difficult to follow?
- Who has the most control or power in this exercise? The leader or follower? (usually, participants will say the leader). Did the leader sometimes abuse this power or exploit the other person? How? Why? A short discussion on power and equality

can ensue. For example, within a relationship, people may often exploit each other rather than work in harmony.

- Facilitator can then ask participants to **repeat** the exercise with the emphasis now firmly on the leader and the follower working in **harmony**. The concept here is that the leader and the follower should share power by working together. When the exercise is repeated a second time, ask participants: In what way did it **feel** different? Why? Is it healthy for us to exploit each other? Is it healthy to allow ourselves to be exploited?

### Group Juggling

- 1) Form a circle.
- 2) Each person in the circle raises his or her right hand.
- 3) Facilitator points to someone in the group and calls their name. That person then lowers their hand and points to another person in the group and calls their name and that person then lowers their hand.
- 4) This continues until everyone in the group has been called. Participants should point to someone as far away from them as possible, not to the person to their immediate right or left.
- 5) Facilitator then repeats this part of the exercise, in EXACTLY the same sequence. One person points to a person and that person points to another person so that a clear sequence is set up.
- 6) When sequence is established, facilitator then explains that he/she is going to introduce an object into the game. This can be a ball (although they tend to roll and can distract) or a soft plastic bottle half-filled with water. The bottle is then passed from one person to another in the EXACT SEQUENCE that has been established. Before a person throws the bottle they must CLEARLY call out the person's name to whom they are going to throw the bottle to. Then they must make eye contact with that person. The bottle should be thrown 'under arm' so that it travels in an arc. This makes it easier to catch. The facilitator must insist on these safety features of the game.
- 7) When one bottle is established in the sequence, the facilitator then introduces a second bottle.
- 8) When the second bottle is established the facilitator can then introduce a third bottle and so on with the same sequence all the time. The number of bottles that the group can juggle should be gauged by the facilitator. Usually four to five



bottles can be juggled before the game becomes chaotic.

The function of this exercise is to help build up team spirit and morale, to help engender concentration and focus, to explore some issues around **coping skills** and **developing strategies** to deal with chaotic or stressful situations.

To explore this exercise with the group the facilitator can ask the following questions:

- Is it easy to juggle one bottle? (the answer will usually be 'yes') Is it easy to juggle two? At what point does it become difficult for the group to cope with the number of bottles being juggled? Four? Five? Why?
- Does the exercise become chaotic or pressurised? At what point? Does anybody have a **strategy for coping with the pressure** of this exercise? (This is a very important question and will be referred to later in the workshop). Usually, someone in the group will identify the strategy of only concentrating or focusing on **two** people out of the group: the person you are throwing the bottle to and the person you are receiving the bottle from. Everybody else in the group can be ignored and the apparent chaos in this exercise can be blocked out. This simple coping strategy allows participants to function well in a difficult situation.
- Can we apply this idea of coming up with a coping strategy to other areas of our lives? Some replies might be: focusing on what is important and giving less attention to things that are trivial or coming up with a strategy to deal with other problems such as bullying. The important thing here for them to grasp is that if we don't have some form of a coping strategy, the result will usually be chaos and difficulty dealing with pressure.

You are linking a lack of strategy to chaos, i.e. when the bottles start falling and it is difficult to do the exercise. When you have a strategy it is easier to do the exercise. Link the idea of focusing on the other person to **acting** as acting is about fully focusing on the other person that you are interacting with.

### SECTION TWO: INPUT FROM THE COUNSELLOR

The counsellor brings everyone together in a small group and establishes an atmosphere that is intimate and quiet. The time for this

session is 30 minutes maximum and the drama facilitator can gently call time after 25 minutes by saying five minutes remaining.

The counsellor's input is based on the workshop handout, the *Information Leaflet on Suicide Prevention* and covers the following two areas detailed in the handout:

- A Guide to some common myths and facts about suicide
- Taking Action

With regard to the common myths and facts about suicide, the counsellor can approach this section in two ways. He/she can state a myth or a fact (as listed in the *Information Leaflet on Suicide Prevention*) and ask the audience whether they think the statement is true or false, and then go on to discuss and explain it. Alternatively, the counsellor can place three large sheets of paper on the floor. On the paper will be clearly written 'I AGREE', 'I DISAGREE' and 'I DON'T KNOW'. When the counsellor calls out each statement, participants in the room walk over and stand beside their chosen piece of paper on the floor. A short discussion on each statement can then take place and the counsellor can explain why the statement is a myth or a fact.

The counsellor then refers to signs of suicidal behaviour (these are not listed in the information leaflet for young people and please refer to the information leaflet for the adult workshop for full details on the signs). When discussing 'Signs for Suicidal Intent' with young people, this area needs to be handled delicately. The discussion is moderated as teenagers may present signs of being withdrawn, depressed, anxious etc as part of normal adolescence.

For example signs such as tiredness or being withdrawn may be signs of adolescents growing up and could not be described **in this context** as signs of suicidal tendencies. However, the one sign that we specifically stress is, if someone is talking about suicide to a friend or close relative. In that case, the clear message would be that **you seek a responsible adult to help the person speaking about suicide**.

In the context of young people and suicide prevention there is one clear guideline for intervention discussed in the workshop and that is: **If someone you know is talking about taking their own life, you must take it seriously and contact a**

**responsible adult**. In the context of this workshop we are **not** aiming to train young people to be effective counsellors or skillful listeners nor do we expect them to have the range of skills that an adult might have. So the fundamental message of the workshop can be summed up in the above statement.

The counsellor then briefly discusses a list of contributory factors that may lead to suicide while stressing that these **can be** contributory factors and by themselves do not lead people to take their own lives. The suggested contributory factors are: bullying, binge drinking/drug abuse, the break up of a relationship, issues around sexual identity and work stress/exam stress. To finish, there is a short question and answer session.

### SECTION THREE: INTRODUCTION TO ACTING AND IMPROVISATION

#### Introduction to Acting Skills

The Drama Facilitator introduces a basic 'acting skills' exercise as a preamble to the main improvisations to be presented later in the workshop. The function of this exercise is to equip the group with basic acting skills and practice before they proceed to develop their own improvisations. The exercise consists of the drama facilitator introducing scenarios for short improvisations. These scenarios are general and not about the theme of suicide awareness and participants are asked to follow a specific **objective** within the scene. This exercise is explained quickly (the whole exercise should take fifteen minutes to do) and is pitched quite high as you are looking for a release of energy as well as an understanding of **objectives** and **focus**.

- 1) Everyone sits in a circle with the facilitator in the middle. The facilitator introduces the following scenario:  
**Scene One:** A cashier working in a large supermarket is called to the manager's office and the manager accuses him/her of stealing money from the till. There is some video evidence but it is not conclusive. The manager says that he/she has a witness, but he/she is not yet at liberty to identify the witness. A scene ensues whereby the manager **accuses** and the worker **denies**. The objectives are 'to accuse' and 'to deny'.
- 2) The facilitator explains the meaning of objective and that each actor must **pursue their objective** clearly and strongly within the scene and not digress from it. The objective of the manager is

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- 'to accuse' and the objective of the cashier is 'to deny' and both must pursue their objective vigorously and assertively. Each player has to focus fully on the other (as in the juggling exercise where a specific focus was a coping strategy) in order to let go awareness of the audience.
- 3) When participants understand the scenario and the function of the objectives, the facilitator then asks for one member of the group to volunteer to perform the role of the cashier. The drama facilitator plays the role of the manager in order to demonstrate the basic principles of pursuing an objective and focusing on the other actor so as to not be aware of the audience. The improvisation takes place in the centre of the circle.
  - 4) The improvisation starts with a line spoken by the manager. The line is "Someone saw you take the money". The scene runs for two minutes. The facilitator needs to demonstrate the **vigorous** pursuit of an objective (not about subtlety at this stage) with the manager accusing all the way through (desperately wants the other person to admit they took the money) and the cashier (played by the volunteer from the group) denying regardless of what evidence is presented.
  - 5) After the scene is run, the facilitator can briefly ask the audience did they see the importance of pursuing the objective and focusing on the other actor/player.
  - 6) The drama facilitator then introduces the second scenario.  
**Scene Two:** An elderly man/woman lives alone on a large housing estate. His/her only companion is a dog. One day the dog leaves the house and bites a neighbour's child. The child has to be taken to hospital. The child's parent confronts the old man/woman at the door of the old man/woman's house. The parent's objective is to **accuse and to get the elderly man/woman to agree to have the dog put down**. The elderly man/woman's objective is to **defend the dog's behaviour** (to deny) on the grounds that the children were tormenting the dog and **to not have the dog put down**. Introduce the idea of an imaginary door; this is where the improvisation will take place. The parent must try at all costs to get inside the house to get the dog and the elderly person must keep the parent out (no physical violence). The parent starts the improvisation by saying 'I have just come from the hospital. My David has seven

- stitches because your dog bit him.'
- 7) Again, when participants understand the scenario and the function of the objectives, the facilitator then asks for one member of the group to volunteer to perform the scene with the drama facilitator who plays the parent. The scene runs for two minutes.
  - 8) The drama facilitator then asks the participants to walk around the room randomly, always walking towards an empty space. On a signal, they stop and pair up with the person nearest them. The drama facilitator explains that each pair will now carry out the first scenario, which the facilitator recaps on. Each pair decides what character they are playing for example A becomes the Manager and B the worker.
  - 9) Each pair then performs the scene simultaneously. Each pair faces each other and the participant playing the manager takes three large steps back. The facilitator calls 'Focus', both actors take a moment to focus (taking in two full breaths), the facilitator calls 'begin' and the actor playing the manager walks vigorously towards the actor playing the worker and states the first line quite high and strong.
  - 10) After two minutes, the facilitator calls 'freeze' and then asks the group to start walking around the room randomly always walking towards an empty space. On a signal, they stop and pair up with a different person. The facilitator recaps on the second scenario. Each pair decides what character they are playing, one person playing the old/man woman and the other playing the parent.
  - 11) The participants take two deep breaths to focus and on the signal from the facilitator they begin, each pair performing the scene simultaneously.

The functions of this exercise are: to prepare participants for performance by providing the opportunity to practice basic acting skills before starting work on main improvisations; to develop confidence in terms of acting in front of the whole group; to explain the term **objective** and to demonstrate the strong pursuit of an objective within a scene; and to provide an opportunity for practicing assertive behaviour which has a positive mental health value.

### Improvisation

This section consists of:

- 1) Choosing a theme and structuring an improvisation: 10 minutes.
  - 2) Breaking into groups to prepare improvisations: 15 minutes.
  - 3) Presentation of improvisations and feedback from the audience: 40 minutes.
- The time allocations are guidelines only.

### CHOOSING A THEME AND STRUCTURING AN IMPROVISATION

Participants sit together all facing the facilitator. The drama facilitator explains that participants will break into groups and each group will prepare a short five-minute improvisation based on the idea of coming up with coping strategies based around one of the following themes:

- 1) Bullying
- 2) Binge drinking/drug abuse
- 3) Break up of a relationship
- 4) Issues around sexual identity
- 5) Work stress/exam stress

Participants are asked to (a) pick a theme and (b) create a story which should involve a character who is experiencing one of the above problems, for example someone who is being bullied at school. It should then be stressed to the participants that they should dramatise the main character of the improvisation in situations where they **don't** have good coping strategies, for example if somebody is being bullied within the drama, they react passively to the bullying, they **don't** express their feelings about it, they **don't** seek help from someone in their peer group or they don't seek outside help, they **don't** have a coping strategy.

The reason that a lack of coping strategy should be dramatised is because, after the improvisation has been performed, the audience (the rest of the participants) are then asked to identify the moments in the drama where the main character fails to act constructively, and to then suggest **alternative actions**. This encourages the audience to become critical viewers of the drama. It encourages them to become the authors of their own coping strategy. The emphasis is on the participants themselves exploring strategies or plans for dealing with particular problems such as bullying or binge drinking.

Again, it must be stressed that the drama facilitator is NOT asking participants to dramatise a suicide. The enactment of a suicide is NOT the central element of these improvised plays. The aims of the improvisations are to be a first step in

looking at coping strategies for mental well-being. Also keep reiterating that the themes are suggestions only and a person may experience bullying or stress and still not be suicidal.

Before breaking into groups, the drama facilitator explains how to structure an improvisation, referring to characters, location, the three-scene structure and the use of a narrator, all ways to assist participants to structure the improvisations more effectively. Please see page 23 on how to structure an improvisation.

### BREAKING INTO GROUPS TO PREPARE IMPROVISATIONS

After explaining themes and how to structure an improvisation, participants are divided into four groups of five. The groups spread out around the room and have fifteen minutes to develop a clear and detailed story and improvisation structure. The drama facilitator moves from group to group and appoints a leader within each group (or the group can be asked to appoint their own leader). The drama facilitator goes over the main points in relation to the theme and structuring of the improvisation, making sure everyone is clear on the focus of the improvisation and offering advice and encouragement as required.

Try to ensure that the groups have some variation in themes, that all the groups do not pick the same theme. Time is short and the drama facilitator AND the counsellor need to provide substantial assistance to each group. The drama facilitator has to motivate the participants to take ownership and this will generate excitement about the work. Put a strong emphasis on **location**: 'Where would be an interesting location? On the bus, in a field, outside a fast food place, in a hospital', on the **objective** (as dialogue will always follow) and on **conflict**. Try to avoid simply sitting around a table, looking for action.

If it is on a bus, a young girl gets on and will not pay her fare, she then gets thrown off the bus, where does this lead, where would the next scene be, what happens next? Or a group of young people are in a field drinking, a neighbour comes along and asks them to leave, they refuse, the guards come and take them back to their parents, what happens when they meet with the parents? The drama facilitator can give suggestions for first scenes and then ask where do you think the second scene would

take place? For example 'our first scene is about bullying and it is set down by the canal'.

### PRESENTATION OF IMPROVISATIONS AND FEEDBACK FROM THE AUDIENCE

Seats for the audience are arranged so that they face onto the designated playing area. The drama facilitator decides the running order and the first group prepares the playing area, putting chairs, props etc in place and they take up positions to begin.

Once the improvisation begins, it is important that the audience view them respectfully and in silence. The drama facilitator tells the participants that they will have an opportunity to comment after each improvisation has been performed and reminds the audience that they are specifically looking for moments where the main character **doesn't** cope well with the difficulties that he/she encounters in the course of the play. Two questions for the audience to keep in mind are: What could the main character have done differently? What coping strategy would have helped him/her in this situation?

On a pre-agreed signal from either the drama facilitator or the group, the improvisation begins. After each improvisation is performed the facilitator can then ask the following type of questions:

- What difficulties did the main character have to face during the play?
- How did he/she cope with these difficulties?
- What alternative actions could he/she have taken? Can you identify specific moments in the play where he/she could have taken different and more effective action?
- Would these alternative actions have been more effective? Why?
- Can you establish a list of principles that could help people in that situation cope with this problem?

If required, the drama facilitator and counsellor can offer suggestions for coping strategies, however, the function of the drama facilitator and counsellor, at this point, is to provide space for the participants to **come up with their own effective strategies** for the problems illustrated in the improvisations, rather than the drama facilitator simply imposing a fixed set of principles upon them.

An important area to draw attention to is the area of expressing our emotions. The facilitator can ask how did the main character feel, why did they find it difficult to talk or express what was happening and how important is it to express and share our feelings and emotions, and to explain that not bottling up or repressing emotions is important for positive mental health. The facilitator can refer to the importance of listening and also to the support of organisations such as the Samaritans.

The main question is what could have been done differently (having a plan or strategy for coping). After feedback, a short scene from one or more of the improvisations can be performed a second time, with the main character now implementing a more effective coping strategy that has been suggested by audience members.

For example if an improvisation has illustrated a young person not coping well with bullying, the audience are asked 'what could the character have done differently?'. The audience are invited to comment and the facilitator and counsellor can provide sample strategies if required. The facilitator can ask questions like: 'How did this character cope with being bullied? How did you feel when you were the character in the play being bullied? What could he have done differently? Should he have fought back? What's the best strategy for coping with bullying?' One or more of the suggestions can then be improvised. The facilitator can also ask 'If a person is not coping, does this become overwhelming? If a person continually does not cope, what may happen?' Remind participants that the information pack given out at the end of the workshop contains strategies for dealing with bullying and the school will be asked to spend time going through this with the students after the workshop. Also, through having the experience of performing the short plays, the issues will be more directly experienced than in a more traditional classroom context.

### WIND DOWN

Allow time at the end of the workshop for participants to give verbal feedback or ask for further information. The counsellor is also available to take questions either within the group or on an individual basis. The information pack is given to each participant. A written evaluation form and pens are distributed to participants to complete.

# Structuring an Improvisation

**“Improvising is openness to contact with the environment and each other and willingness to play. It is acting upon environment and allowing others to act upon present reality, as in playing a game.”**

Spolin, Viola. *Improvisation for the Theatre. A Handbook of Teaching and Directing Techniques* (page 25)

An improvisation is where participants act out a scene or play in their own words. A ‘theme’ is presented and discussed. Participants then break into groups and prepare a clear and detailed story and structure. The drama facilitator moves from group to group offering advice and encouragement as required. Before breaking into groups, the drama facilitator discusses some of the points listed below to assist participants to structure the improvisations more effectively. Encourage participants to focus on **who** (characters and relationships to other characters), **where** (location), **when** (time), **what** (theme/story being explored), **objectives** and the **three-scene structure**. All these are important areas for making a scene work.

## 1) CHARACTER

- Workshop with **Adults**: Choose a main character who may be experiencing one of the six contributory factors to suicide listed in the drama workshop model for adults. The character may be experiencing more than one of the factors. For example the character can be someone who is being bullied at work and may turn to excessive alcohol consumption to help cope with the stress.
- Workshop with **Young People**: Choose a main character who may be experiencing one of the problems listed in the drama workshop model for young people such as bullying or binge drinking. The character may be experiencing more than one of the factors for example someone who is being bullied at school may turn to excessive alcohol consumption to help cope with the stress.

## 2) LOCATION

Set your improvisation in an interesting location and choose a location that offers interesting dramatic possibilities.

- Workshop with **Adults**: For example a person working as a waiter/waitress in a restaurant may be getting bullied by the chef or the manager. This might be an interesting scene to open your play. Or if it was about the break-up of a relationship, the play could be set in a nightclub.
- Workshop with **Young People**: For example a young person working in a fast-food restaurant may be getting bullied by his co-workers. Or if it was about the break-up of a relationship, the play could be set in a youth club disco.

## 3) TIME

When does each scene take place in terms of time, day, month, year?

## 4) CHOOSING CAST OF CHARACTERS

Once the theme of the play and the location is chosen, it is easier to choose the main character and supporting characters. Discuss each character in detail and what are the relationships between each character?



## 5) THREE-SCENE STRUCTURE

Encourage the participants to have three scenes in their short play. The three-scene structure facilitates the development of the story and the characters. Participants may wish to have more than three scenes, but usually the three-scene structure creates a strong dramatic momentum.

- Workshop with **Adults**: For example, in the story about a waiter/waitress being bullied by the chef in work, the first scene may be set in the kitchen of the restaurant, the second scene could be set in the sitting room of their home, where the person being bullied discusses the issue unsuccessfully with their partner, and the third scene could be set in the dining part of the restaurant.
- Workshop with **Young People**: For example, a story about a young person being bullied by co-workers in the fast-food restaurant, the first scene may be set in the kitchen of the restaurant, the second scene could be set in the managers office, where the person being bullied discusses the issue unsuccessfully with the manager, and the third scene could be set on the street outside the restaurant when the workers are on their way home.

## 6) USING OBJECTIVES

Each actor in each scene should always have an objective. An objective is what your character is trying to achieve, pursue or gain in any particular scene – ‘What do I Want?’ Always be clear on what your objective is, the objective should involve one or more of the other players and it should be truthful so that you and the other actors can believe in it. Try and make your objective active:

- What do I want? = Objective
- What do I **do** to get my objective?  
= Creative Action
- What stands in the way of getting my objective? = Obstacles

Defining the objective by using a verb (rather than a noun) can help to make an objective active, for example ‘I wish to be powerful’ is too vague. ‘I wish to obtain power’ encourages us to ask ‘What must I do to obtain power?’ it encourages us to action. Look for something concrete, real. I want or I wish to DO... (verb expressing desire, aim, wish). Never use feelings or emotions such as I want to feel sad (cannot be done), as they accompany the objective. Encourage the participants to ask ‘what if’ this was to happen, ‘what if’ I was in this situation.

## MEMORIES from Interviews

### SEAMUS CURRAN

“Seamus Curran had six children, he was a great brother to me in many ways, in all ways really. My brother used to bring me everywhere when I was younger. When he was depressed it used to drive him crazy, one doctor would tell him, this is the way you need to be treated, three of these tablets and four of those and another doctor would rubbish that . . . There is an awful lot of young people dying by suicide, Seamus wasn’t in that bracket but don’t forget about those people as well, whatever programmes they’re making they shouldn’t forget about the people in their forties . . . ”

*By Paul Curran*

### BARRY CAREN

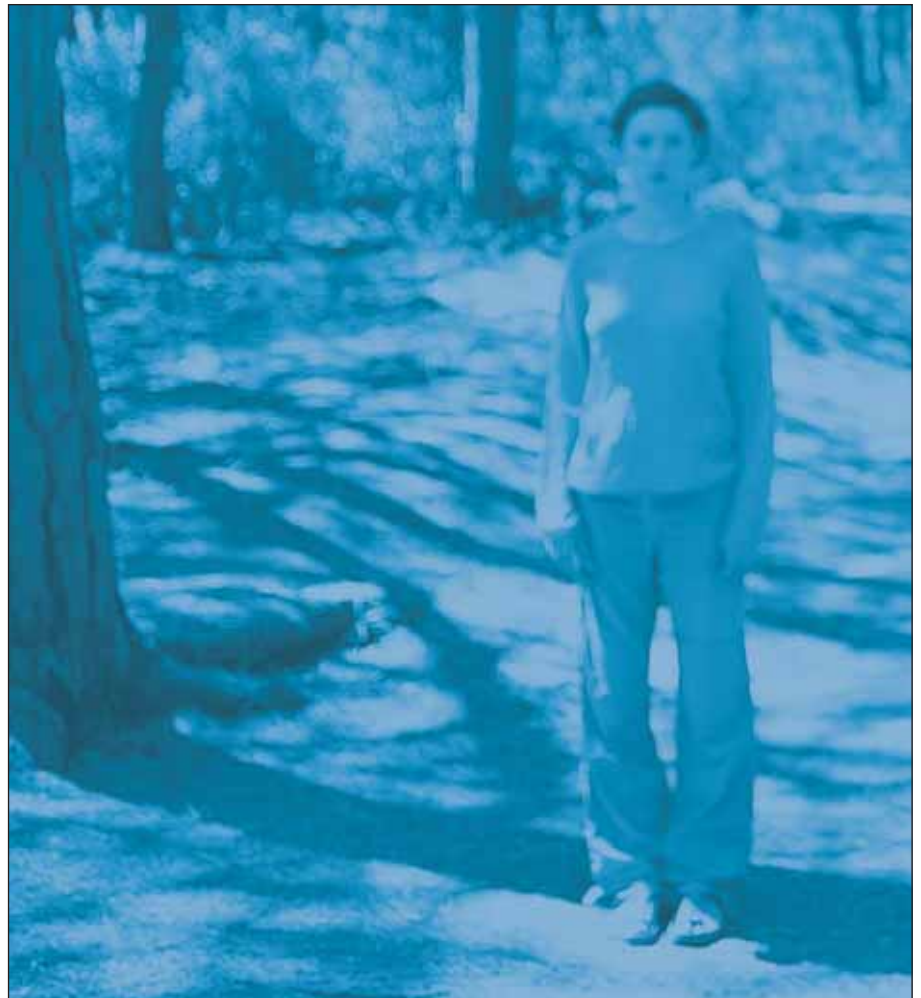
“Tall, handsome, affectionate, popular, much loved, friendly, daring, stylish – great smile all these words describe Barry a son and a brother who died by suicide aged 17 years.

Suicide hit our lives on the 7th October 2000 like a giant tidal wave that took not only Barry but life as we knew it. There are no words that can describe the pain left by suicide or the difficulty a family goes through knowing that as over and over we ask ourselves what did we miss, we know we will never have the answer.

The loss of Barry has left a gigantic hole in our hearts that can never be filled. He is our first thought in the morning and our last thought at night. However we keep going from day to day always proud of the lovely boy who brought such happiness and joy into our lives.”

Barry 04/07/83 – 07/10/2000

*By Joan Caren*



## ■ Structuring an Improvisation

### 7) BEFORE-TIME AND FOURTH WALL

If you are entering a scene, work out beforehand where you are coming from (in terms of the imaginative world) and what has just happened before you enter. This is the before-time. Create a detailed before-time to launch you into the scene. The fourth wall is the imaginary space between the actors and the audience. Work out in detail what is on the fourth wall as this helps to settle players and can be creatively used within the scene, for example seeing someone approaching on the road or watching a car drive away. Or it can be a wall with a large painting or a window with a view, a mountain or a busy road.

### 8) CREATING DRAMATIC CONFLICT

Conflict exists within a scene when two characters have incompatible objectives. The conflict may be understated or it may be out in the open, but it should always be there. For example, if the waitress/waiter in the restaurant scene needs a day off to attend an important family obligation, and the manager refuses to allow them the day off, there is a clear conflict in terms of the characters' objectives. Being clear about this enables us to put an effective dramatic structure on the play.

### 9) DRAMATIC COMPOSITION AND CLARITY

This relates to entrances and exits, use of chairs, use of 'freeze frames', use of a narrator, efficient staging, voice and audibility and use of props.

**Entrances and exits:** if there are five characters in the play, each should have a separate entrance onto the stage if possible. For example, if we open our play with five characters present and they are all trying to talk over each other, this can create confusion in the audience's mind. It is better maybe to stagger the entrances, to have just one character on the stage first, and then a second character can enter. A third character may enter when those first two characters are established.

**Use of chairs:** Unless necessary, encourage the participants not to have too many of their characters sitting down as you want to create scenes that are dynamic and active. If your first scene consists of four people sitting at a table talking, this can often create a low energy and low focus and the play can drift into the merely conversational. Participants can use chairs creatively, for example if a scene takes place in a car, four

chairs facing the audience could do this very effectively. But excessive use of people sitting around tables drinking tea can sap the energy of a scene and lead to blunted dramatic impetus.

**Use of 'freeze frames':** Sometimes participants may create a structure where there are two moments of action taking place simultaneously on the stage. This may be a good structure for their play. However, if two groups of actors are speaking simultaneously this may create confusion for the audience. In this case, the facilitator should ask one group of actors to 'freeze', while the second group plays out their scene and vice versa.

**Use of a narrator:** The group performing the play may choose to use a narrator to introduce the story and explain the setting of each scene. A narrator can often communicate important information to the audience concisely, thus allowing the story to flow more efficiently. For example 'Our first scene is set outside a football stadium and a person who is homeless is asking people for money'. The narrator can also be an actor in the play. A very shy person may take the role of the narrator and have one line to start each scene.

**Efficient staging:** A few basic rules here. Encourage players to be aware of the 'stage picture' for example placing a table diagonally so that different characters around the table may be viewed clearly or not turning your back to the audience for extended periods of time (it is okay to turn your back occasionally). Also, to not physically block (for example to stand directly in front of) another player for a long period of time. Remind participants that blocking can also happen when a player rejects a contribution put forward by another player, for example 'Where is our brother?' and the player says 'We don't have a brother'. Where possible, try and be open to contributions from others.

**Voice and audibility:** Actors need to be heard. As a general rule, participants performing the short plays need to speak louder than their normal conversational levels. If the facilitator can't hear clearly he/she should ask them to raise the volume of their voices by saying 'share your voice' to encourage players to project their voice and be heard.

**Use of props and costumes:** The use of

simple props and costumes can often enhance the effectiveness of a scene for example using four chairs to represent a car or a coat to represent a blanket or encourage freedom of physical expression by putting on a coat and gloves or packing a bag. If a prop is necessary, but cannot be found in the room, it can easily be mimed. The drama facilitator should plan his/her prop box well in advance of the workshop.

### FACILITATOR AS DIRECTOR

While the improvisations are being performed, the facilitator **may** need to give directions. These should only be given when absolutely necessary. For example, if a scene is going on too long and becoming repetitious, the facilitator may say 'Please finish the scene in one minute and move onto the next scene'. Each group should aim to bring the scene to a natural conclusion or the drama facilitator can call time saying 'one minute left', 'thirty seconds left' and so on. Players may need reminding to share what is happening with the audience so the drama facilitator can say 'share the stage picture'. If an actor is turning their back to the audience for extended periods, the facilitator may say 'Please stand in profile' or 'Please face towards the audience'. Make sure participants take time to focus before starting and the start can be an agreed signal from the facilitator such as 'Curtain' or 'Lights Up' or can be initiated by the group.

There is no right or wrong way to do improvisations and encourage players to not worry about judging themselves or trying to be 'good', 'best', 'right', etc. 'In judging, we keep ourselves from a fresh moment of experience and rarely go beyond what we already know' (*Improvisation for the Theatre*, page 8). Encourage participants to enter into the work fully and naturally and to go where instinct or impulses lead them. Participants focus on their own role within the improvisation while also being aware of what is going on around them and what others are giving them.

Preplanning is important to develop a structure, however do not over plan. For example do not try to work out exact dialogue, instead focus on the theme, story and overall structure while allowing room so that 'how' the problem is worked through can grow out of the actual stage action.

# Appendices



**T**his section contains key concepts for a drama workshop (not necessarily issue-based), recommended reading, biographies, a sample evaluation form, content of the *Information Leaflet on Suicide Prevention* and a list of support services in Ireland. The lists are not comprehensive.

## SOME KEY CONCEPTS FOR A DRAMA WORKSHOP

**Focus:** A drama facilitator needs to be aware of the focus rating of drama games and exercises. For example in a low focus exercise no person is singled out for direct attention, the group works collectively and the input of individuals is not pointed out. Medium focus refers to an exercise whereby, although no person is singled out for sustained attention, there is more attention on the individual than in low focus exercises. Some tasks may be done by individuals but these are of short duration. In an exercise with a high focus rating, the whole group observes one or a small number of persons perform a specific task and these exercises are of longer duration than medium focus. A drama workshop should ideally start with low focus exercises

and move to high focus ones (see *Playing the Game* by Christine Poulter).

Focus is also about having a point of concentration when you are acting. In an improvisation, the participant needs to focus fully on their objective and on the other players.

**Disinhibition:** This means that participants feel safe enough to be able to do things that they would not normally do. It involves the facilitator consciously structuring the workshop so that participants move beyond normal social inhibition and into a frame of mind that is willing to take risks. It is not the only aim of a workshop, but it is one of the essential ingredients that will enable the workshop to produce effective results.

**Synchronisation:** This is the ability of the group to function harmoniously and at the same level. It involves the facilitator choosing exercises that help the entire group operate at the same level of energy and focus. Synchronisation should take place during the **beginning** section of the workshop.

**Staggered Risk Taking:** Participants should be asked to take relatively few risks at the

**beginning** of a workshop. As the workshop moves to its **middle** section, the risk taking becomes more pronounced (but still in the relatively safe context of group support). If the first two levels of the workshop have been successfully completed, the facilitator can then ask that a bigger risk be taken by the participants...this is the **end** part, and usually it will involve a performance-related situation. The facilitator needs to be very sensitive that participants are not pushed out of their depth too quickly and left in situations where they feel vulnerable. Nor must the facilitator under-challenge the participants. Small and calculated risks at each part of the workshop are better than asking a participant to take one massive leap.

## SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER READING – THEATRE

- Johnston, Chris (1998), *House of Games, Making Theatre from Everyday Life*, Routledge, London
- Poulter, Christine (1993), *Playing the Game*, Macmillan, London
- Boal, Augusto (1992) *Games for Actors and Non-Actors*, Routledge, London
- Boal, Augusto, (2000) *Theatre of the Oppressed*, Pluto Press, London

## Appendices

- Boal, Augusto (1995) *Rainbow of Desire*, Routledge, London
- Boal, Augusto (1998) *Legislative Theatre*, Routledge, London
- Brook, Peter (1990) *The Empty Space: A great theatre director gives his views on the making of drama*, Penguin, London
- Brandes, Donna and Phillips, Howard (1977), *The Gamester's Handbook, Volumes 1 and 2*, Hutchinson, London
- Spolin, Viola (1999). *Improvisation for the Theatre. A Handbook of Teaching and Directing Techniques*, Northwestern University Press, Evanstown

### BIOGRAPHIES

**Mary Moynihan** is Artistic Director of Smashing Times and a Drama Lecturer for the Conservatory of Music and Drama, DIT, teaching the Stanislavski system of actor training, Michael Chekhov techniques, movement and drama facilitation. Mary originally trained as an actor and director at Focus under the direction of Deirdre O'Connell, her friend and mentor and she is directing a main show at Focus in 2006. Directing credits include *Talk To Me Like The Rain and Let Me Listen...* by Tennessee

Williams, Focus Theatre, *May Our Faces Haunt You, A Chain of Hands and Medea* for Smashing Times and on nationwide tour and *Yerma* and *Riders to the Sea* at the Samuel Beckett Theatre. She was assistant director to Bairbre Ni Chaoimh for *Very Heaven* at Focus. As a playwright, Mary's work includes *May Our Faces Haunt You, Out of the Outside* and *Silent Screams*.

**Paul Kennedy** has worked as a director, writer and drama facilitator with Smashing Times for the past eight years. He has worked with groups in Ringsend, Tallaght, Belfast, Strabane and Derry and has a wide range of professional theatre experience. His play *Desert Places* was produced by the Druid Theatre Company, Galway, in August 2000 as part of the Druid Debut Series. He wrote and directed *Acquainted with the Night* for the Dublin Fringe Festival in 2002 and he wrote and directed *The Tenants*, which premiered at the Project Arts Centre for the 2003 Dublin Fringe festival, both presented by Female Parts Theatre Company.

**Karen Ward** is the Holistic Therapist on RTE's successful *The Health Squad*. She

treats her clients from a physical, emotional, mental and spiritual point of view. She has an Honours Science degree from UCD and her many holistic therapies include Psychotherapy and Stress Management Counselling, Reflexology and Aromatherapy Massage. Karen is a Hatha Yoga teacher, a Body Sculpting and Pilates Instructor and a Holistic Dietician and Nutritionist. Karen is an established lecturer and facilitator of one-off motivational and inspiring seminars on a variety of holistic health subjects (Stress Management, Yoga at your Desk, Parenting Skills, Relaxation Techniques, Weight Management). Karen runs her own clinic in Smithfield, Dublin and in Sportsco, Dublin 4. Karen's website is [www.karenwardholistictherapist.com](http://www.karenwardholistictherapist.com)

**Joan Freeman** is a Psychologist and has also a Masters Degree in Research Psychology. In 1989 she trained as a counsellor for the last sixteen years and in 1995 opened a counselling practice in Leixlip. Joan has recently pioneered the first Irish Centre for the Prevention of Self-Harm which opened in Lucan, Co Dublin in 2006.

# SMASHING TIMES THEATRE COMPANY LTD

## ACTING FOR THE FUTURE

Using drama and theatre to promote positive mental health and to raise awareness of issues surrounding suicide and suicide prevention

## Drama Workshop Feedback Questionnaire

Please tick a box below to indicate what you felt was the standard of the drama workshop presentation:

FAIR  VERY GOOD  EXCELLENT

COMMENTS: \_\_\_\_\_

Has your awareness of issues surrounding suicide and suicide prevention increased from your attendance at the workshop?

YES  NO

Comments: \_\_\_\_\_

Any other comments that you may like to add: \_\_\_\_\_



# Information Leaflet on Suicide Prevention

The following are the details contained in the *Information Leaflet on Suicide Prevention*, which is distributed at each drama workshop for both adults and schools. This leaflet contains the content for discussion by the counsellor in each workshop. The main difference between both leaflets is that the leaflet for the schools workshop does *not* contain the Signs for Suicidal Intent (instead signs are discussed within the workshop by the counsellor) and the information on 'Taking Action' has been adapted for the schools workshop:

The *Information Leaflet on Suicide Prevention* for workshop with adult groups contains:

- A guide to some common myths and facts about suicide
- Signs for suicidal intent
- Taking Action (Guidelines for Intervention)
- List of support services

The *Information Leaflet on Suicide Prevention* for workshop with schools contains:

- A guide to some common myths and facts about suicide

- Taking Action (Revised version)
- List of support services

## A GUIDE TO SOME COMMON MYTHS AND FACTS ABOUT SUICIDE:

### **"Those who talk about suicide are the least likely to attempt it" Myth**

Those who talk about their suicidal thoughts do attempt suicide. Experience shows that many people who take their own lives will have told others about it in the weeks before their death.

### **"If someone is going to kill themselves, there are things you can do that may prevent it from happening" Fact**

If you can offer help and emotional support to people who have suicidal thoughts then you can reduce their risk of suicide.

### **"Suicidal people are fully intent on dying" Myth**

Many suicidal people are undecided about living or dying. Many callers to the Samaritans do not want to die but they talk of not wanting to go on living as things are.

### **"If someone has a history of making 'cries for help' then they won't really do it for real" Myth**

Those who have attempted suicide are 100 times more likely than the general population to die by suicide eventually. On average four out of ten people who die by suicide will have attempted suicide earlier.

### **"Talking about suicide does not encourage it" Fact**

Some people worry that talking about suicide could lead society to think suicide is 'okay' and a reasonable thing to do. Allowing a person to talk through their worst fears and feelings may provide them with a lifeline that makes all the difference between choosing life and choosing to die. Responsible discussion will also educate society about suicide without giving extra encouragement to vulnerable people to attempt suicide.

### **"Only mentally ill/clinically depressed people make serious attempts at suicide" Myth**

Although the majority of people who die by suicide are judged to have had some sort of

## Information Leaflet on Suicide Prevention

psychiatric illness (whether diagnosed or not), a proportion of people who take their own lives do not suffer from any mental illness.

### “Once a person is suicidal, they are suicidal forever” Myth

Individuals who wish to kill themselves may feel this way for only a limited period of time. Emotional support can help people come through a suicidal crisis. Talking and listening can make the difference between choosing to live and deciding to end pain by dying.

### “Suicide can be a blessed relief not just for the individual but for those that surround him or her” Myth

It is not helpful to view suicide as honourable or courageous. For those left behind, the loss of a loved one – particularly in such tragic circumstances – is the start of a nightmare, not the end. It leaves profound feelings of loss, grief and guilt in its wake.

The above information has been taken from a publication developed by the Irish Association of Suicidology in conjunction with the Samaritans.

## SIGNS FOR SUICIDAL INTENT

### Suicide risk is greater where there is:

- Recent loss or the break-up of a close relationship
- Current or anticipated unhappy change in health or circumstances, e.g. retirement or financial problems
- Painful and/or disabling physical illness
- Heavy use of, or dependency on, alcohol/other drugs
- History of earlier suicidal behaviour
- Depression

### People often show their suicidal feelings by:

- Being withdrawn and unable to relate.
- Having definite ideas of how to take their own lives, and maybe speaking of tidying up affairs, or giving other indications of planning suicide.
- Talking about feeling isolated and lonely.
- Expressing feelings of failure, uselessness, hopelessness or loss of self-esteem.

- Constantly dwelling on problems for which there seem to be no solutions.
- Expressing the lack of supporting philosophy of life, such as a religious belief.

*Report on the National Task Force on Suicide, Department of Health and Children.*

## TAKING ACTION (GUIDELINES FOR INTERVENTION) FOR WORKSHOP WITH ADULT GROUPS

**Believe it.** Take it seriously if someone you know is talking about suicidal feelings.

**Check it out.** You may want to check with another person to see if they share your opinion. You could ask the person directly if they are feeling suicidal. Suicidal people are often relieved to find someone willing to talk.

**Be Calm.** Don't panic. It will only increase anxiety and may jeopardise your ability to act appropriately.

**Listen.** Take the time to listen without judgment. Don't make false promises that things will improve immediately.

**Do not say something like:** “That's so stupid. How could anyone be so silly as to want to kill themselves”?

**Do say something like:** “Tell me more about your feelings so I can help you.”

**Do not** leave the person alone.

**Do not promise confidentiality.** Never make and keep a promise of confidentiality about an individual's suicidal intentions. An admission of suicidal thoughts is one secret that should not be kept.

**Get help.** Seek professional help. Remember that there are sources of help and information. You do not have to handle a crisis situation by yourself

**Be willing to give help sooner rather than later.** Suicide prevention is not a last minute activity. All textbooks on depression say that it should be reacted to as soon as possible. If you feel that someone is not coping, help should be offered before the situation becomes a crisis.

*Above information has been adapted from a brochure produced by the National Suicide Review Group and the Irish Association of Suicidology*

## TAKING ACTION FOR WORKSHOP WITH SCHOOLS

**Believe it.** Take it seriously if someone you know is talking about suicidal feelings.

**Check it out.** You may want to check with another person to see if they share your opinion. You could ask the person directly if they are feeling suicidal. Suicidal people are often relieved to find someone willing to talk.

**Be Calm.** Don't panic. It will only increase anxiety and may reduce your ability to act appropriately.

**Listen.** Take the time to listen without judgment. Don't make false promises that things will improve immediately.

**Do not say something like:** “That's so stupid. How could anyone be so silly as to want to kill themselves”?

**Do say something like:** “Tell me more about your feelings so I can help you.”

**Do not** leave the person alone.

**Get help.** Seek professional help. Remember that there are sources of help and information. You do not have to handle a crisis situation by yourself

**Do not promise confidentiality.** Never make and keep a promise of confidentiality about an individual's suicidal intentions. An admission of suicidal thoughts is one secret that should not be kept. You could suggest that you both talk to someone neutral together. An organisation like the Samaritans would be a good choice.

**Be willing to give help sooner rather than later.** Suicide prevention is not a last minute activity. All textbooks on depression or mental ill health say that it should be treated as soon as possible. If you feel that someone is not coping, help should be offered before the situation becomes a crisis.

**Don't be afraid to tell a responsible adult.** If someone you know is suicidal, it is not ‘ratting’ to tell a responsible adult. It could save someone's life.

**If you would like to speak to someone in confidence, please see attached list of helpline telephone numbers and support organisations.**

The following is a list of support services in Ireland. It is not intended as a comprehensive list of voluntary support services. Local health boards can provide a more detailed guide to local support services.

## AWARE DEFEAT DEPRESSION

Providing support to those whose lives are affected by depression.  
**Address:** 72 Lower Leeson Street, Dublin 2  
**Phone:** +353 (0) 1 661 7211 / Helpline: Lo-call 1890 303 302  
**Web:** www.aware.ie  
**Email:** aware@iol.ie

## SAMARITANS

Provides befriending and confidential emotional support 24 hours a day, 365 days a year to those passing through personal crisis.  
**Address:** Irish Regional Office, 112 Marlborough Street, Dublin 1  
**Phone:** Help line 1850 60 90 90 / 01 872 7700  
**Web:** www.samaritans.org  
**Email:** jo@samaritans.org

## NATIONAL SUICIDE BEREAVEMENT SUPPORT NETWORK

Providing support to new and existing suicide bereavement support groups and information to the bereaved. Website contains a Directory of Suicide Bereavement Support Groups in Ireland, recommended reading and details of upcoming events.  
**Address:** PO Box 1, Youghal, Co. Cork  
**Phone:** +353 (0) 85 722 4819  
**Web:** www.nsbnsn.org  
**Email:** nsbsn@eircom.net / info@nsbsn.org

## CONSOLE – BEREAVED BY SUICIDE FOUNDATION

Console assists people who have lost a relative or friend to suicide and who would like the comfort and understanding of others who have experienced a similar loss.  
**Address:** All Hallows College, Gracepark Road, Drumcondra, Dublin 9  
**Web:** www.console.ie  
**Bereaved by Suicide Foundation**  
**Phone:** 24hr Help line: 1800 201 890  
**Web:** www.suicidebereaved.com  
**Email:** suicidebereaved@hotmail.com

## BARNARDOS

Committed to the best interest of children and young people in Ireland, promoting and respecting their rights.  
**Address:** National Office, Christchurch Square, Dublin 8  
**Phone:** Call save 1850 222 300  
**Web:** www.barnardos.ie **Email:** info@barnardos.ie

## SOLAS – CHILD BEREAVEMENT COUNSELLING

Sólás is Barnardos' counselling service for children who have lost someone close to them – like a parent or sibling – through death.  
**Phone:** Solas Help line: 01 473 2110, Mon-Fri 10am-12noon  
**Email:** solas@barnardos.ie

## BODYWHYS

Providing help, support, and understanding for people affected by eating disorders. Bodywhys operates two types of support groups around Ireland: one for people with eating disorders and another for families and friends. Details of time and venues available from website and help line.  
**Phone:** Lo Call: 1890 200 444  
**Office:** +353 (0) 1 283 4963  
**Web:** www.bodywhys.ie  
**Email:** info@bodywhys.ie

## MENTAL HEALTH IRELAND

Mental Health Ireland aims to promote positive mental health and to actively support persons with a mental illness, their families and carers by identifying their needs and advocating their rights.  
**Address:** Mensana House, 6 Adelaide Street, Dun Laoghaire, Co Dublin  
**Phone:** 01 284 1166  
**Web:** www.mentalhealthireland.ie  
**Email:** information@mentalhealthireland.ie

## COMBAT POVERTY AGENCY

**Address:** Bridgewater Centre, Conyngham Road, Island Bridge, Dublin 8  
**Phone:** +353 (0) 1 670 6746  
**Web:** www.combatpoverty.ie  
**Email:** info@cpa.ie

## NYCI

The National Youth Council of Ireland (NYCI) is the representative body of Irish youth organisations.  
**Address:** 3 Montague Street, Dublin 2, Ireland.  
**Phone:** +353 (0) 1 478 4122  
**Web:** www.youth.ie  
**Email:** info@nyci.ie

## CARI FOUNDATION

The CARI Foundation is a registered charity founded in 1989. Our primary aim is to provide a professional, child-centred therapy and counselling service to children, families, and groups who have been affected by child sexual abuse.  
**Phone:** Helpline 1890 924 567  
**Web:** www.cari.ie

## THE DUBLIN RAPE CRISIS CENTRE

The Dublin Rape Crisis Centre offers a free, confidential listening and support service for women and men who have been raped and/or sexually abused at any time in their lives, or for anyone who wants to talk about the effects of sexual violence.  
**Address:** 70 Lower Leeson Street, Dublin 2  
**Phone:** 01 661 4911 / Freephone: 1800 77 88 88  
**Web:** www.drcc.ie  
**Email:** rcc@indigo.ie

## GINGERBREAD IRELAND – ONE PARENT FAMILIES

**Address:** Carmichael House, Brunswick St North, Dublin 7  
**Phone:** +353 (0) 1 814 6618  
**Web:** www.gingerbread.ie

## LESBIAN AND GAY RESOURCE GROUP

**Address:** The Other Place, 8 South Main Street, Cork  
**Phone:** +353 (0) 21 427 8470/1  
**Gay male Helpline:** +353 (0) 21 427 8745  
**Lesbian Helpline:** +353 (0) 21 480 8600  
 Thursday 8-10pm

## NATIONAL LESBIAN AND GAY FEDERATION

**Address:** Unit 2, Scarlet Row, Temple Bar, Dublin 2  
**Phone:** +353 (0) 1 671 0939  
**Email:** gcn@tinet.ie

## ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS

General Service Office:  
**Address:** 109 South Circular Road, Leonard's Corner, Dublin 8  
**Phone:** +353 (0) 1 453 8998  
**Web:** www.alcoholicsanonymous.ie  
**Email:** ala@indigo.ie

## GAMBLERS ANONYMOUS

**Address:** Carmichael House, North Brunswick Street, Dublin 7  
**Phone:** +353 (0) 1 872 1133

## NARCOTICS ANONYMOUS

**Address:** 4-5 Eustace Street, Temple Bar, Dublin 2  
**Phone:** +353 (0) 1 672 8000  
**Web:** www.na.ireland.org

## DOCHAS – BEREAVEMENT SUPPORT AFTER SUICIDE

**Address:** Roselawn Health Centre, Blanchardstown, Dublin 15  
**Phone:** +353 (0) 1 820 0915  
**Web:** www.dochas.info

## NORTHSIDE COUNSELLING CENTRE

**Address:** Coolock Development Centre, Bunratty Drive,

Bonnybrook, Dublin 17  
**Phone:** +353 (0) 1 848 4789

## PASTORAL CARE

**Address:** Tallaght Hospital, Belgard Road, Dublin 24  
**Phone:** +353 (0) 1 414 2482

## SPIRITAN ASYLUM SERVICES INITIATIVE – SPIRASI

SPIRASI works in partnership with others in welcoming refugee seekers, whatever their background, and to work with them, including survivors of torture, and the host community in the promotion of self-reliance and integration by providing a range of supports and services.  
**Address:** 213 North Circular Road, Phibsboro, Dublin 7  
**Phone:** +353 (0) 1 838 9664  
**Web:** www.spirasi.ie  
**Email:** info@spirasi.ie

## RAINBOWS IRELAND

Rainbows Ireland aims to help children who have been bereaved through parental death, parental separation, or parental divorce, to work through the grieving process, which follows any significant loss.  
**Address:** National Office, Loreto Centre, Crumlin Road, Dublin 12  
**Phone:** +353 (0) 1 473 4175

## IRISH ASSOCIATION OF SUICIDODOLOGY

The Irish Association of Suicidology is a forum for all individuals and voluntary groups involved in any aspect of suicidology and works for the exchange of knowledge gained from differing perspectives and experiences.  
**Address:** 16 New Antrim Street, Castlebar, Co Mayo  
**Web:** www.ias.ie  
**Email:** drjfc@iol.ie  
**Phone:** +353 (0) 94 925 0858

## NATIONAL SUICIDE RESEARCH FOUNDATION

**Address:** 1 Perrott Avenue, College Road, Cork  
**Email:** k.malone@st-vincents.ie  
**Phone:** +353 (0) 1 209 4560

## TURNING THE TIDE OF SUICIDE

The 3Ts (Turning the Tide of Suicide) is a charity organisation, founded to raise awareness and funding to lower the suicide rates in Ireland through dedicated research, educational support and intervention in the problem of suicide in Ireland.  
**Web:** www.3ts.ie

## SPHE SUPPORT SERVICE

Social, Personal and Health Education support service – post primary.  
**Address:** Marino Institute of Education, Griffith Avenue, Dublin 9  
**Web:** www.sphe.ie  
**Email:** sphe@mie.ie  
**Phone:** +353 (0) 1 8057718

## IRISH CENTRE FOR THE PREVENTION OF SUICIDE AND SELF-HARM

**Address:** Pieta House, Old Lucan House, Lucan, Co. Dublin  
**Phone:** +353 (0) 1 6010000

## OXFORD CENTRE FOR SUICIDE RESEARCH

**Web:** cebmh.warne.ox.ac.uk/csr

## AN AUSTRALIAN MENTAL HEALTH PROMOTION PROGRAMME FOR SECONDARY SCHOOLS

**Web:** www.curriculum.edu.au/mindmatters

## CANADIAN SITE CONTAINING INFORMATION ON ASSISTED TRAINING (SUICIDE INTERVENTION)

**Web:** www.livingworks.net



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