

*“Suicide does not end the chances of life getting worse.
Suicide eliminates the possibility of it ever getting better.”*

Building a Suicide Safer Community: a Combined Approach to Saving Lives through safeTALK and ASIST



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The Issue of Suicide

Suicide is one of the last big taboos' in modern day society; a phenomenon that effects so many people in our communities in so many ways and yet has not been tackled by our communities. This needs to change.

In the last 45 years suicide rates have increased by 60% worldwide. Suicide is now among the three leading causes of death among those aged 15-44 (male and female). Suicide attempts are up to 20 times more frequent than completed suicides.

Although suicide rates had traditionally been highest amongst elderly males, rates among young people have been increasing to such an extent that they are now the group at highest risk in a third of all countries.

There are many factors that are associated with suicide including social factors, cultural factors, economic crisis, work stresses, mental health difficulties, family issues, substance misuse, sexual orientation, individual crisis and bullying.

In Britain, each year, more than 6000 people kill themselves; that's 4000 more deaths per year than occur on all our roads.

Yet suicide remains a taboo subject that most people won't entertain talking about it, never mind feeling able to support someone who they think might be considering taking their own life.

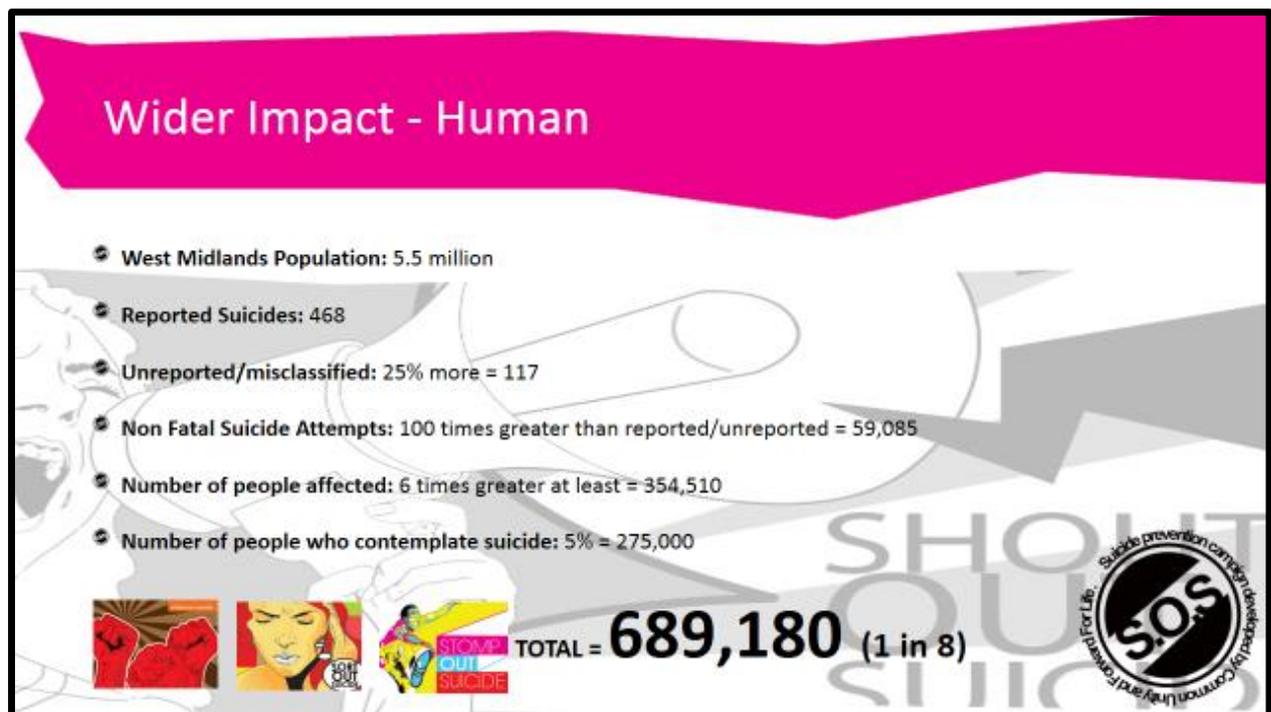
In 2011, the suicide rate in the U.K. drastically shot up, reaching a 7 year high.

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The Human Cost of Suicide

It is important to recognise the impact of Suicide and the human cost is much greater than just the reported suicides.

With reference to [LivingWorks](#) research and evidence, Forward For Life in partnership with Common Unity undertook a conservative calculation of the impact of suicide for the West Midlands as part of the launch of the SOS Campaign in Birmingham (September 2013).



The Financial Cost of Suicide

Suicide is emotionally costly - its effects have far reaching consequences on individuals, families, friends, communities and our society as a whole.

The coalition government looked to start to address suicide through the publication of [Preventing Suicide in England – A cross-government outcomes strategy](#) to save lives on World Suicide Prevention Day (September 10th) in 2012. The impact of this outcomes strategy though has been compromised greatly by the very fact that local suicide prevention strategies do not have to be implemented – they are not mandatory –

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austerity measures have further challenged Health and Social Care regarding direct investment in suicide prevention both strategically and operationally.

However, putting a price on a life is impossible – the value of life cannot be calculated and should not be calculated which makes such decisions by our local authorities as to what services need to flourish and which need to be put on the "back burner" very hard decisions indeed. Decision makers have to take into consideration a range of health and social care pressures and the cost benefit of implementing specific approaches.

Even though we shouldn't even contemplate putting a price on life, we can calculate what the financial costs to society the act of suicide has.

The SOS Campaign Launch in Birmingham allowed for the overarching financial costs to society of Suicidal Behaviour based on the known number of suicides within the West Midlands in 2011 using a costing formula developed by the [North East Mental Health Development Unit](#) in 2009 as follows:

Wider Impact - Financial

- England – Cost of a suicide estimated at **£1.45 million** (NE MH Development Unit/2009)
- Cost for reported suicides in the West Midlands (468) = **£678,600,000**

These estimates have been based on 3 sets of cost components:

- **Direct costs** i.e. the services used by the individual leading up to and immediately following the suicide. This includes, for example, unsubsidised GP visits, prescribed medication, counselling, funeral costs, court costs, use of emergency services, insurance claims and medical services.
- **Indirect costs** i.e. the costs to society of each suicide. These include the time lost from work and lost production from an exit or absence from the workforce
- **Human costs** i.e. lost years of disability free life in addition to the pain and grief experienced by family and friends

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An introduction to safeTALK and ASIST as one way to reduce suicides.

Suicide is a major issue and it's increasing – In England it is a sad fact that every 2 hours a person dies by their own hand.

When someone takes their own life, the effect on the family, friends, the local community and the wider community is devastating – An immeasurable impact.

In 2011, according to the latest data from the Office for National Statistics, the suicide rate in the U.K. drastically shot up, reaching a 7 year high. The 8% increase in the number of suicides from 2010 to 2011 highlights the effects that times of financial hardship is having on our communities.

Forward For Life and Common Unity believe that suicide prevention requires a range of approaches to be effective. One of the key approaches is through the delivery of training that looks to strengthen the knowledge base, the skill base and the resilience levels within and across our communities for all community members both in a professional context and general population context.

safeTALK and ASIST are two internationally recognised and respected approaches that engage communities with the myriad of challenges that suicide brings and enables communities to play a vital interventionist role regarding suicidal thought.

These training programmes are warranted on the premise that the majority of services either work from a preventative approach or a reactive approach – the *interventionist area* is to an extent picked up within some front-line health and social care professions and alluded to in services such as helplines as provided by organisations such as the Samaritans.

However, front line services only engage with the distress of an individual upon referral of that individual, and helplines have a clear mandate regarding their approach being a “listening service.”

safeTALK and ASIST bridge this gap by equipping communities with the necessary skills and knowledge to identify and where appropriate provide suicide first aid to individuals who are considering taking their life by suicide.

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What is **safeTALK**?



safeTALK is a half-day course that offers you practical steps to help someone with thoughts of suicide and helps you both to connect with more specialised support.

The *safeTALK* course was developed by [LivingWorks](#) in Canada and is delivered worldwide. It complements the more comprehensive 2 day ASIST course by widening the net of suicide alert helpers to ensure that thoughts of suicide aren't missed, dismissed or avoided.

Through attending the *safeTALK* course, delegates will know what to do if someone's suicidal through following the easy to remember TALK steps - Tell, Ask, Listen and Keep-safe. These practical steps offer immediate help to someone having thoughts of suicide and helps you both move forward to connect with more specialised support.

The *safeTALK* course is based on the principles of maximum dissemination and minimum cost.

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The logo for 'Forward for life' consists of the text 'Forward for life' in a sans-serif font, with 'Forward' on the top line and 'for life' on the bottom line. To the right of the text is a green graphic element consisting of two overlapping, curved shapes that form a stylized arrow pointing to the right.

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What is ASIST?



ASIST is a two day, skills building workshop that prepares caregivers of all kinds to provide suicide first aid interventions. Professionals, Volunteers and informal helpers all need to know how to help persons with thoughts of suicide in ways that increase their suicide safety.

Approved by the World Health Organisation (WHO), Applied Suicide Intervention Skills Training is a standardised, certified programme teaching a robust model of suicide intervention with 6 easy-to-remember steps. Over one million people worldwide have been trained in ASIST.

ASIST is a comprehensive two day course which enables communities to become more willing, ready and able to help persons at risk of suicide. Developed by LivingWorks in Canada and delivered world-wide, it is an interactive and practical course proven to help caregivers learn how to identify risk and intervene to prevent the immediate risk of suicide.

The Preventing Suicide in England: A cross-government outcomes strategy to save lives (2012) recognises the value of high quality training and development in a bid to reduce suicide rates stating that interventions that raise suicide awareness or training programmes that teach people how to recognise and respond to the warning signs for suicide in themselves or in others are effectively being delivered in a variety of settings including schools, colleges, workplaces and community settings.

[The Independent Commission on Mental Health and Policing Report 2013](#) recognised that training in mental health and suicide prevention was lacking in the police force and identified ASIST as a well evaluated training programme. One of the recommendations

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in this report states “Suicide prevention training and guidance must be put in place immediately with the advice and assistance of external stakeholders”.

Why ASIST?

ASIST was developed by LivingWorks in Calgary, Canada, in the early 1980s and since then over one million people in 22 countries have been trained.

Evaluations of ASIST have shown that it is popular with participants and results in changes in knowledge, attitudes and skills. It has also been shown to have an impact in intervention behaviour.

You can find out more facts about the impact of suicide and how ASIST may be one solution by reading ["Suicide and ASIST: An Overarching Programme Briefing"](#)

ASIST has been implemented in Scotland and an evaluation of its use and impact there, based on an internet survey with 534 respondents, concluded that it had been successful in raising awareness of suicide and increasing the body of people with intervention skills.

ASIST has been recognised within the most recent evaluation undertaken in Wales identifying that

“The rollout of ASIST is making a positive contribution towards suicide prevention within Wales. It is raising awareness and creating a greater understanding and acceptance that prevention of suicide is everybody’s business.”

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One Solution – A Combined Approach to realising Suicide Safer Communities

At Forward For Life and Common Unity we believe there is one solution we can promote alongside the SOS programme in realising *Suicide Safer Communities* and it’s a very simple one.

The *safeTALK* course can train up to 30 people in half a day – this training serves as gatekeeper to individuals who are considering suicide. We believe that through greater engagement in *safeTALK* at an organisational and community level, people can be directed to the appropriate support with the outcome of saving a life.

The challenge is this - *safeTALK* trained individuals are expected to refer people at risk of suicide to *ready, willing and able* individuals who can implement *Suicide First Aid Support (ASIST)* through an agreed safety plan – however, organisations who have staff trained in ASIST are limited in number across the region and therefore continued support could be compromised due to a lack of ready access to ASIST trained individuals.

Our *Combined Approach* sees a way through this via brokering agreements with a range of stakeholders to sign up to engaging in *safeTALK* at a proportional level. This will provide the eyes and ears for every organisation to intervene where suicide ideation is a possible consideration. In addition to this, organisations can engage with ASIST – Forward For Life and Common Unity believe that through proportional representation both within organisations and community groups stakeholders will have both the gatekeeping aspect (*safeTALK*) and the *Suicide First Aid (ASIST)* embedded. The combined approach is outlined on the following page which demonstrates what is required to be recognised as achieving full recognition as a Suicide Safer Community Organisation.

Forward For Life and Common Unity realise that austerity measures mean that investment in training is difficult to raise. However, with the relatively low costs for implementation of *safeTALK* and the comparatively low costs of ASIST through our training, the overall financial impact in comparison to the relevant gains is absolutely minimal when we consider that the cost of each and every suicide is in the region of £1,450,000 per death by suicide.

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The Combined Approach to Suicide Safer Communities



Through being recognised as adopting the *Combined Approach* and therefore working towards a *Suicide Safer Community*, Forward For Life and Common Unity will actively highlight such organisations through a range of resources both virtual (social media / web-site links / publicity / promotion) and physical (resources/documents/publicity) where appropriate and relevant to the partnership work under SOS.

In the spirit of partnership, it is anticipated that Suicide Safer Community Partners will highlight the work of SOS – as through active partnerships, we believe we can reduce suicides and save lives.

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Why Common Unity and Forward For Life?

First and foremost, Common Unity and Forward For Life **are the only** established Social Enterprises across the West Midlands who can offer both the *safeTALK* **and** ASIST courses.

We believe that our experience, our knowledge and our sense of purpose along with the level of active engagement we foster through the delivery of our training programmes ensures that for the participant, the quality of training experienced is second to none.

Common Unity and Forward For Life have between us more than 35 years' experience working within health and social care.

Common Unity are well-respected with established roots in the community having a history of delivering a range of ground-breaking programmes that engage seldom heard sectors of society. These programmes have included Urbrum, the Birmingham Barbershop Project and the management of the Community Cohesion Portfolio across the city of Birmingham. Caron Thompson, Director of Common Unity is a qualified, knowledgeable, dynamic and highly engaging trainer in the area of suicide prevention.

Forward For Life carries with it over a decade of experience directly in the field of suicide prevention and well-being at both a strategic and operational level. Prior to the establishment of Forward For Life its Company Director, Terry Rigby, was responsible for establishing the Award Winning Kin Kitsu Youth Programme in Sandwell, The nationally recognised Arts On Prescription Programme in Stockport and the NHS endorsed Mental Health Awareness Training Programme in the Heart of Birmingham to name but a few.

Terry's knowledge of well-being, suicide prevention and his training background along with Caron's passion for developing skills in others, mental health knowledge and inclusive approach means that delegates feel *ready, willing and able* to embrace and utilise the suicide prevention skills learned to help society become *Suicide Safer*.

To date Common Unity and Forward For Life have led the implementation of *safeTALK* and ASIST training to people from a range of backgrounds including Mental Health specialist services, teachers, lecturers, the housing sector, bereavement services, suicide support groups, counsellors, GP's, front line primary care workers, the emergency



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services, specialist third sector organisations who work with vulnerable communities (e.g. Homeless, Substance Misuse), Service User Forums, health sector commissioners, the private healthcare sector and social workers.

Standardised evaluations to date has assured us through the [feedback](#) received that the course had been of significant benefit in supporting them to become more *ready, willing and able* to identify and help people in the community with suicidal thoughts.

Since the delivery of ASIST via Forward For Life and Common Unity in and around Birmingham there have been a number of occasions when through utilisation of the skills learned on ASIST, trainees believe they have been successful in saving a life.

One such testimonial was by Mark Peters of [Start Again C.I.C](#) who stated

Start Again Project CiC, recently undertook the ASIST training for our management and support workers, we have been able to put the training to use straight away and have supported young people. Without the training suicide is a subject that we as a team felt was a taboo subject but now have the confidence to ask questions and give support.

Is that it? Absolutely not!

[Common Unity Social Enterprise](#) and [Forward For Life](#) are not solely training providers in suicide prevention. At the heart of what we do is a drive for working with communities to support society to be *Suicide Safer*. This includes the [SOS campaign](#) development and roll-out, organisational support, resource development, tailored campaigning support, marketing, lobbying and wider suicide prevention strategic input.

When you engage with SOS and its founders, you engage with a whole movement that strives for making *Suicide Safer Communities* a reality. We are not a one trick pony.





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