

*“Suicide does not end the chances of life getting worse.
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Suicide Prevention Training in Hertfordshire

An overview of delivery of the Combined Approach for suicide prevention implemented on behalf of Hertfordshire County Council Public Health Service 2014



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Foreword

Common Unity and Forward For Life 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 more than 35 combined years’ experience working within health and social care.

To date Common Unity and Forward For Life have led the implementation of [safeTALK and ASIST](#) (Applied Suicide Intervention Skills Training) courses to people from a range of backgrounds across England 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 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 have provided assurances locally that the courses have been of significant benefit in supporting participants to be more *ready, willing and able* to identify and help people in the community with suicidal thoughts.

A recent groundbreaking [study](#) has shown that LivingWorks’ ASIST program helps caregivers provide effective help to persons at risk in immediate suicide first-aid situations.

Conducted by leading suicide researchers at Columbia and Rochester Universities, the *Impact of ASIST on the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline* study evaluated over 1,500 calls made to the Lifeline and showed that callers working with ASIST-trained counselors were significantly less depressed and suicidal—and significantly more hopeful about living.

The Challenge

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. Forward For Life and Common Unity see suicide as being “[the Biggest Elephant in the Room](#)” in relation to the amount of stigma that surrounds suicide.

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.



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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.

The Guidelines

[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 should be delivered in a variety of settings including schools, colleges, workplaces and community settings.

The recent [National Confidential Inquiry into Suicide and Homicide by people with Mental Illness](#) (NCISH) by the University of Manchester (2014) further outlines the need for and opportunities for suicide prevention in Primary Care and across communities seeing suicide prevention as everybody’s business.

[The Independent Report: Mental Health and Policing](#) commissioned for the Metropolitan Police Force in 2013 provides recommendations to ensure that the future of policing best engages with the communities they support in regards to both Mental Health and Suicide risk. This report cites ASIST as a training programme recognised as a valuable tool to reduce suicide risk.

The evidence base and a need for Suicide Prevention training programmes such as ASIST grow stronger year upon year in the UK with there being a clear identification of both identifiable vulnerabilities associated with suicidal behaviour and key occupational groups that can make a difference in preventing suicide. [Suicide and ASIST: An Overarching Programme Briefing paper \(2013\)](#) clearly demonstrates real opportunities for reducing deaths by suicide.

The Combined Approach & Hertfordshire County Council

It was recognised by Hertfordshire County Council Public Health Service that although suicide rates across the County were relatively low compared to the English average rate, one suicide was one too many and therefore through locally based third sector organisation Herts RITE, Common Unity and



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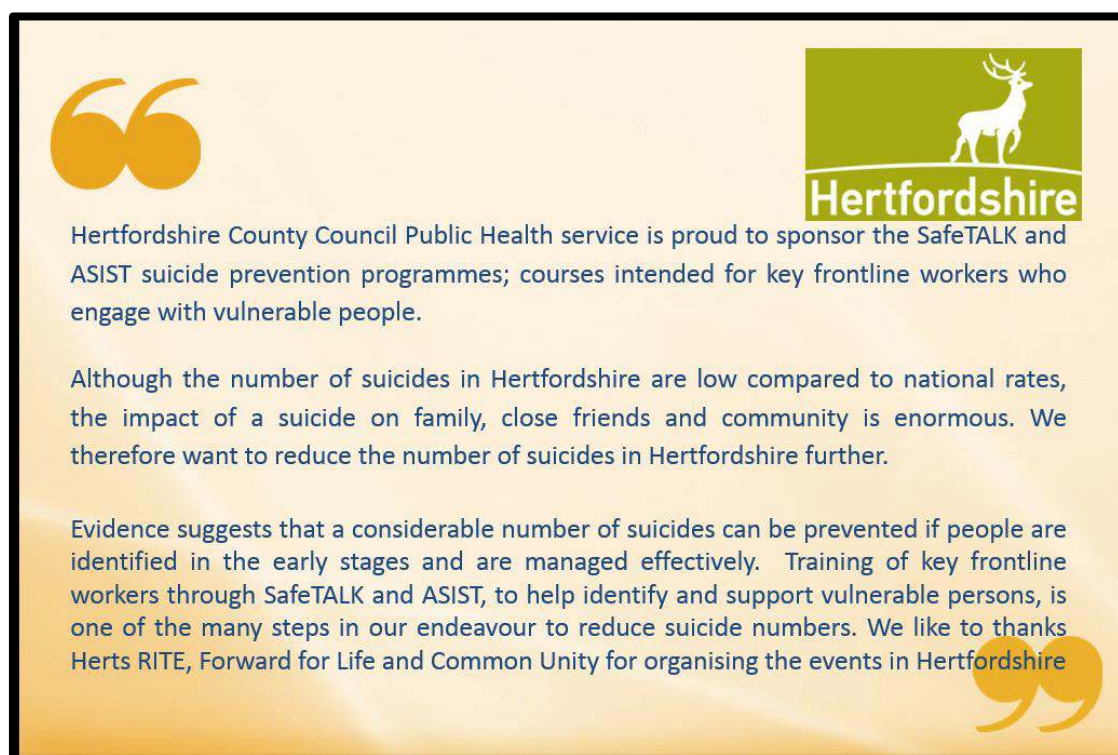
Forward For Life were commissioned to deliver 4 safeTALK courses and 1 ASIST course to start the process of having the necessary support in place for people who are exhibiting suicidal behaviours.

It was agreed that the approach taken would be to deliver the safeTALK courses in accessible community based locations across the County with invitations for places on each of the courses being made available across the board to ensure that a wide ranging health and social care sector representation could be realised to have the greatest benefit to communities.

The 2 day ASIST course was agreed to be delivered after the initial safeTALK courses to skill up key Health, Social Care, education and criminal justice sector representatives to best enable further support for individuals at risk of suicide.

Through this combination of training in safeTALK and ASIST, it was recognised that a referral route could be established where initial identification and appropriate referral (safeTALK) could be realised and specialist first Aid support (ASIST) could further enhance the opportunity for saving the life of a person with thoughts of suicide [[The Combined Approach](#)].

As Hertfordshire County Council Public Health Service stated:



The 4 safeTALK sessions were delivered over 3 days in March across Hertfordshire with one in Ware, one in Hitchin and two in Watford. The ASIST course was delivered over two days in April in Hatfield.

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SafeTALK



safeTALK training at a glance

Focus: Suicide alertness training

PARTICIPANTS: Anyone who might want to help, minimum age 15 years; 1 trainer and 1 community resource person per up to 30 participants

PRE-REQUISITES: None

DURATION: 3 to 3.5 hours

LANGUAGES: English and French

safeTALK is fully licensed and standardised through LivingWorks in Canada meaning that the facilities required, the time frame for delivery, the training steps and the materials used are the same wherever it is delivered.

The one thing that can't be standardised are the facilitators themselves therefore through the standardised evaluation a level of quality can be demonstrated being scrutinised rigorously through LivingWorks as the licensor.

This training helps supports the delegate to identify persons with thoughts of suicide and connect persons with thoughts of suicide to suicide first aid resources (often ASIST trained caregivers).

The safeTALK Courses

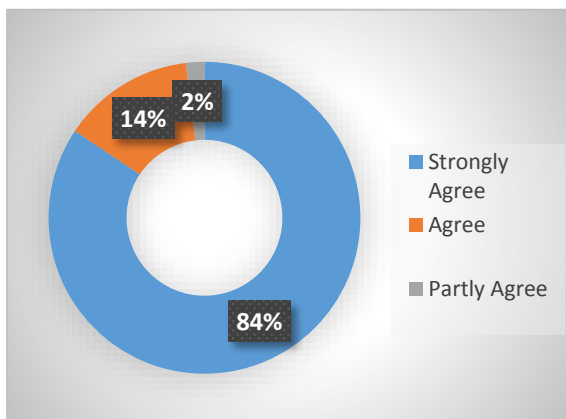
Total Number trained over 4 courses = **103**

Total evaluation responses = **103**

Average Rating per delegate = **8.9/10**

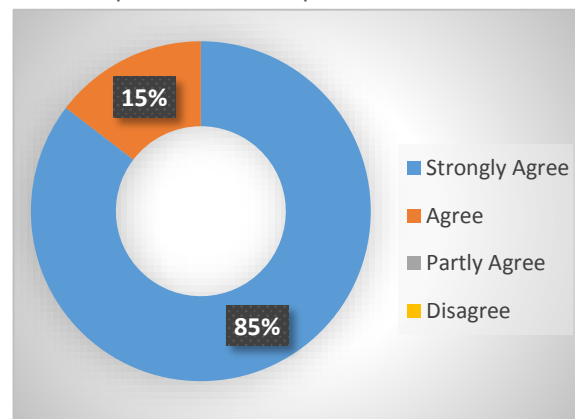
Trainer Knowledge

“My Trainers were prepared and familiar with the materials”



Participation

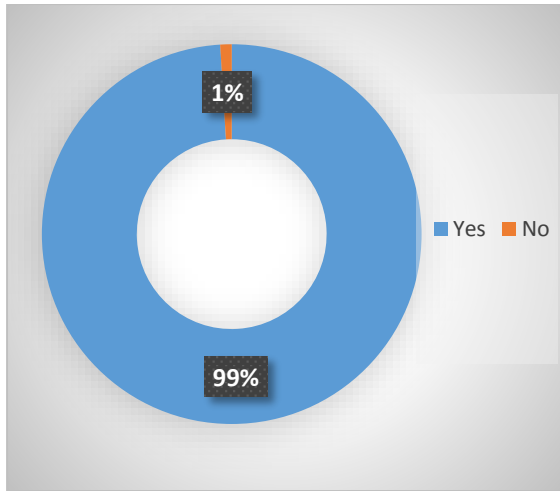
“My trainers encouraged participation and respected all responses.”



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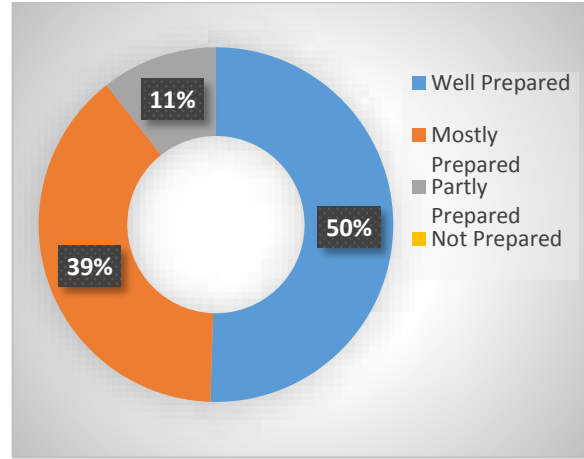
Recommendation to others

“I intend to tell others that they will benefit from this training.”



Delegate Preparedness

“How prepared do you now feel to talk directly and openly to a person about their thoughts of suicide?”



Rating of safeTALK

“On a scale of 1 (very bad) to 10 (very good), how would you rate this training?”



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ASIST

ASIST trains frontline staff in early intervention. The 14- hour workshop held over two days teaches participants to connect, understand and assist people who may be at risk of suicide.

The intervention is intended to prevent suicidal thoughts becoming suicidal behaviours. ASIST is underpinned by the idea that many people who are thinking about suicide will find some way to signal their intent. The workshops provide training in suicide intervention and are designed to help a person become more ready, willing, and able to help someone who is having thoughts of suicide.

ASIST is intensive, interactive and practice dominated to help caregivers — or any people of trust - recognise risk and learn how to intervene to prevent the immediate risk of suicide.

It is suitable for mental health professionals, nurses, doctors, pharmacists, teachers, counsellors, youth workers, police and prison staff, school support staff, clergy, community volunteers, and those training to undertake these roles.

ASIST provides standardised, quality assured training that establishes a common language for referrals and is building a network across the UK. This promotes the sharing of peer experiences regionally and nationally. Creating a common language between organisations and community is key to ensuring support, both for people experiencing suicidal thoughts and for those assisting them.

ASIST aims to help create clear and lasting community and inter-organisational pathways and networks for understanding and communicating suicide risk and appropriate solutions to preventing it.

The ASIST Course

Great training. Excellent facilitators. It was great to be given a structure/model to work with. Thank you.

Total Number trained = **13**

Total evaluation responses = **13**

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Delegate Representation:

Probation:	1
Young Offender/Homeless	2
Attendance Manager	1
Housing Support	2
Registered Care Manager	1
Social Worker	1
Police	1
Solicitor/Mediator	1
Teacher	3

Evaluation Questions

1) How would you rate ASIST? (1 = did not like at all...10 = liked a lot)

Average rating based on 13 respondents = **9.9/10**

2) Would you recommend ASIST to others? (1 = definitely NO...10 = definitely YES)

Average rating based on 13 respondents = **10/10**

3) This workshop has practical use in my personal life (1 = definitely NO...10 = definitely YES)

Average rating based on 13 respondents = **8.5/10**

4) This workshop has practical use in my work life (1 = definitely NO...10 = definitely YES)

Average rating based on 13 respondents = **9.6/10**

This has been a fantastic journey and I am grateful to have had the opportunity to attend. I wish to take these spots

In relation to preparedness to support people presenting with suicidal behaviours, all respondents stated that they

- Felt they had the knowledge so to better identify behaviours indicating potential suicidal intention
- Were ready, willing and able to ask directly if a person was thinking of suicide.
- Would feel more prepared to help a person at risk of suicide.
- Had increased levels of confidence to help a person at risk of suicide.
- Understood the structure and process fully.

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Conclusions/Recommendations

Gatekeeper skills through the safeTALK course have been delivered effectively to 103 front line professionals from across the Health and Social Care Sector and beyond across the County of Hertfordshire. The overall rating for this experience of the 103 delegates was 8.9 out of 10 with many delegates asking for a future opportunity to engage with ASIST.

The 13 ASIST delegates were drawn from a number of specialist areas where it had been evidenced that stakeholders they were engaged with often had vulnerable characteristics that were associated with suicidal ideation. In discussions with the delegates it was clear that exposure to such suicidal behaviours was common-place.

The ratings given for the ASIST course and the belief that the ASIST experience would have a demonstrable positive impact regarding suicide prevention were evidenced through the course and further clarified within the evaluation.

Although it was already the aim in Hertfordshire to develop the necessary links to ensure that safeTALK trained front-line workers would be able to seek support from ASIST trained workers, the 13 ASIST delegates decided at the end of their training that they would develop their own Suicide Prevention Network in a bid to start this opportunity for reducing death by suicide with follow up dates agreed.

Through this process, Common Unity and Forward For Life feel that the seeds have been sown for Suicide Safer Communities in Hertfordshire but would also would like to recommend that specific geographical areas within the county and specific service areas be further targeted in the future regarding safeTALK and ASIST due to the vulnerabilities of the communities in those areas. Such a targeted approach was highlighted at the project proposal stage and it is still felt that this would be of significant value.

Regarding service areas, this would be particularly pertinent to the education sector, housing, criminal justice, Primary Care and the LGBT communities.

Common Unity, Forward For Life and the Hertfordshire ASIST delegates 2014



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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.

Website: www.common-unity.org

Email: caront@common-unity.org

Telephone: 0121 554 9360 ext. 4



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.

Website: www.forwardforlife.org

Email: terry.rigby@forwardforlife.org

Telephone: 07585776800

