



Rural Community Council (Leicestershire and Rutland)



Suicide Awareness Partnership Training Project Evaluation

Executive Summary

July 2011

SUICIDE AWARENESS PARTNERSHIP TRAINING PROJECT EVALUATION

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Introduction

The Rural Community Council (RCC) (Leicestershire and Rutland) appointed Focus Consultants in February 2011 to undertake an interim evaluation of the Big Lottery funded Suicide Awareness Partnership Training (SAPT) project. The purpose of the evaluation is to report on progress towards aims and objectives to date, make recommendations for improved outcomes during Year Three and make proposals for the future of the project.

The evaluation has been informed using a combination of quantitative and qualitative research methods including a desk-based review of extensive project data, primary consultation with a range of staff and stakeholders across partnerships structures, an e-survey with 368 (25%) delegates and observational analysis of four training sessions.

This executive summary presents the highlight findings from the evaluation.

Background

SAPT aims to increase the awareness of good emotional health and mental wellbeing, and reduce the stigma of suicide. By encouraging people in communities to talk about suicide, SAPT believes it goes some way towards removing the stigma that surrounds the subject. In turn, that helps to break down barriers (whether perceived or real) to those who need to seek help.

Evolving over a number of years, the project has its roots in the RCC's (Leicestershire and Rutland) running of the Rural Stress Support Team and subsequently as part of the local response to the *National Suicide Prevention Strategy*. Today, SAPT is funded by the Big Lottery to run a three-year programme of training until 2012. The project has also received funding from Leicester City Primary Care Trust (PCT) since 2008 to run training sessions in the city, and this continues into 2011/12.

SAPT aims to contribute towards the then Labour Government's target to reduce suicide rates by 20% by 2012. Whilst there have been shifts in the policy context since SAPT began in 2009, the project's aims and objectives still very much align with the current Coalition Government's policy on public health and wellbeing. A revised National Suicide Prevention Strategy is due to be published later this year but experts in the field strongly believe that the philosophy of SAPT will remain a key tool in achieving outcomes for the prevention of suicide.

The Big Lottery grant agreement sets the following outcomes for the SAPT project:

- Outcome 1: To reduce the suicide rate in four counties of the East Midlands (Derbyshire, Leicestershire and Rutland, Northamptonshire and Nottinghamshire) by 20% by 2012
- Outcome 2: To provide short presentations in the workplace for selected employers of at risk employees to raise their awareness of problems faced by any vulnerable employees and how to support them
- Outcome 3: To establish a network within the East Midlands to highlight and be a central focus for suicide awareness and the support required to address this issue within society
- Outcome 4: To evaluate this approach to suicide awareness training across the East Midlands to display best practice for possible adoption nationally.

Project Management

SAPT is a partnership approach between the RCC (Leicestershire and Rutland) and its neighbouring RCC-equivalent agencies in Derbyshire (Rural Action Derbyshire), Northamptonshire (ACRE Northamptonshire), and Nottinghamshire (Rural Community Action Nottinghamshire), with RCC (Leicestershire and Rutland) as the accountable body. This was the first time that these organisations had worked together on a common project regionally and under the extended management structure that is in place.

The project is managed by a full time Project Manager based within RCC (Leicestershire and Rutland). He manages the overall project and is responsible for delivery within Leicestershire and Rutland. Three part time Project Officers are employed by the RCC equivalent agencies in Nottinghamshire, Derbyshire and Northamptonshire to deliver the project in each of these areas. Project administration support is also provided by the RCC (Leicestershire and Rutland).

All consultees engaged in the evaluation feel the project is being well managed both by the Project Manager and also in each of the areas by the Project Officers. The partnership between the SAPT partner agencies is viewed very positively by most consultees. In terms of the project's relationship with NHS stakeholders, whilst some Project Officers did find it challenging to establish these relationships at the beginning it is now understood that relationships with NHS partners are overall very positive. The East Midlands Suicide Prevention Manager was a key player in establishing connections between the Project Officers and local health services and now, where there are local Suicide Prevention Groups, the Project Officers attend these as members.

Project Delivery

Training Sessions and Delegate Packs

The project delivers half-day suicide awareness training sessions which aim to:

- challenge attitudes and address the myths about suicide
- enable delegates to examine their own attitudes
- discuss known suicide risk factors (to assist identification of those vulnerable to taking their own lives)
- provide guidance on how to help those suffering stress or having suicidal thoughts

The training sessions, which provide the opportunity for both small group discussion and whole group discussion, cover the following topics:

- Aims and objectives
- Myths and attitudes
- Risk factors
- Protective factors
- Risk/case studies exercise
- Intervention/help

The sessions have the flexibility to be tailored either to its audience, for example for specific groups, or on specific subjects. Examples of where this has been undertaken include sessions delivered to specific women's groups and on subjects such as self-harm.

The training is not facilitated, generally, by the SAPT Project Officers, but by mental health specialists from the NHS or similar workers and trainers from relevant voluntary sector agencies. Independent professional consultants are also sometimes used. The evaluation found the facilitators to be very professional, using appropriate delivery styles and skilled at using their own examples. Each project area uses either one or two facilitators to deliver a session although staff and stakeholders tend to feel that the use of two co-facilitators works more effectively.

The content of the suicide awareness training is consistent across the four county areas of the project. The original content for the training was written in 2006 by experts in the field and was then re-written in October 2009 again by an expert panel including Keith Waters (Royal Derby Hospital, and until recently the East Midland Suicide Prevention Manager), Carole Devaney (NHS Leicester City, Public Health) and Dr Syd Fraser (Head of Clinical Psychology, Adult Mental Health, Leicestershire Partnership Trust). Having been written by experts in suicide awareness (both from academic and practitioner backgrounds) the training is reported by staff and stakeholders as being credible and relevant. They also believe that it is essential that such experts continue to be involved in the project in the future to ensure the content remains so.

The model and training is rated *very good* or *good* by all consultees who commented. Having a standard approach to delivering training across each of the areas but with the flexibility to develop different approaches to meet local needs is also viewed positively by consultees. The training material used in the sessions is considered to be logical and easy to follow, although there is a feeling by staff and stakeholders that it could be updated, and would benefit from using data relevant to each area and to reflect changing trends.

In addition to the half-day training, SAPT offers to deliver short suicide awareness presentations (around 30 minutes) in the workplace – targeted at staff in management positions. In addition to this group, special emphasis is given to deliver presentations in the school environment specifically focusing on self-harm.

A comprehensive delegate pack is provided to all those attending the half-day training session. It is a resource tool to support the training and provides contact details and signposting to other sources of support. It is tailored for each county and includes a wide range of leaflets/booklets from relevant national and local support organisations covering a vast range of subjects, for example:

- *Need to talk? We'll listen* (Samaritans leaflet)
- *Depression: You're not alone* (NHS, Milton Keynes PCT leaflet)
- *The truth about self-harm* (Mental Health Foundation booklet)
- *How to help someone who is suicidal* (Mind booklet)

Marketing and Communication

Different approaches are taken to marketing and communication in each area. Demand for the training remains high which is confirmed by the well attended courses and waiting lists. Therefore, some Project Officers have not found it necessary to go beyond the existing 'captive' audience and existing outlets to fill places. However, in order to attract the types of delegates which have been more difficult to target, there will be a need to take a more proactive approach to marketing in the future. This is particularly important for the longer-term where momentum will need to be maintained and new markets explored.

The SAPT project website www.sapt.info could benefit from further development work to ensure it is an engaging and valuable tool as possible. There is a sense that there is a need to develop more community ownership of the site, making it a place where delegates who have taken part in the training can be part of a wider network and somewhere they can go for signposting and further information.

Impacts

Those consultees that provided comment believe the project is doing well in meeting its targets. Whilst it is recognised by staff and stakeholders that it is impossible to show any direct correlation between SAPT and a reduction in the suicide rate they do believe that the project is having a positive impact. There are so many factors that will influence the suicide rate that it is impossible to show a correlation between the suicide rate and any single project or activity. Indeed, experts believe that due to the current economic climate, the suicide rate may well increase over the period of the project as national rates suggest this may be the case. Therefore, increased demand for a range of suicide prevention interventions is likely to continue in the future.

SAPT has achieved many positive impacts to date which contribute towards achieving its Big Lottery outcomes. Key impacts to emerge to date (i.e. end of March 2011) are highlighted below. These impacts are considered to be the baseline figures achieved at the interim stage of the project and indeed can only increase - as more delegates attend the training, and as more and more vulnerable people continue to be supported by those who have already attended.

- 79 half-day training sessions have been delivered throughout the four counties
- 1,681 delegates have attended the half-day training sessions - delegates are from a range of voluntary, public and private sector organisations and are also members of the general public
- Delegates have supported an approximate average of 3.47 vulnerable people each since attending the training
- An approximate 5,833 vulnerable people have been supported by delegates since attending the training
- 54 short presentations have been delivered to a range of employers including schools, colleges, universities, voluntary sector agencies, GP surgeries, Samaritans, Territorial Army
- On a scale of 1 to 10 (1 being *non-existent* and 10 being *expert*), the delegates' average post-course evaluation rating of their knowledge of suicide awareness has risen by 2.7 points - from 3.7 prior to the training to 6.4 after the training
- 89.1% of delegates stated that the training has helped to raise their awareness of suicide prevention
- Since attending the training 54.3% of delegates have used the training given and the resource material provided in the delegate pack in practice
- 76.7% of delegates have recommended the training session to other people
- 85.5% of delegates feel more confident in raising the issue of suicide and discussing it with someone who may be at risk
- SAPT is providing training to new audiences with 88.6% of delegates receiving suicide awareness training for the first time
- 84.4% of delegates feel that they do not require further support/training since attending the SAPT training
- The most useful elements of the training sessions were considered to be 'what to look for / changes', 'risk factors' and 'myths and attitudes'
- Over 50% of delegates believe the training sessions were either *very good* or *good* at providing networking opportunities
- Post-course evaluation questionnaires show that feedback from participants is very positive with an overwhelming majority of participants either stating they *strongly agree* or *agree* that the individual aims of the training were met
- 94.5% of delegates believe there is a need for the project to continue

Summary and Forward Strategy

The project is considered to be contributing positively towards its aims and objectives. It is considered to be a very well-managed project and one which can demonstrate impacts on the delegates attending. The project clearly aligns with current and emerging policy around public health and wellbeing and suicide prevention and there certainly remains the support from partners and demand from delegates for it to continue.

A focus group was held with the SAPT steering group and a Leicester City PCT commissioner. The aim of the session was to consider options for the forward strategy of SAPT. The group agreed that there is a need and demand for the project to continue and this is substantiated by the outcome of the evaluation. At the same time, there is also recognition that the project cannot remain in its existing form and needs to evolve accordingly.

The future model for SAPT emerged as a combination of the following:

- Continuing to provide free suicide awareness training sessions for members of the community
- Introduce a charging policy for different types of delegates attending the training sessions (e.g. voluntary and community, public and private sector). The findings of the delegate e-survey suggest that organisations would be willing to make a financial contribution to attend the training
- Develop the in-house training sessions targeting the voluntary and community, public and private sector. Develop a charging policy for this training

In addition, because of the flexibility of the training the steering group identified an opportunity to develop tailored modules of training (focussing on specific groups/themes). The group also identified an opportunity to develop a programme of accredited training and also Train the Trainer models.

Recommendations

A series of recommendations for both improved outcomes and continuation of the project are outlined in the full report with key recommendations focusing on the development of a business plan and marketing and funding strategies.