

Breaking the Silence



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If Walls Could Talk



*If walls could talk,
they'd chew me up and spit me out.
They'd tell all of my secrets and more.*

*These walls know everything.
They've heard my private cries,
whispered curses,
and shouts of frustrations and anger.
They've also heard my prayers.*

*If they could talk,
I would be in a heap of trouble.
I've splashed a lot of dirt on those walls.*

Anonymous

Editorial

Dear Reader,

Welcome to the 5th Edition of *Breaking the Silence 2016*.

The best way to find yourself , is to lose yourself in service to others. This is why Befrienders Kenya together with its partners continues to provide free and confidential emotional support and to reach out to communities in order to achieve its goal; Suicide Prevention.

Breaking the Silence's overall goal is to provide information and educate its readers on the topic of Suicide which is still a taboo subject in Kenya and to show how Befrienders Kenya is reaching out to those who are in distress.

In this edition we feature a real life story told by one of the persons affected by suicide. What she has been through and how she has come to terms with the loss. You are welcome to share her experiences and journey.

We are also looking at the organization's participation in various activities as a way of creating awareness, giving exposure to volunteers as well as forming networks as we reach out and save lives. The 2016 activities include: Introduction of the universal Suicide Prevention Awareness Ribbon, World Mental Health Day, World Suicide Prevention Day, and IASP Consultative forum.

These events, each with a different theme, communicate the message that suicide is preventable and that each one of us can play a role in this prevention.

We hope you enjoy the Befrienders Kenya 2016 Newsletter.

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Introduction of the Universal Suicide Prevention Awareness Ribbon



Befrienders Kenya Directors assist in the launch of the Suicide Prevention Awareness Ribbon.

According to the World Health Organization 7,126 Kenyans commit suicide every year while Kenya is ranked 29th in the world with regard to its suicide rate, though the number may be higher since suicide is a crime in Kenya and often concealed hence there are no clear records.

Befrienders Kenya in partnership with the Ministry of Health – Department of Mental Health launched the Suicide Prevention Awareness Ribbon. This was during the World Suicide Prevention Day national event held on 9th September, 2016 organized by the Ministry of Health at the largest psychiatric hospital in East Africa, the Mathari National Teaching and Referral Hospital in Nairobi.

The two-toned ribbon which was initiated by International Association for Suicide Prevention (IASP) was launched by a chief guest who represented Mr. Geoffrey Mwangi, the Chief Executive

Officer & Board secretary of the National Hospital Insurance Fund.

According to Mrs. Merab Mulindi, the volunteer regional coordinator for Befrienders Worldwide and Kenya representative of IASP the suicide prevention awareness ribbon indicates a candle flame which symbolises walking out of the darkness into the light and is in line with the candle lighting activity which is a tradition often associated with the day.

She said, “In uniting behind a shared universal ribbon, we hope to increase awareness of suicide prevention - the more we wear the ribbon, the more it will get known. The desire is for the suicide prevention awareness ribbon to become globally recognisable, much like other ribbons for other worthwhile causes.”

Introduction of the Universal Suicide Prevention Awareness Ribbon

Elsewhere the Medical Superintendent Mathari Hospital, Dr. Julius Ogato said the institution recognizes that suicide is a condition that requires prompt intervention from both care givers such as psychiatrists, psychologists and lay people such as relatives.

Adding that feeling suicidal is not a character defect and it does not mean that you are crazy, weak or flawed. It means that you have more pain than you can cope with now. Dr. Ogato said the pain may seem overwhelming and permanent but with time and support the problems can be overcome and the pain and the suicidal feelings will pass.

The event was filled with pomp and colour from the beginning with a procession which raised awareness on the event and the day as participants clad in the orange T-shirts led by the prisons band marched to the venue. There was also entertainment by various groups including medical students at the hospital, primary school children from the locality and some of the patients at the institution entertained the guests with skits, dances and songs.



From left Befrienders Kenya Volunteer assist a participant pin on the ribbon.



Newly launched Suicide Prevention Awareness ribbon.

‘What Mental Health
needs is more sunlight ,
more Candor,
more unashamed conversation
about illnesses that affect not only individuals,
but their families as well.’

GLENN CLOSE

By Befrienders Kenya team

IASP Consultative forum

Befrienders Kenya in partnership with International Association for Suicide Prevention held a consultative forum on the 6th December 2016 at P.C.E.A Kikuyu Hospital in Kiambu County.

The forum brought together stakeholders from various fields: Community Based Organizations, teachers, Community Health Workers, religious leaders, service providers within the field of Mental Health and general health to discuss suicide - an issue which is a challenge in the country yet is still regarded as a taboo subject and attracts a lot of stigma.

Ms Merab Mulindi of Befrienders Kenya (BK) and volunteer regional co-ordinator for Befrienders Worldwide introduced BK to the participants, talked on the importance of giving support to those in distress emphasizing on the need to raise awareness among the public on suicide prevention and the fact that everyone has a role to play in enabling affected persons get help. She noted that BK is a member of International Association for Suicide Association (IASP) and represents the organization in Kenya.

The IASP representative Ms. Wendy

Orchard also had an opportunity to introduce the organization and said their main focus is to



IASP representative Wendy Orchard



Participants during the group discussion session.

raise awareness on suicide

prevention and as an organization were exploring Possibilities of a community based project on suicide prevention in Kenya.

Among the activities of the day was a candle lighting ceremony in remembrance of those who died through suicide and standing in solidarity with those who have lost loved ones through suicide. There were also presentations from various professionals tackling Integration of Mental Health in Primary Health care, the role of the church in tackling stigma associated with suicide, Psychological First Aid, the media monitoring project by Users and Survivors of Psychiatry among other related topics. There were also group discussions covering various areas of interest such as sustainability and ownership of the project, creation of support groups, confronting stigma in suicide prevention, how stigmatization takes place, how the community can change the way suicide survivors are treated and handled within the community. The forum moderators were David Njuguna and James Karuru both volunteers with Befrienders Kenya.

Among the presenters was Ms. Christine Musyimi the Research, Ethics & Scientific Publication officer, AMHF. In her presentation, she noted that early detection of mental health challenges reduces the risk of death. She added that the inclusion of suicide as a stand-alone in the list of mental disorders provides an opportunity for clinicians to effectively integrate assessment and management among other priority mental disorders. She emphasised that integrating mental health care reduces stigma for people with mental disorders and their families and hence better health outcomes for people treated in Primary Health Care. She said that to achieve successful integration there should be training of Primary Health Care workers e.g. Clinical officers and nurses to detect and treat mental disorders.

The forum sponsored by International Association for Suicide Prevention was an initial activity within the explorative phase of IASP's plan for a community suicide prevention project. The proposed project will cover Kikuyu sub-county in Kiambu County and Mutuini sub-county in Nairobi County respectively.



Christine Musyimi, AMHF gives her presentation.



David Njuguna, Befrienders Kenya volunteer facilitating.

When a storm is coming, all other birds seek shelter. The Eagle alone, avoids the storm by flying above it. So, in the storms of life..... May your heart soar like an Eagle.

My journey with Befrienders Kenya

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he pain and the shock of losing a father can be quite devastating, especially if it happens in the tragic manner of suicide. Many emotions go through a person experiencing such a loss, and most often the community is at loss as to the best way to offer support to such persons or a family. A few years before that tragic death of my father, he had retired from the government service as a senior government official. My father was a self-made man who had risen from a humble background and accomplished a lot by the time of his retirement at the age of 60. As a result, he was a person to look up to, both to us his children, and even the entire community. It was such a great shock therefore to everyone when the news broke out that he had committed suicide.

It was one morning in November of 2015 that I received those dreaded news of my father's suicide. The news left me numb with shock and I was at loss as to who to turn to for support. Suicide in most



Anita Kiara a volunteer with Befrienders Kenya tells her story during the WSPD

cases is considered a terrible sin by the church and a taboo by the society. The matter is spoken of in undertones and in most cases close family members are accused of having led the person into committing suicide or having not done enough to prevent it. And in my rural community, a family that has lost a loved one through suicide is discriminated or demonized for the fear of the "evil spirit of suicide" catching on to others. For this reason, I and my family were even denied the opportunity to bury our father.

According to the Lukhya customs, a person

My journey with Befrienders Kenya

having committed suicide can only be buried at night, and the family is not allowed to take part in the burial ceremony.

It was during that period of coming to terms with the loss and seeking healing

that I made contact with Befrienders Kenya and during the 2016 World Suicide Prevention day event was given a chance to share my story. Through sharing my story, I was able to open up and let out my pain in an empathizing environment that was also accepting and non-judgmental. Having done so, I felt a great sense of relief and I made great strides in realizing my healing. Sharing my story also gave me a sense of duty and accomplishment, for in so doing I feel that I am helping to educate others on suicide prevention and also helping others affected like myself to deal with such losses. I believe that speaking out is one of the ways in which we can deal with the issue of stigma which surrounds those who have been bereaved through suicide. As I continue to give my service as a Befrienders Kenya volunteer, I do appreciate Befrienders Kenya for the support and space to share my story with a hope that someone else can be encouraged and find strength to talk about the

difficult experiences they may be going through but may be too afraid to share and therefore continue to carry this burden which further complicates the healing

"Why didn't she tell us she was depressed?"

She did. She told you when the cat suddenly started scratching her more than usual. She told you when she said she wasn't hungry and began pinning the clothes you just bought her. She told you when she stopped doing her school work and cried when you called her lazy. She told you when she locked her bedroom door at night. She told you when you noticed alcohol missing and she started waking up with headaches. She told you when she spent an hour in the shower and came out with puffy eyes.

She told you. The thing about depression is that it's quiet. It isn't loud, and the reason you didn't hear it was because you weren't really listening.

{ S.M }



World Suicide Prevention Day 2016

By Mabel Inganji



The newly launched Suicide Prevention Awareness Ribbon.



Participants during the candle lighting ceremony.

Befrienders Kenya marked the World Suicide Prevention Day for the 5th time in the country on 10th September 2016. The theme for this year was **Connect, Communicate and Care** and the venue was at a school in Nairobi city centre.



Befrienders Kenya volunteers during the WSPD.

This came immediately after the launch of the Suicide Prevention Ribbon on the 9th September 2016 which was done in partnership with the Mental Health Department, Ministry of Health at the Mathari National Teaching and Referral Hospital.

The event which brought together participants from various institutions and organizations saw various speakers emphasize on the importance of the theme. Participants

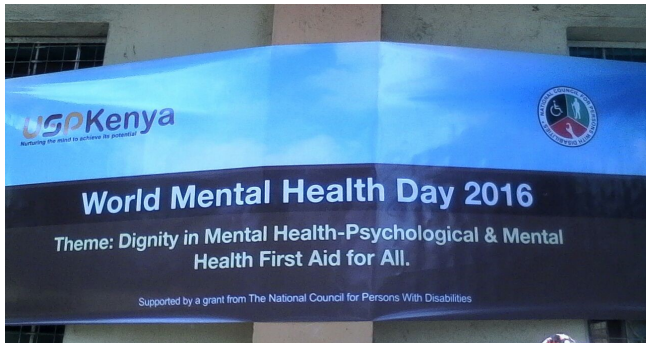
took part in the traditional candle lighting ceremony where those that died by suicide, survivors of suicide attempts and those bereaved through suicide are remembered.

The participants were introduced to the day and theme, introduced to International Association for Suicide Prevention (IASP) and Befrienders Kenya (BK) and taken through topics such as the importance of seeking help and warning signs of suicide. In addition to this, real life experiences of attempted suicide and bereavement through suicide were shared. One of the highlights of the forum was the sharing of the message from the IASP President Prof Ella Arensman which was presented by Ms Merab Mulindi from Befrienders Kenya who also noted that Befrienders Kenya is a member of IASP and represents the international organization in Kenya.



Befrienders Kenya share a cake with participants.

WORLD MENTAL HEALTH DAY 2016



USP-Kenya World Mental Health Day banner

The theme of this year's World Mental Health Day, observed on the 10th October was Dignity in Mental Health: Psychological and Mental Health First Aid for All. The events which were organised by Users and Survivors of Psychiatry in Kenya and the Mental health department, Ministry of Health were held at Mary Immaculate Catholic Church in Karatina, Nyeri County and at Kenyatta National Hospital, Nairobi County.

The message for the day was Psychological support is vital in dealing with Mental Health with emphasis that, there is a need to ensure that when crisis events occur part of the humanitarian response is appropriate and timely mental health support including psychological first aid hence the need to be conscious of the need to provide the right support when people experience the stress of traumatic events, both in the Kenyan context and on an individual level.



Befrienders Kenya volunteer in Karatina.



A procession led by Ministry of Health officials.

It was noted that just as the general health care which does not consist of physical first aid alone, similarly no Mental Health care system should consist of psychological First Aid alone. Investment in psychological First Aid is part of a longer-term effort to ensure that anyone in acute distress due to a crisis can receive basic support and that those who need more than psychological First Aid will receive additional advanced support from health, Mental Health and social services.

The events which brought together hundreds of people were graced by speakers who included: The USP-K Executive Director, Michael Njenga, Ms. Lucy Waititu, County Executive for Special programs Nyeri County, Hon. Mohammed Gabbow, Director and Board Member National Council for Persons with Disabilities among others.

Befrienders Kenya participated in the events represented by volunteers in Karatina by Mabel Inganji while David Njuguna, Ruth Nyokabi and Christopher Ndiba were at KNH.



Befrienders Kenya volunteers at KNH.

IASP's Wendy Visits Befrienders Kenya



BK volunteers with IASP representative Wendy Orchard at the BK office.

International Association for Suicide Prevention representative, Ms. Wendy Orchard honoured Befrienders Kenya by visiting the BK office in Upper Hill, Nairobi on the 5th December 2016. This was part of the proposed IASP Community Based Project Kenya initial visit.

Ms. Merab Mulindi BK director introduced the organization and its programs. She then officially welcomed and introduced the IASP representative to the BK office and the country.

Ms. Wendy then introduced IASP and said, she was in the country representing her organization which had plans to initiate a suicide prevention community based project in the Kikuyu sub-county and Mutui sub-county as proposed by BK.

According to Ms. Wendy IASP strategic aim for 2014-2020 lists as a priority a remit to explore and develop culturally based relevant to a specific community, local, regional or national.

The IASP representative said, the decision was made following a meeting with Merab Mulindi, Director BK at IASP congress held in 2015 in Canada, observing her excellent contribution to the World Health Organization launch of the World Suicide report in 2014. Her visit was therefore to assist IASP in assessing the viability of this project in Kenya.

The team went through the weeks program for the IASP initial visit which included: A consultative forum, site visit and visit to various stakeholders offices .

The meeting was attended by the BK Directors and some of the volunteers. The forum noted that despite various challenges faced by the organization BK has been able to carry out services to those in need and the team welcomed the community based initiative by IASP.



EVENTS



BK volunteers with Wendy at the Nairobi Safari walk.



IASP's Wendy hosts BK team for dinner .



BK volunteers see off Wendy at the Jomo Kenyatta International Airport



IASP's Wendy Orchard and the BK team with the Director Mental Health Department



Merab of BK speaks to a group of Community Health Workers.



Wendy and the team at the Dove International offices.



The team visits a dam in Kikuyu sub-county