

**Cross-Party Group on Suicide Prevention – sponsored by Lynne Neagle MS**

**Thursday 9<sup>th</sup> July 2.30pm – 4pm.**

**Meeting held by video conference**

**Attendees:** Lynne Neagle MS, Dai Lloyd MS, Dawn Bowden MS, Eleri Cabbage (Senior Research and Communications Officer) Welsh Parliament, Sarah Stone (Executive Director for Wales) Samaritans, Liz Williams (Policy & Communications Officer) Samaritans Cymru, Laura Frayne (Assistant to Executive Director for Wales) Samaritans, Professor Ann John (Clinical Professor of Public Health and Psychiatry) Swansea University, Alun Fletcher (SHARE Project Co-ordinator) Mental Health Matters Wales, Ana Laing (Trustee from Wales) Samaritans, Ana Reis-Rogers – Living in Suicides Shadow, Andrea Gray (Mental Health Development Lead for Wales) Public Health Wales, Caryl Stock (Amber Project Coordinator) Church Army, Claire Cotter (National Coordinator for Suicide and Self-harm prevention) NHS Wales Health Collaborative, Dr Alys Cole-King (Consultant Liaison Psychiatrist) 4 Mental Health & Connecting with People, Emma Kneebone (Bereavement Service Manager) 2 Wish Upon A Star, Gareth Davies (Director) Tir Dewi, George Watkins (Admin and Communications Officer) Welsh Parliament, Glenn Page (Senior Policy & Campaigns Officer) Mind Cymru, Helen Bennett (Mental Health Consultant) South Wales Police, Janette Bourne (Director) Cruse Bereavement Care Cymru, Jillian Purvis (Officer Manager/Researcher) Welsh Parliament, Kate Heneghan (Head in Wales) Papyrus, Laura Tranter (Community Relationship and Engagement Lead – ACE Support Hub) Public Health Wales, Lisa Hammett – Living in Suicides Shadow, Liv Baker (Communications and Administrative Assistant) Welsh NHS Confederation, Maggy Corkhill (Service User Representative) Cwm Taf Morgannwg UHB Together for Mental Health Partnership Board, Mark Lewis (Head of Public Protection) South Wales Police, Mark Smith (Managing Director) 66 99 Project, Meryl James (Regional Director for Wales) Samaritans, Michaela Moore (Director) Mental Health Matters Wales, Mike Mainwaring (Training Officer) Children in Wales, Natasha Ham (Senior Neighbourhood Coach) Hafod, Peter Thomas (Force Advisor on Mental Health) South Wales Police, Philippa Watkins (Senior Research Officer) Welsh Parliament, Rebecca Hoskin (Health, Social Care and Wellbeing Officer) BAVO, Robert Visintainer (Project Manager – Men's Sheds) Hafan Cymru, Sian Curley (Chief Executive) Office of Police and Crime Commissioner for Gwent, Steve Thomas (Team Superintendent – Police Liaison Officer) Welsh Government, William Adams (Improvement Manager – National Collaborative Commissioning Unit) Public Health Wales

**Apologies:** Mike Hedges MS, Angela Burns MS, David Melding MS, Llyr Gruffydd MS, David Williams (Wales Regional Director) Farming Community Network, Sophie Howe (Future Generations Commissioner), Sally Holland (Children's Commissioner for Wales), Callum Hughes (Policy & Public Affairs Officer) Welsh NHS Confederation.

### **1. Welcome and introductions**

Lynne Neagle MS thanked everyone for attending the meeting and thanked Professor Ann John for attending and delivering a presentation to the group.

### **2. Annual General Meeting**

Lynne explained that the group Annual General Meeting would take place. Lynne handed over to Sarah Stone, Samaritans Executive Director for Wales. Sarah explained that election of a Chair needed to take place. There were no other nominations for the role apart from Lynne Neagle MS. Lynne Neagle MS was elected as Chair by the group. Lynne explained that voting for the secretariat

also needed to take place. There were no other nominations for the role, and it was agreed that Samaritans Cymru would continue as secretariat. Lynne thanked Samaritans for all their work to support the Cross-Party Group over the past year.

### **3. Minutes from the previous meeting and matters arising.**

The minutes from the previous meeting were agreed. Lynne explained that after the last meeting, there was an action for a letter to be sent to Welsh Government about the need to prioritise mental health in their considerations of Covid-19. A letter had been sent and a written question tabled, with a response awaited on the latter. Lynne explained that her understanding was that Prof Ann John had now been asked to join Welsh Government's Technical Advisory Group on Covid-19. Professor Ann John conformed that this was the case. There were no other matters arising.

### **4. Professor Ann John, Clinical Professor in Public Health and Psychiatry, Swansea University & National lead for suicide and self-harm prevention, Public Health Wales**

Lynne introduced Professor Ann John to the group. Ann delivered a presentation to the group and ran through the current research activities taking place. Ann explained that any potential rise in suicides as a result of the pandemic are not inevitable, provided we take action. Ann added that it is very difficult to be certain of the impact on suicide due to the short time frame but lots of work is being done to try and collect data earlier rather than having to wait a year for the Office of National Statistics (ONS) data. Ann explained that increases in unemployment rates are usually linked to an increase in suicide and the period of uncertainty of job loss is also a risk factor for suicide. Ann added that we still do not know who the most vulnerable groups are and cannot say whether there has been an increase in suicide, but we should not wait before taking action to prevent this.

The issue of accessing services was also discussed, some people have been preferring to access services remotely during the pandemic, but some people do not and have been no longer able to access services. The fear of contacting services of COVID and being a burden is a barrier to accessing services for some. There has also been an increase in calls to helplines, but those helplines have also been impacted by resource issues. Also, there is evidence that those with severe illness and those on ventilators often experience post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Ann explained that a PTSD network has been set up in Wales to explore this. Ann also highlighted the need to look at the long-term impact of the pandemic and that well-resourced safety nets are needed rather than short term measures. We need to really think about the long-term impact and how this could become an adverse childhood experience for young people. The impacts of the pandemic will be felt disproportionately for those already experiencing difficulties.

There has also been a focus on access to means at the start of the pandemic which was a cause for concern. Ann explained that media reporting of suicide can make the idea of suicide cognitively available or for over-identification to people if deaths are reported in an over simplified way. It is unhelpful for media to predict suicide statistics and some of the data behind some recent headlines have been based on assumptions and comparisons and we cannot make assumptions on the impact of Covid-19 since this is a unique experience. Ann added that she is working with Welsh Government to source real-time data on suicide and will report back to the group. Bereavement will also have become more complex and suicide bereavement will be focused on going forward. Swansea University is also doing research with Bristol University to search databases on suicide and self-harm research evidence every day. The team then look at the data and use it to create briefings and every 3 months publish a summary of current research. Research is also being done to look at Google search data and trends and can be used to look at public thinking. Ann showed the group a graph with peak times for searches for mental health topics over the course of the pandemic. Ann explained that we are now seeing a decrease in Google searches for loneliness and isolation than there was before. There is now an increase in searches for coping strategies and how people can help support themselves.

### **5. Questions and next steps**

Lynne thanked Ann for her presentation and all the work she is doing. Sarah Stone asked whether there is a country which is doing particularly well in mitigating suicide risk. Ann explained this is not known yet, but some nations have good foundations by being able to collect real-time data. Ana Laing asked whether with many organisations having to stop outreach activity whether we need to think about other ways people can access support. Ann explained that the provision of remote services is key.

Janette Bourne explained that we need to make sure that organisations have enough capacity and that Cruse have launched a new 'grief chat' service which had approximately 700 people access it in a week. Dr Alys Cole-King talked about the benefits of safety planning and that evidence shows people find it helpful. We need to think of the universal situation and that having a safety plan is like having a seatbelt to protect you in case you need it. Alys added that we could be more agile in how we think about safety plans and learn safe, self-help management strategies and we do not know what impact this could make on people. Alys talked about the staying safe website and that the NHS website now includes the staying safe information about safety planning. Lynne explained she is interested in safety planning and the Children, Young People and Education Committee looked at how crisis care has not been working as it should. Ann John explained that safety plans may be different for people in the current climate and a briefing is currently being done on this.

Glenn Page talked about care in treatment plans to prevent crisis and that we have an opportunity to refresh those plans and asked whether there are lessons to be learned regarding access to services. Glenn explained there has been a lot of innovation and moves to digital support but that services should not be digital by default and what about those who do not have access to technology or do not want to access services remotely. Ann commented that we need to think about digital exclusion and the need to evaluate services. Lynne explained that issues around digital services have been discussed by the Children, Young People and Education Committee to Welsh Government and that services need to be co-produced with service users. Alun Fletcher explained that Mental Health Matters Wales have found that there have been barriers with services moving to digital and they are now running their support groups online. Ann added that there is an organisation called Xen Zone which provides digital support to young people and work is being done to look at whether there are differences in outcomes for those accessing digital services.

Lynne asked the group if there are any issues Members of the Senedd could take forward. Ann talked about the impact on existing vulnerable groups, poverty and young people and that young people will be impacted and carry that vulnerability with them. Lynne explained that the Children, Young People and Education Committee has secured a debate on the impact of Covid-19 on children and young people which will take place next week. Kate Heneghan added that we know the impact will be worse on deprived communities and asked whether extra resources could be targeted at those communities. Kate also asked whether the messaging around wellbeing has been right and the need for positive messaging around wellbeing. Papyrus have created HopeLink, a digital platform for service users to create safety plans online with an advisor.

Helen Benett explained that the number of calls to Welsh Ambulance Service Trust has increased but the ability for the ambulance service to deal with mental health concerns is limited and there is concern about access to statutory services and health boards are not seeing the same enquiries as before.

Caryl Stock explained that The Amber Project works with 12 – 25 year olds and that many children are thriving as they can find school hard. There is a need to consider how we help ease the transition for those children when they will return to school. Lynne explained she has received some enquiries about this and will raise this. Ann added that this is why the research and evaluation work is important and that there is need to look at what positive outcomes may be for some. Dai Lloyd MS explained that this will be discussed further in the Senedd and thanked all for their contributions and the great work of their projects. Kate commented that she hoped Welsh Government are capturing

the positives that have come out of the current situation such as the support that has been given to the homeless community.

Lynne explained that we want the CPG to be action focused and asked whether the group were happy for a letter to go to Welsh Government from the CPG.

Maggy Corkhill raised a point about a survey she had carried out on drugs, alcohol and suicide. Maggy asked whether the group would be interested in looking at the data and asked whether there is any current research being done in this area. Ann explained that convenience sampled surveys can be biased and are hard to draw firm conclusions from, but she would be happy to take a look at the survey results. Maggy asked whether having an organisation like Barod be part of the CPG would be useful as they could offer some further insights.

Jillian Purvis from Huw Irranca-Davies MS office raised concerns about support for those with a diagnosis of Borderline Personality Disorder and whether there were links between this and suicide. Ann said that there is some evidence on this.

## **6. Topic for next meeting and close**

Lynne said that given the pandemic there was a need to be flexible about the agenda for the next meeting in October, but that one option could be to focus on postvention in schools which had originally been planned before the pandemic. The meeting could also focus on concerns around children and young people returning to school and the impact on them. This was agreed.

Lynne thanked everyone for attending and closed the meeting.