Inside this Issue

28th IASP Congress
Montreal, Canada

Beyond the sunset

Message from Sue Horseman
BEFRIENDERS KENYA

Vision
A society in which fewer people die by suicide.

Mission
To provide confidential emotional support for people, who are experiencing feelings of distress or despair and through focused programs create awareness aimed at suicide prevention.

Values are based on beliefs:
- Suicide is, most times, preventable
- The opportunity to talk about and explore difficult feelings is often therapeutic.
- Being listened to, in confidence and accepted without prejudice can alleviate despair and suicidal feelings and help one to explore other available options.
Dear Reader,


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 distress and in danger of committing suicide.

As Befrienders Kenya we aim to make our free listening and counseling services known to all as well as reducing stigma associated with suicide through bringing the topic of suicide into conversation, keeping in mind that being listened in confidence and accepted without prejudice can alleviate despair and suicidal feelings and help one to explore other available options.

In this edition we have a new introduction – in addition to all we have been doing, we are now breaking the silence through the newly introduced school outreach program. This initiative aims at reducing the number of suicide cases among students and by extension suicide among young people.

We are also looking at the organization’s participation in various activities as a way to creating awareness, equipping the volunteers with the necessary skills as well as forming networks in reaching out and saving lives. The 2015 activities include: Marking the World Suicide Prevention day, World Mental Health day, 8th Annual PCAF Psychotrauma conference and the IASP conference in Montreal, Canada. The events which carried different themes bring out the message across that suicide is preventable and that each one of us can play a role in this prevention.

We hope you enjoy the Befrienders Kenya 2015 Newsletter.
The 28th IASP World Congress held in June 2015 brought together researchers, practitioners, helpline workers, program planners, graduate students and persons concerned with suicide bereavement, from a range of disciplines around the world. Befrienders Kenya was privileged to be represented at the congress by Ms Merab Mulindi who was able to attend both the IASP congress and the Befrienders Worldwide 2-day meeting which came immediately after the congress. This was courtesy of IASP which sponsored her travel and stay in Montreal. To Befrienders Kenya, this sponsorship was a great honor - recognition of the work done by the volunteer organization and an acknowledgement that grass root level efforts do contribute to the bigger picture in suicide prevention. This is an important recognition for an organization working in the area of suicide prevention driven only by passion and a spirit of volunteering since there is no suicide prevention policy in place. Despite this and other challenges, Befrienders Kenya continues to offer services to those in distress and in danger of committing suicide while also creating awareness on suicide prevention and working towards de stigmatization of suicide.

The congress theme, New Discoveries and Technologies in Suicide Prevention, focused on presenting cutting-edge research and clinical insights from the beginning of the 21st century. However, a full range of topics were covered, from the latest discoveries in biology and genetics, to culturally sensitive prevention practices and suicidology and the arts.

In addition to the great opportunity provided by the congress, Ms Merab Mulindi who is also the Africa regional coordinator for Befrienders Worldwide (BW) had an opportunity to meet and interact with other BW network members some who she had only had email contact with before.

She says “The passion for the befriending service was evident from all the network members and I am sure that as a network we will continue to grow as we learn from each other - indeed each of our centers is a part of the whole and there can be no network without each one of them.”

Her appreciation is to all those who made her travel and participation in the congress and BW event possible and the warmth and learning she got from the congress and individuals she interacted with. Her summary is “No words can quiet capture the sense of being so diverse yet bound together by shared concerns from our different countries and different continents.”

By Merab Mulindi

Mrs. Merab Mulindi and other delegates at the IASP world congress in Montreal, Canada.

Breaking the silence
Hello everyone, my name is Sue and I am here in Nairobi for 5 years.

Back home in the UK, I am a volunteer with Samaritans, an organisation set up in 1953 by a Vicar and Chaplain to offer free emotional support and help to those in distress or despair and in danger of committing suicide. The organisation today has grown and has over 21,000 volunteers, 200 branches and over 2.7 million contacts made per year.

When I knew I was coming to Kenya, I hoped I could carry on the good work here. On carrying out some research, I was shocked to learn that in 2012 Kenyatta National Hospital was reporting about 100 suicides in past 2 months!

It became clear I should use my time and knowledge to try and promote similar services to the UK, here in Kenya. However, I quickly found there is little or no mental health support and that many people are stigmatised by suicide and attempted suicide being a punishable offence by law.

I then found Befrienders Kenya and with the committed volunteers there, together we have been working to increase and improve our services and we hope that in time, we will be able to reach out to all of Kenya. We now have a fully functional website giving help, information and guidance on mental health issues and suicide.

So how does our service help? It provides a safe and confidential space for people to talk about their problems and difficult feelings with trained listeners and gives access to services of professional counsellors. Research has shown that suicide is drastically reduced by talk therapy.

So why volunteer? Becoming a Befrienders volunteer means you:

- give something back to your local community
- change peoples’ lives
- contribute and share existing skills
- develop new listening and communication skills you can use in all aspects of your life
- meet new people from all different kinds of backgrounds and cultures
- improve your CV

After you've registered your interest in volunteering with us, we invite you to a selection session. This helps us get to know each other, and both decide if Befrienders Kenya is right for you. Training as a listening volunteer takes place over several days as agreed by all involved. After the training the number of hours you give us a volunteer is agreed. We welcome you to volunteer with Befrienders Kenya.
This year Befrienders Kenya in partnership with P.C.E.A Kikuyu hospital, Samaritans Medical Services, My Mind-My Funk and Africa Mental Health Foundation held the 4th World Suicide Prevention day occasion in Kenya with the theme: Reaching out and saving lives on the 10th September, 2015 at Kikuyu hospital in Kiambu County.

The event brought together students, teachers, Community Health Workers, service providers within the mental health and other stakeholders to discuss the issue which is a challenge within the communities yet is a taboo subject.

Mrs Merab Mulindi, the volunteer regional coordinator for Befrienders Worldwide and Kenya representative of International Association for Suicide Prevention [IASP] said that the forum was meant to create awareness on: the WSPD and the theme, the issues around suicide and suicide prevention, available services to the survivors and the bereaved, call for action on suicide within the Kenyan context, call for key institutions for actions towards preventing suicide and come up with a way forward on addressing the issues surrounding suicide especially keeping in mind the survivors of suicide and the bereaved families.

Among activities for the day was candle lighting ceremony in honor of those who died through suicide. There were also presentations from various professionals tackling various aspects related to suicide including worldwide statistics, Kenyan perspective on suicide, rape in relation to suicide, Drugs and substance abuse in relation to suicide, youth and suicide, impact of suicide on significant others, personal experience stories from suicide survivors and a skit by a youth group. The event was chaired by Ms Margaret Karania of P.C.E.A Kikuyu hospital and Mr. James Karuru of Befrienders Kenya.

In his presentation Prof. David Ndetei, the founding director of Africa Mental Health Foundation [AMHF] said that research and interventions into suicide among the adolescents in Africa has been hindered by various factors such as stigma and legal issues which lead to under reporting of suicide cases. He added that suicide is therefore documented wrongly as accidental or attributed to other causes of death. He emphasized that cultural and religious beliefs also make it difficult to classify a death by suicide.
The AMHF director, presented a study that his organization had carried out in selected counties on the prevalence of suicidal behavior among school-going adolescents in Kenya to identify risks and protective factors for suicide in this age group. Among the study findings was that there is need to involve parents and teachers as mental health workers as informal social control agent in programs designed to address youth risk behavior, empowerment and well-being.

Elsewhere the forum was informed that Kikuyu hospital received a total of 16 patients who had made suicide attempts in 2014. Among this 11 were male and 5 were female aged 18-55 years and all were from Kikuyu town.

According to Ms. Margaret Karani, Counseling psychologist at Kikuyu hospital, out of the 16 Patients 5 were known to be living with mental illness but were off medication at the time. 11 reported relationship and family conflicts, loss of job and loss of a loved one.

The event was sponsored by International Association for Suicide Prevention, Liberty Life Insurance and ROK Industries.
Mention the word suicide and the community will shun you like the plague as suicide is most of the time a taboo subject. This is precisely the image Befrienders Kenya wants to change.

Starting May 2015, Befrienders Kenya partnered with Samaritans Medical Services (SMS) in Dandora, Nairobi County in a joint program aimed at both public and private upper primary pupils as well as high school students. This is in response to the fact that young people are greatly affected by suicide. Through this program Befrienders Kenya hopes to reach out to young people who do not have access to both listening and counseling services.

SMS supervisor Ms. Ebby Maresi revealed that the facility receives at least five attempted suicide cases in a week mostly emanating from domestic issues. The hospital also receives patients with mental health issues and when they are unable to handle the cases they refer the patients to Kenyatta and Mama Lucy hospitals for further consultation.

This initiative comes after the number of students committing suicide after receiving their national examination results has caused concern.

Starlight Academy principal Mr. Yusuf Opiyo acknowledged that the school is in a hostile environment where issues of drugs, loss of caregivers and diseases pose a challenge to the young people adding that there is a gap in the area of counseling. He therefore welcomed the initiative noting that pupils are not able to comfortably discuss their problems and issues with their teachers due to fear of break in confidentiality. He noted that having access to a counselor who can listen and answer their questions will be a great step towards keeping the students focused on their studies.

Another institution on the school outreach program is Glorious Rehabilitation Center which enrolls street children between the ages of 12-16 years from various parts of the country. Given their background, Ms. Ann Anyona the institution’s Director noted that they all need counseling services and welcomed the school outreach program as an important step in the rehabilitation process.

This program is a volunteer-run initiative for the benefit of the young people.
The theme for this year’s World Mental Health Day, observed on 10 October was “Dignity in mental health.” The day’s event which was organized by Africa Mental Health Foundation (AMHF) and the Makueni County government was held at the Makueni County Referral Hospital.

The message for the day was mental health is treatable with the emphasis that there is no health without mental health hence the need for social support programs that cater for the mentally impaired.

The event which began with a procession led by the bodaboda motor-cycles and a band brought together hundreds of people and was graced by speakers who included: The Director Africa Mental Health Foundation, Prof. David Ndeti, Makueni County Secretary Mr. Joshua Wambua, Makueni County Disability service officer [NCPD] Ms. Ivy Mbinya Nzuki and Dr. Veronic Clair of University of British Columbia among others.

Befrienders Kenya participated in the event represented by Terry Makokha and Vincent Sakwa both volunteers at Befrienders Kenya.
Sunday, 21 September, 2007 will remain a landmark in my life just as my birthday which always reminds me of the day I was born. This day marked the beginning of my new life as a widow.

I woke up in high spirits, prepared my husband for work as usual and when he had left, I took my breakfast and rushed out to open my business as I normally did, since at the end of the day I expected to meet my needs through the sales made. When evening came I was glad for I had made good sales and I could not wait to share the good news with my husband.

I arrived at home with our 6 month old son who was sound asleep. Quickly I prepared supper for I knew that at any moment my husband would be coming home tired and hungry. It was now midnight, supper was ready but he had not arrived. This was not his usual pattern as in the 2 years we had been married he had not been coming home that late from work. It was only in the recent past that he had started coming home late drunk - whereas he never took alcohol before and when he came home he did not eat nor utter a word. He would just walk in and retire to bed. On this day, I could not bring myself to sleep since I was worried of what might have happened to him.

An hour later I heard a knock at the door and when I opened there stood my husband and I felt relieved since he was home and he looked fine though he was totally drunk and looked like a wreck. I tried to start a conversation but it looked as if I was talking to a zombie, he was so withdrawn, seemed annoyed and spoke little. He came in and went straight to bed.

Early in the morning when I woke up I realized he was not in bed so I thought he might have decided to go and watch the television as he did sometimes in the early morning.

When I opened the door that led to the sitting room, I was shocked as down on the floor lay the love of my life, the father of my son with white...
foam round his mouth.

I screamed my heart out and in came the neighbors who assisted me to rush him to the hospital but sadly he was pronounced dead on arrival.

With my husband gone, I felt I was not good enough to stay alive. With his departure he had destroyed my hopes and expectations for the future. We met as family and organized his burial ceremony. It was after his burial that I felt the world had come to an end and it is at this point that I felt I needed a lot of comfort but all I received were insults! **The friends I had were nowhere and I later came to learn that everywhere I went people said, “This is the lady whose husband committed suicide.”** This made me feel alone and rejected.

A week later after my husband’s burial my in-laws came and collected everything in the house and even demanded the permit to my business which my husband had opened for me. As if that was not enough they asked me never to step into their home claiming that I had something to do with their son’s death. “This wouldn’t have happened if he hadn’t been with you,” they said.

I had to move to another house with the little amount of money I had saved so as to start a new life as a single mother to my son. Life became so difficult with no source of income that I opted to join prostitution just to make ends meet. I was involved in prostitution for about 6 months and then suddenly I became ill and when I went to the hospital I was tested and results showed that among the ailments I had, I was also HIV positive. This made me even more distressed and I will never know whether my husband too was HIV positive....could that be why he took his life? Or did I get the virus during the life I led after his death? These remain unanswered questions, but I was at my lowest and almost gave up since I more than ever, felt alone and distressed and almost to the point of committing suicide. To me life had lost meaning......

Fortunately for me, I one day met a long time high school friend who on hearing my story offered to help me out by introducing me to a support group for those bereaved or who have lost their loved ones through suicide. She advised me that it was important to share my feelings. The support group was being run by a charitable organization that believes that through sharing experiences we lessen our burdens and encourage each other to move forward with life. Here I met people who had suffered experiences similar to mine and on listening to some of the stories I learnt that some of the experiences were worse than mine. I also got counseling and so started my journey to recovery. Through the support group I found a good samaritan who offered to give me capital to start a business and once again be able to fend for myself.

I am forever grateful to the counselor and friends who believed in me and gave me hope to continue living. Currently I am self employed and run a beauty parlor which is slowly expanding. My son is already 3 years and has joined pre-school. Right now all I can do is to work hard to see my son succeed in life. I still miss my husband and still have many unanswered questions, but I have learned to live through the stigma of suicide and accept what I cannot change. As I look at my son I am glad that I found help when I most needed it.

*Beyond the Sunset*

The article is based, with permission, on a true story of a Befrienders Kenya client, who underwent listening and counseling services because of the challenges she faced. She later joined a support group within the organization.
Befrienders Kenya participated in the 8th Pan African Psychotrauma conference held on the 13th-16th July, 2015 at the Catholic University of Eastern Africa in Nairobi with the theme: Trauma and Mental health across the Lifespan.

The conference featured plenary sessions, workshops and trainings by some of the world’s foremost experts in global mental health. The sessions were chaired by Dr. Janet Nakigudde, Dr. Eliallia Okello, Dr. Mark Jordans, Chika Eze, Dr. Raymond Odokonyero, Michael Odenwald, Prof. Anna Karani, Dr. Tharcisse Niyonizigiye among others.

Topics such as harnessing the entrepreneurial spirit to address Psychotrauma and mental health from womb to tomb and from generation to generation in Africa and beyond, transforming mental health through innovation, the need to test anti stigma interventions in low and middle income countries, substance abuse, gender violence and child & adolescent trauma were discussed.

Trauma was the main topic of the conference with most speakers exploring trauma-related themes in their presentations. Trauma is an emotional response to a terrible event like an accident, rape, natural disasters, and death of a loved one. Immediately after the event, shock and denial are typical. While these feelings are normal, some people have difficulty in moving on with their lives. Trauma is not only felt by adults but can be experienced by children as young as 5-6 years and below.

The conference is Africa’s only multi-disciplinary conference on psychological trauma in war and conflict affected societies. The conference brought together students, faculty, researchers, consumers, policy makers, clinicians and other stakeholders in mental health to discuss what is common amongst them.
When trauma occurs post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) often occurs. Those with PTSD are at higher risk of suicide attempts after controlling for physical illness and other mental disorders. Anger and Impulsivity predicts suicide risk in those with PTSD. Individuals with PTSD who present with intermittent but manageable suicidal thoughts may benefit from trauma-focused therapy.

It was noted that stress can be dealt with through support networks and self-control and that traumatized individuals require a lot of listening and counseling.

The participants came from across the world. These included participants from Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, Somalia, Nigeria, Ghana, USA, Canada, Democratic Republic of Congo, Southern Sudan. Befrienders Kenya was represented at the conference by Fredrick Wanjiru, Vincent Sakwa and Mabel Inganji – who are all volunteers with the organization.

**GETTING HELP FOR YOUR SELF**

If you are feeling suicidal please remember the following:

- **Acknowledge** that this cannot be solved by you alone you need the help and support of others.
- **Do not blame** yourself
- **Believe** that your life can change for the better.
- **Seek help** from a mental health professional, counselor or psychologist.
Ms Clare Kerubo gives a presentation during the WSPD.

Befrienders Worldwide delegates who met in Montreal during the BW meeting.

WSPD materials for the day

Dr. Veronica Clair and Prof. David Ndetei during the World Mental Health day

Befrienders worldwide delegates at the IASP congress in Montreal, Canada

2nd from left Befrienders Kenya Administrator during the PCAF conference in Nairobi.
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