

MEDIA RELEASE

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IT'S PERSONAL – Accessing Youth Mental Health Services

- 65 deaths due to suicide in the Northern Sydney region in 2015, averaging one death from suicide every six days.¹
- The top cause of death in 15-24-year olds in NSW for both males and females is intentional self-harm with the rate for males over double the rate for females.²
- There is a higher prevalence of mental illness among males and adolescents - (16.3%) among males compared to females (11.5%) in Australia.³
- 14.4% of children in Australia aged 12-17 years report having a mental illness in the past 12 months compared to 13.6% of children 4-11 years.

Yes – It's Personal! Accessing youth mental health services and providing ongoing support to children and young people with mental health issues is growing, indicating the need for increasing the effectiveness and focus of youth mental health investment. Just ask Andrew – 22 years-old – who has had a long term battle with this mental health resulting in self-harm and suicide attempts, and Tatum – mother of 4 – who has children that suffer from anxiety, depression and attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD).

Andrew's Story

Andrew is brave, because having the courage to share your story like Andrew has about self-harm and suicidal thinking means that other young people might not feel so alone and reach out for help before it got as serious and scary as it did for Andrew.

“I first started having issues when I was about 8 or 9 years old. I didn't really understand at that time what was happening or how to respond to the dark feelings. Some of the signs were spending a lot of time by myself and not wanting to go to school. I was also being bullied a lot at school so I didn't have a lot of friends, and so I would spend a lot of time alone.

“At high school I struggled quite a lot with my mental health. For me the first signs of this were an overwhelming feeling of sadness that I couldn't quite get away from. From this deep feeling of sadness there was serious flow on effects in my life. I was spending quite a lot of time isolated and by myself. I withdrew from all of my friends and family. I wasn't really doing a lot with my life. I was just spending a lot of time in bed. I was crying a lot and I didn't really know how I was going to move forward. From this space it developed into suicidal thoughts and self-harming and a couple of suicide attempts. Then I realised I really needed to go and get some help.”

Andrew is now a positive mental health advocate and member of the Sydney North Primary Health Network (SNPHN) Community Council with a lived experience that the SNPHN draw on for feedback and direction when reviewing youth mental health services.

“I never actually had the 'I'm in trouble here' conversation with my parents. When they saw the visible self-harm they put me straight in the car and took me to the doctor. I kept seeing and talking to my GP and eventually he got me into headspace and I found a really great psychologist there.

¹ Centre for Epidemiology and Evidence 2017, Health Statistics New South Wales, Sydney: NSW Ministry of Health

² Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) 2017, Causes of Death, NSW, 2016, cat no. 3303

³ Lawrence D et al 2015, The Mental Health of Children and Adolescents - Report on the second Australian Child and Adolescent Survey of Mental Health and Wellbeing, Department of Health, Canberra.

“The first thing that I really noticed about the headspace service when I walked through the doors was how youth friendly it was. It made me feel immediately comfortable. It was a really great experience for me and I was able to get my life back on track. The number one benefit of using the headspace services is that it was, and still is, FREE! Being a young person without any money it is really important to be able to access a youth mental health service for free without having to rely on your parents having to pay for it. Another great benefit of headspace is that they are really flexible. I could get an appointment after school and they took into account everything else that was going on in my life.”

When Andrew was asked what advice he would give to a young person experiencing severe anxiety and depression, he said, “Seek help! Even if that is just speaking to your friends first or any adult you feel comfortable with like a parent, doctor or teacher – that is a good start and they can help you with the next steps.”

I think the first port of call for anyone struggling with anxiety or depression is to go and see a GP. They are really good at referring to appropriate services and offering really great and non-judgemental support. There are also some really good online resources you can access. headspace has eHeadspace where you can chat to a psychologist for free over webchat and I found that really helpful as well.”

Andrew also reinforced that if you are a support person or parent trying to connect with or help a young person facing battles with anxiety and depression that it is important to take their cues.

“Just be there to support them, but don’t smother them. Also don’t try to come in and fix the issue straight away. The number one thing is for young people to feel listened to and comfortable talking to you and then from there you can refer and seek professional help.”

Tatum’s Story

Tatum is already a busy mother of four, but when it comes to the mental health of your children it is very personal and emotional.

“The signs of my 15-year-old struggling were that he used to talk to us openly and then he just started to retreat, come home and go straight to his room, and sit down for dinner and not talk to us at all. This is where the concern started.

“We kept on thinking it was just puberty, but the signs were getting worse to the degree he ended up saying he felt sick all the time and he couldn’t get to school. He wouldn’t even go to parties he was invited to and couldn’t sleep. There were just a lot of signs that just weren’t him.

“Then one day he just broke down into the foetal position and said ‘I can’t do it anymore!’ And that was really hard and heartbreaking. He collapsed and said he didn’t want to live anymore. It ripped my heart out!”

Tatum and the extended nuclear family sought immediate help from their GP and were referred straight to a psychologist.

“The psychologist told us to step back a bit and adopt an open communication style that let him come to us. In the end we gave him that space and after a few months he sat us down and told us everything,” said a relieved Tatum.

The Solutions & Help Available

Sydney North Primary Health Network (SNPHN) has undertaken a review of regional youth mental health needs and is working closely with key partners and the community to ensure youth mental health services continue to expand, meeting the needs of young people and the wider community.

Mental Health Commissioning Manager at SNPHN, Craig Parsons says, “One of the things that we frequently hear at Sydney North Primary Health Network is that young people don’t know where to go

to access help or mental health services or just don't feel confident asking for support. headspace services are great because they operate as a one-stop-shop that young people can go to get the support that they need, and if they are accessing services for a mental health issue they can also get additional support around their physical health, sexual health, drugs and alcohol, or work and study issues.

“headspace services in the local region are also expanding. There are the existing headspace services in Chatswood and Brookvale which will continue to operate, but we will also introduce additional services in Hornsby, Ryde and the Upper Northern Beaches.”

Sydney North Primary Health Network also funds services for young people with more severe mental illness including the Karrakin Program - an outreach based program which means they provide support to young people in their home or in other locations which they feel more comfortable. SNPHN also fund specialist support services for people who have drug and alcohol problems and that program is delivered by the Sydney Drug, Education & Counselling Centre (SDECC) out of Manly and Chatswood and will soon be extending into Ryde.

Psychologist Kym Carlson says, “People who are looking after 12-25 year-olds might be looking out for signs such as isolation and irritability. It can be difficult to identify with young people because some of these mood ebb and flow traits are just considered a normal part of the teenage or adolescent years. It's really when you get that feeling that something is more serious.

“Secretive behaviour and your young person shutting themselves away is also a big sign that maybe there are some mental health challenges. There might also be signs that they are disengaging from school, their confidence in how to engage with the outside world will be shaky, there may be issues with drugs and alcohol, and they can become extremely anti-social. These are generally more serious warning signs.

I think that often the first point of call for parents or young people themselves is their family GP. They usually have an existing relationship and strong rapport and can refer directly to a psychologist, psychiatrist or specialist mental health service.”

There are also services such as [Parentline](#), [Lifeline](#) and [Kids Helpline](#). These are all services that are completely confidential and often a referral point for other services the parent or young person can engage with, to help them on a more regular and consistent basis if needed.

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MEDIA ENQUIRIES

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To view the
[“IT'S PERSONAL – Accessing Youth Mental Health Services”](#)
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PHOTOS FOR DOWNLOAD (on your keyboard click Ctrl key and left hand 'mouse' click)

1. [Andrew – Age 22 High Res \(Print\)](#)
2. [Andrew – Age 22 Low Res \(Web\)](#)
3. [Craig Parsons – Mental Health Commissioning Manager SNPHN High Res \(Print\)](#)
4. [Craig Parsons – Mental Health Commissioning Manager SNPHN Low Res \(Web\)](#)
5. [Tatum – Mother of 4 High Res \(Print\)](#)
6. [Tatum – Mother of 4 Low Res \(Web\)](#)
7. [Kym Carlson - Psychologist High Res \(Print\)](#)
8. [Kym Carlson - Psychologist Low Res \(Web\)](#)

MORE INFORMATION

There are four types of services currently available to young people in the Northern Sydney region:

- headspace services for people with mild to moderate mental illness, drug and alcohol, sexual health and employment services for young people aged 12-25 in a youth friendly environment.
- Short term individual and face-to-face psychological sessions for children and young people of all ages with mild to moderate mental illness or who are at risk of suicide or self-harm.
- Subsidised access for young people aged 16-24 years old with eating disorders, to Butterfly Foundation's Intensive Outpatient Program, including group therapy and nutrition therapy for young people whose finances would otherwise limit access to the service.
- *Karrakin*: Long term clinical case management, psychological interventions, and affordable psychiatry for young people aged 12-25 with, or at risk of, severe and complex mental illness such as bipolar disorder, psychoses, severe anxiety, and depression.

HOW TO ACCESS THE SERVICES?

headspace

People can self-refer to headspace, and direct referrals can also be made by GPs:

Chatswood: **(02) 8021 3668**

Brookvale: **(02) 9937 6500**

Psychological Services for Underserved Groups

A GP referral is required to access these services. A completed Mental Health Treatment Plan and outcome measure (K-10+, K-5 or SDQ) must be included with referral. To refer a client, please call the SNPHN Mental Health Triage on **1300 782 391** or send a completed referral form via secure fax on (02) 8072 6899.

Eating Disorders

Direct referrals can be made to the Intensive Outpatient Program on **1800 334 673**. The Butterfly Foundation will determine whether people are appropriate to receive the subsidised service. Alternatively, referrals may be made via the SNPHN Mental Health Triage on **1300 782 391**.

Karrikin

Severe and complex mental illness service. Referrals may be made by contacting the service directly on **(02) 9196 8700**, or by contacting the SNPHN Mental Health Triage on **1300 782 391**.

Suicide Prevention Services

Seasons is an aftercare service delivered by Community Care Northern Beaches (**1300 000 125**) for people to access after a suicide attempt. It provides rapid access, mobile and intensive care coordination and psychosocial treatment to ensure people have appropriate follow up and access the right services during the time when the risk of re-attempt is highest.

Eligibility - all people who live, work or go to school in the Northern Sydney Primary Health Network region can access this service. This service provides aftercare to people who have attempted suicide.

How to access these services

Referrals can be made through the hospital, by a GP, or individuals such as family members. Call **1300 000 125**.

GPs can also refer people through the Mental Health Triage on **1300 782 391**, send a referral form via secure fax on **(02) 8072 6899**.