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Our film, 'You're Not Alone' shares the experiences of 5 people who have had thoughts of suicide, or have cared for someone with thoughts of suicide, how they've sought help, and how they maintain their positive mental health & well-being.

'You're Not Alone', was made with the aim of de-stigmatising suicide, and whilst we still need to keep some negativity around suicide we don't want to stigmatise those bereaved, or who have suicidal ideation. We hope that this film will help those in community to understand that it is ok to seek help; to show the importance of maintaining mental health & well-being, and importantly, that life can get better.

We have also developed some accompanying materials that you can work with; some are targeted toward mental health professionals working with clients from cultural & linguistically diverse backgrounds; others are aimed at students, and toward members of our newer and emerging communities. Please come and see either myself, Paula, Archie or other Phoenix Centre staff if you would like to view these.

Stigma associated with suicide can manifest itself differently depending on cultural background, where you live, age, sexual or gender identity and many other factors. We know that in some cultures and religions, suicide is still considered a 'sin', a 'curse' or 'black magic' – we can see why this is so - to take life confronts life itself, however - You can imagine how difficult it would be for people to seek support for suicidal thoughts, or even following the death of loved one by suicide when this thinking prevails.

We know that men are much less likely to seek help for any kind of emotional problems whether associated with mental illness or not; which means that they are less likely to share with others if they are feeling suicidal – and this of course, makes intervention much more difficult. We also know that other types of stigma experienced by people can contribute to increased risk of suicidal behaviour. Those who identify as LGBTIQ have a high rate of suicide attempts, with stigma and discrimination reported to be a factor in that increased risk.

We know that just focussing on the signs and symptoms as a prevention tool will not reduce the stigma attached to suicide, but that stories of those affected may actually be the key. We need to increase awareness of the impact of suicide on families, friends, workplaces and communities. This might include stories of those bereaved by suicide so that others know of the devastation caused, and that 'staying away' or 'giving the family or friend space' can sometimes reinforce that stigma and isolation already being felt.

We also know that if we are to use personal stories, research suggests that stories of how someone overcame suicidal ideation and behaviour are more likely to be effective in getting others to also seek help. Unfortunately our media stories have a tendency to focus on those who have died by suicide, **but** research by Thomas Niederkotenthaler & colleagues, suggests that stories describing what worked for someone, how someone moved on from suicide, are much more likely to be preventative.

We first decided to make this film, because suicide is still such a touchy subject. People are unsure of how to talk about it and what to do when someone is showing signs of suicidal ideation. According to research (Niederkrontenthaler et al., 2010), "media reports about suicide deaths, reports focussing on suicide myths and even expert opinion about suicide were associated with increases in suicidal behaviour". The Suicide and Mental Illness in the Media Report states that "Stories about suicide appear to have the greatest impact on people in the community who are already vulnerable. The risk is increased where someone identifies with the person in the report, where the story is prominent, is about a celebrity, details method and/or location or glorifies the death in some way."

But what Niederkontenthaler's research also found was that "presentations of an individual's mastery of suicidal ideation, or recovery from suicidal thoughts, were associated with reductions in suicide rates". So **positive** stories about people who have been there and are now talking about the strategies that help keep them well **-HAVE BEEN SHOWN TO HAVE A POSITIVE EFFECT AND ACTUALLY DECREASE THE SUICIDE RATE.**

Our guests/panel have requested that I introduce them. They all participated in the film and whilst some of my words may sound frank, they asked that I convey this level of personal detail.

Craig Dow-Sainter is the Producer at Roar Films. Craig and the rest of the team's enthusiasm, empathy and understanding of this very sensitive issue made the making of "You're Not Alone" much easier than we anticipated, and I know he'll be delighted to answer any questions you have after viewing the film.

Kondok was bought up in Sudan and spent many years in a refugee camp in Kenya. Kondok has suffered from mental illnesses, and had also turned to alcohol – and at his lowest times, contemplated suicide. Over the years, with lots of help from his counsellors, and hard work and determination from him, Kondok lives a much healthier life. He takes his medication regularly and continues to see his counsellor; He also assists the Community Connection's Suicide Prevention Program deliver workshops in educational settings, and has written his story to share with others.

Hassan, who unfortunately couldn't be here today, is a young Iranian man who was granted a humanitarian visa a few years ago after spending years in immigration detention centres and community detention. During detention, Hassan met a young Sri Lankan man, Kajan, who was fleeing persecution and violence in his home country. Hassan's story is incredibly important in that he tells it from a different perspective; one where he is trying to support his friend through his darkest times, and how he went about that.

Hassan and Kajan, who we have here on our panel, met again whilst in community detention. Kajan was on a Bridging Visa, which meant he was not allowed to work or go to English classes; he missed his family, was unsure whether he'd be allowed to stay in Australia or be sent home, and he began to lose hope. With the help of Hassan and a Phoenix counsellor Kajan found that dance helped with his recovery along with continued support from his friends and counsellor.

Since gaining asylum, things have looked up for Kajan, and he is now working and enjoying his life.

Faisal, originally from Saudi Arabia was, at the time of filming, seeking asylum in Australia after renouncing his faith in religion which placed him at great risk if he returned. As such, at the time of filming we had to obscure his identity. Luckily, since then, Faisal has been granted asylum, and is now studying again, and we can now show his lovely face. Until Faisal knew he'd been granted asylum, he was having a tough time coping with feelings of isolation and anxiety regarding his visa application, his safety, and the knowledge

that his family would want no more to do with him if they knew of his feelings. He came to see a counsellor at the Phoenix Centre and began building his personal resilience and ability to cope by focusing on health and fitness. Faisal trains regularly to improve his strength and endurance and is teaching himself about the science of nutrition - focusing on his physical health has empowered him to take control over things he is able to, and cope better with the things that he has no control over. Faisal is a determined yet humble young man who speaks confidently and with insight about his experiences and recovery. He's now studying at TasTAFE to become a Personal Trainer.

Aurora is a personal friend of mine & unfortunately she also couldn't make it here today. Aurora is not from a refugee or asylum seeking background; she's from a middle class, Australian born family, and as she says in the film she "had never dealt with crisis or loss", and was very surprised when her world fell apart around her.

These stories are all very different, but they are all so very similar. They are stories of people who felt they'd lost all hope.

These people here, and the others in 'You're Not Alone' all agreed to be a part of this film, because they know how bad things can be – but more importantly, they know that life can be good again, and with the help of others, and some hard work from themselves, they are all very grateful that they're still alive and able to share their stories – And so are we!

We hope you are as impressed by their bravery and resilience as we are!!

#### *References:*

Niederkrötenhaler, T., Fu, K.-W., Yip, P., Fong, D., Stack, S., Cheng, Q., et al. (in press). Changes in suicide rates following media reports on celebrity suicides: a meta-analysis. *Journal of Epidemiology and Community Health*.

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