

Irish Association of Suicidology

Presentation to the
Suicide Strategy Implementation Body
Northern Ireland

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Background

The Irish Association of Suicidology (IAS) was established in 1996 in response to rising suicide rates in Ireland.

The Vision of the IAS is:

“To be a leading independent advocate in Ireland on all aspects of suicide including intervention, prevention, and postvention in order to reduce and prevent suicide and self-harm and promote mental health awareness”

IAS Activities

Over the past 14 years the IAS has achieved it's vision through the development of guidelines, hosting of conferences and through it's membership:

- 14 annual conferences
- Publication of Media Guidelines
- Publication of Schools Guidelines
- 6 conferences held for the education sector
- Hosting of the 28th World Congress on Suicide Prevention
- Publication of information booklets and regular newsletters

Independent Strategic Review

- In 2008 the IAS commissioned an independent review of the Association.
- The aim of the review was to examine the role of the IAS and inform it's strategic direction.
- The next strategic phase of the IAS is 2011 to 2015, ten specific action areas have been identified.

Action 1

Board Development

- To have a Board of Directors which comprises the skills relative to the aims of the association.
- That expertise should be reflective of the environment from both north and south of Ireland.
- Until recently the association always had a third of it's Board members from Northern Ireland.
- Over the coming years we intend to strengthen the Northern representation on the Board

Action 2

Membership

- There are two benefits to having members of the Association; members are a means of disseminating information on developments in suicide prevention and members can also be the source of information, through their own experiences.
- Over the last number of years membership has decreased. The IAS intends to rebuild it's membership and in particular to attract members from Northern Ireland.

Action 3

Annual Conferences

- Over the next five years we will look at the format of our conferences to ensure they are relevant to the current times.
- The IAS will add new elements to the conferences for example in 2011 a new research award will be established.
- The 2011 conference will again be held in the border region with a plan to return to Derry in 2013.

Action 5

Media Guidelines

- The IAS are currently working with the Samaritans on a new section of the media guidelines which will focus on bereavement support.
- This section will provide advice for journalists on how to sensitively engage with those bereaved by suicide.
- There will also be information for families on how to engage with the media and on their rights on privacy for example: regarding use of images.
- Such supplements will be incorporated into the main publication when it is revised in 2012.

Action 6

Schools Guidelines

- It has been over 10 years since the original schools guidelines were published. A revision of these guidelines is planned for 2011.
- The IAS will invite experts from health and education sectors on both sides of the border to form a working group to revise the guidelines.
- The guidelines offer best practise to any school looking to develop policies in relation to suicide prevention. They are not specific to any educational system and can be promoted in the north as well as the south of Ireland.

Research Award

- Research is key to informing how we tackle the issue of suicide in the future. We need new researchers to take an interest in the subject of mental health and suicide prevention.
- The IAS has received corporate funding to develop an annual award for new researchers in the field of mental health for the next five years.
- 2011 will be the first year of this award and institutions involved in research from all over Ireland will be invited to participate.

Action 8

Accreditation Process

- In the republic of Ireland it is estimated that there are over 500 organisations in the voluntary sector involved in suicide prevention.
- At the request of the Minister for State in the Department of Health & Children the IAS will establish an accreditation process for these organisations.
- The process will be based loosely on a model used by the American Association of Suicidology.
- While this has no implications for organisations in Northern Ireland. It will have implications for Northern organisations operating in the south.

Organisational Support

- Since the establishment of the IAS the Directors of the Association have given advice and support to other organisations looking to establish or expand their current service.

Communications

- Like all organisations the IAS will continue to use new technologies as a way of doing business.
- In 2010 the IAS upgraded it's website and will, over the next five years develop the site to respond to growing demands.

Conclusion

- Over the next five year the IAS will raise awareness of the issue of suicide in Irish society.
- Through the accreditation process we will also raise the standard of support to those using the voluntary sector in crisis
- Our successes in these actions will be measured by an independent review in 2015

Thank you

Question and Answers

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