

MEDIA RELEASE

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Suicide prevention training reaches capacity in Casterton and Heywood

More than ever, people across the Glenelg Shire community are stepping up to tackle one of the community's most pressing issues: suicide.

Recently, both the Livingworks safeTALK and Applied Suicide Intervention Skills Training (ASIST) were delivered in Casterton and Heywood respectively. Casterton residents were eager to gain the skills over four hours to recognise the warning signs, start conversations, and gain confidence to connect those at risk to professional health and support.

Heywood Rural Health hosted the ASIST training where 30 participants from across the shire undertook a two day more intensive training in suicide first aid, using a Pathway for Assisting Life.

United Way Glenelg, in partnership with Rotary Club of Portland and the health Promotion team at Portland District Health, are leading this strong community response. The shire has faced increasing rates of suicide in recent years, with local surveys identifying mental health and suicide prevention as top priorities for action.

Training programs such as safeTALK, safeYARN and ASIST provide residents with practical tools to intervene, giving everyday people the confidence to reach out and support someone in crisis. SafeTALK, already delivered in more than 20 countries, helps build a network of trained "connectors" who can ensure that people at risk are not left alone but supported and linked to care.

The three Rotary Clubs in the Glenelg Shire have been instrumental in bringing these workshops to the region, backed by United Way Glenelg's Lewis Court Fund.

Peter Taylor, Chair of the Rotary project, emphasised the importance of reaching diverse groups.

"These workshops aim to deliver ongoing training for our residents across the Glenelg Shire, including our older residents such as retirees and grandparents who can play a vital role in suicide prevention," said Mr Taylor.

"Suicide affects families, workplaces and communities. The fact that these sessions booked out so quickly shows how ready people are to learn and to make a difference."

Delivered by accredited LivingWorks trainers, the workshops are built on evidence-based methods. Trainers must complete ASIST, undergo specialist SafeTALK training, and deliver workshops under supervision before becoming fully accredited.

With Victorian Government suicide statistics published annually, the long-term impact of this training will be measured over time.

"By running suicide alertness workshops, we can give everyday people the skills to recognise warning signs and take action," said Lynda Smith, Health Promotion Practitioner at Portland District Health.

"Our long-term goal is to see workplaces, community groups and families across the Shire equipped with the knowledge to support someone in crisis, connect them to professional health and support, ultimately reducing the rates of death by suicide."

Nicole Carr, Executive Officer of United Way Glenelg, praised the community response.

"When people put their hands up to take part in suicide prevention training, it shows the strength and care within our community. These workshops give locals the confidence to reach out, listen, and connect someone to help when it's needed most."

"The vision is a suicide-safer Glenelg Shire where every community member feels equipped to notice, listen, and act," Mr Taylor concluded.

Photo: Participants of the Heywood session show their delight in having completed the ASIST course.

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