Final Outcomes Report

Initiative-1095
The Truth About Teenage Suicide Documentary

Sponsored by
Leeds & Grenville
Child and Youth Wellness Centre
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1. Project Overview

Purpose of the project

To produce an awareness and prevention tool for teenagers aged 13-25, parents and professionals who work with teens. As well as bring the issues that teens face and the ever increasing suicide rates among youth to the forefront to open discussions. “The Truth About Teenage Suicide” is to be presented regionally and then prepared to be presented nationally and distributed internationally along with additional suicide prevention support material in conjunction with a broader mental health/suicide prevention strategy.

Summary of the project

The Truth About Teenage Suicide is a gripping true story of how a young girl - with all the potential in the world named Chantal Thomas has her life completely turned upside down because of her inability to cope with having a mental illness, a drug addiction, being sexually abused, bullied, and unsure if she'd be accepted because of her sexuality - on top of the regular challenges of adolescence.

Feeling alone and with nowhere to turn, everything would come completely crashing down on Chantal. As what started out like any other night of camping with her friends - quickly became her last.

Through video footage, pictures, artwork and poetry left behind by Chantal along with interviews with the people who were closest to her, supported by key statistics and facts from industry experts this documentary gives viewers an in depth look at the valuable lessons from her loss, how it has affected the people in her life and how it all could have been prevented.

The documentary shares a great sense of hope by including interviews of those who have been able to cope with a mental illness and/or have overcame suicide attempts - by receiving the support they needed to overcome their issues and begin living happier and healthier lives.

Objectives

To produce a documentary that is not harmful to viewers and is effective at achieving the following outcomes:

A) Educate viewers and reduce the stigma associated with such topics as Suicide, Mental Illness, Sexual and Physical Abuse, Substance Abuse/addictions, Bullying and Homosexuality. As well as help open the doors of communication, so that people are more willing to talk about it with others.

B) Educate viewers on how to recognize the signs of someone who is suicidal, the steps to
take and the resources that are available to them.

C) Illustrate the effect we have on the people around us and the choices we make (positives and negatives).

D) Show viewers that we all go through difficult times and that things will get better once we are able to deal with them properly (Suicide is a permanent solution to what is often a temporary problem).

E) Allow viewers to appreciate life and the people around them.

F) Provide hope and inspire viewers to live a happy, healthy and fulfilling life.

**Identifying the Target Population**

The video is first targeted towards at-risk teenagers who may be struggling with thoughts of suicide and/or a mental illness, as well as teenagers in general who may need to support a friend.

Secondly the video is also directed towards parents of teenagers and professionals who work with teens on an ongoing basis so they can better understand suicide.

**Relevant Stakeholders**

There are a number of partners who were involved in the development and success of the project. Each of them have helped shaped the documentary and could not have been possible without all of their support.

A) Supporting Partners, funders and sponsors;

B) On Camera Team - Actors, Family, Friends and Mental Health Experts;

C) Production team – Producers, Audio/Video Technicians, Animators;

D) Musicians/Bands who all donated the rights to utilize their music.

**Review of research/documentation**

In the research some of the most common risk factors among teen suicides included Mental Illness, Drug & Alcohol abuse, Sexual abuse, Bullying, Issues with sexuality, Social pressure, Inability to cope with major loss. Each of the following statistics helped shape the message of the documentary and some of which were shown on screen in the documentary itself.
Suicide

Every 40 seconds someone around the world dies by suicide

1 in 25 Canadians attempt suicide in his or her lifetime
Source: http://mindyourmind.ca/help/facts-a-symptoms/69-suicide

In the last 45 years suicide rates have increased by 60% worldwide. Suicide is the second leading cause of death in the 10-24 years age group; these figures do not include suicide attempts which are up to 20 times more frequent than completed suicide.

Although traditionally suicide rates have been highest among the male elderly, rates among young people have been increasing to such an extent that they are now the group at highest risk in a third of countries, in both developed and developing countries.

Suicide is the second leading cause of death for Canadians between the ages of 10 and 24

According to a report by the Canadian Institute for Health Information (CIHI), more men in Ontario committed suicide in the past 10 years than died in car crashes.

Men commit suicide at a rate four times higher than that of women. Women, however, make 3 to 4 times more suicide attempts than men do.
Source: Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (September 2002). Understanding depression statistics.

Sexual Abuse

1 in 5 have been sexually abused before leaving high school
Studies indicate that there is a significant correlation between a history of sexual abuse and the lifetime number of suicide attempts.


**Drug/Alcohol addiction**

Substance abuse is the second most common risk factor for suicide after mood disorders.


In adolescents the figure is higher with alcohol or drug misuse playing a role in up to 70% of suicides.


**Mental illness**

1 in 5 people will experience a mental illness in their lifetime

Source: CMHA Website

**Summary**

1) Suicide is a complex issue where each case has its own set of circumstances, and we can never really determine the exact cause/reasons for someone to take their life. However with over 90% of suicide victims having a diagnosable mental illness, it is by far the largest risk factor to suicide.

2) Mental illnesses can be treated and the earlier they are diagnosed and treated the less severe they become and the easier it is to treat them. Therefore learning about mental illnesses, the causes of mental illness, and what signs to look out for are very important to decrease the number of suicides.

3) If someone is suicidal they are most likely to tell (if anyone) a friend – therefore it’s important that all teens and those who live with and work with teens learn to recognize the signs of suicide and realize the importance of taking immediate action.

**2. Approach**
Approach and Design of the project

The design of the project/process was as follows:

1) Research and discover what Chantal had encountered in her lifetime - which lead her to take her own life through reading her artwork and poetry, then interviewing family and friends.

2) Research the common causes of suicide and mental illness through online findings and interviews with child/youth mental health & suicide prevention experts.

3) To produce and release a documentary that improves awareness and educates youth, parents and professionals about suicide prevention and mental illness – so viewers will be more likely to seek help when they or a friend needs help.

4) Provide a number of individuals (from the mental health field and youth/young adults) the chance to review the documentary and provide feedback in order to evaluate the impact it may have on viewers and to ensure that it is not harmful.

5) Look at additional ways to support the documentary as part of a well-rounded approach to suicide prevention.

Evaluation Format

Due to the limited amount of time an informal evaluation process was completed in which members of the review committee and partners were given the chance to review the first draft of the documentary in order to provide feedback as to whether they felt it was effective and not potentially harmful. This committee included approximately 25 people in total, ranging from youth, mental health experts and participants interviewed in the documentary.

3. Results

This section presents a summary of positive feedback and constructive criticism as well as how that feedback was taken into account to develop a final conclusion for the completion of the documentary.

Video Review Feedback

Here are some of the positive direct quotes from the feedback received:
“I feel that the message and content of your video is excellent. From a prevention angle this video does a great job and from a mental health promotion angle the video emphasizes how important it is to speak to someone you trust and seek help.”

“Brilliant James. I am just so impressed with this video. It's simply incredible, and Very Effective. I completely endorse it.”

“Wow! It certainly cannot be too soon that it is released and hopefully viewed by every school in the country.”

“I am not sure how those who have never experienced having someone ill and consequently lost to suicide will view this, but for me, it captured all of the emotion which is something. I cried and could relate to everything that was being said and felt by those on the film, my heart broke for her friends, and her family, and I realized all that was lost, and what those who she left are faced with. I also appreciate so much how you end this film with such a message of hope. It is so hard to maintain that perspective sometimes, and while I cried through the film, I did feel hopeful at the end, and to me this is brilliant. I think what you have done and created is brave, and necessary, and without champions like you we risk so many more young lives, but with champions like you, we will start to see change, and for that I thank you from the bottom of my heart.”

“Amazing! Think you did an excellent job on this. I also think this will help many, many others, not only around better understanding suicide but also reducing stigma and generally bringing attention to this most serious topic.”

Here is a summary of the constructive criticism received by those who reviewed the documentary:

A) Length of video

“It is an extremely valuable and powerful tool/video that contains such a wide variety of useful information that has the potential to connect with and not only educate but impact the lives of many people. Cutting it down would likely cause you to lose some of that.”

“It is too long to show in schools because of the difficulty in maintaining the attention of a large audience. And doesn’t leave enough time for discussion amongst viewers/students after watching the video – within a typical one class period. Therefore shortening the video would allow the video to be used in more group settings and in current presentations.”

“The ideal time for large audiences of youth is roughly 15-25 minutes maximum.”

B) Tone of video
“The tone of the video is very dark and the graphic images of suicide contemplation, suicide attempts, drug use and sexual abuse could be triggering for some.”

C) Strengthened conclusion/link to support

“There needs to be a stronger conclusion to summarize the story and link viewers to resources (consistent with The Jack Project).”

“There should be guidelines for those who want to show this video in classroom/community settings.”

Reflection of Feedback and Conclusion

All of the feedback that was provided by each of the participants was taken into account in order to develop what seemed like the most effective conclusion while completing the production.

A) Length of the video

The content is all very valuable, creating a shortened version would allow it to be shown to larger audiences, reaching more people and also further promoting the full length documentary. So one of the next steps and as part of the marketing plan will be to soon create a shortened version as well.

B) Tone of the video

The tone being used was created directly from my sister’s artwork and lifestyle, in which many other people who are far into depression and thoughts of suicide relate to. So it seemed not only important in connecting with at-risk youth, but also important in showing the harsh reality of suicide and avoiding any glorification of it.

When figuring out if the shouldn’t contain such graphic material it seemed to fit in with the old way of thinking – not talking about or showing the reality of it was clearly not working and likely added to the stigma and avoidance of it all. Putting it all out there in front of the viewers can be very helpful and huge step in the direction we need to be going when discussing suicide/mental illness and these other issues more openly. When someone is suicidal and feeling alone, they may connect more with Chantal’s story and see for the first time they are not alone and others may also be contemplating suicide (by thinking about jumping off of a bridge much like she did – as an example). These images may also be very helpful in bringing out certain issues – such as being sexually abused, having a drug addiction, or re-occurring thoughts of suicide. And if in the right setting (with support) may actually be the key to bringing those thoughts to the forefront to be dealt with in a healthy effective manner.
So in the end it seemed important to keep those images because taking them away would be more likely to lessen the impact of the video.

C) Strengthened Conclusion/link to support

Since the topics covered and the graphic material in the video can potentially be triggering it is very important to include the signs of someone struggling and links to resources. I scripted the following conclusion and included the signs of struggling that were used in “The Jack Project” (The Jack Project is a project that's working with the Canadian Mental Health Commission on a number of initiatives including a Mental Health First Aid Program) as well as provided the information about the Kids Help Line - as suggested by Ian Manion. And also included a link to the project website where resources are also listed as well as additional information (as there are so many out there, there are too many to list them all on the video).

**Scripted conclusion of the Documentary**

Every suicide has its own set of circumstances and can include people from walks of life, which is why it’s an issue that is bound to affect us all at some point.

I’ve came to learn that The Truth About Suicide is that it does not end the pain, but instead transfers that pain over to everyone around having a far more devastating impact then you would ever imagine.

Chantal’s story is a prime example of how destructive it can be when we try dealing with our struggles all on our own, and how quickly our problems can mount up to cause a seemingly unbearable amount of pain until we simply lose hope of being able to overcome it.

Life is full of ups and downs… And we all have difficult times where we need support. Which is why we all need to realize that we are not alone and that it’s ok to talk about our struggles in life.

No problem is too big nor too small to talk about. The sooner you get help, the easier it is to overcome a problem – though it’s never too late to overcome obstacles in life.

Suicide can be prevented, but it’s up to all of us to be able to recognize when we or the people around us are struggling with thoughts of suicide or possibly a mental illness – and be there support one another.

Here are some of the most common signs of suicide and mental illness… (List shown on screen)
If you or someone you know may be struggling - I encourage you to reach out immediately and begin getting the support that you need!

4. Conclusion & Recommendations/Next Steps

Lessons learned from the project

Being able to focus my time and energy over the last couple years on developing and producing this documentary has been the most challenging, yet valuable experience of my life.

Chantal herself wrote about her life being a lesson for others so doing this project allowed us to give purpose to her life and death by creating something that will hopefully impact many other lives. Allowing them to avoid or overcome the painful experiences that Chantal herself initially went through and what her family and friends are continuing to go through.

After years of struggling to be able to discuss what we – as family and friends are going through as individually, the process has been very helpful in opening dialogue among us, about Chantal’s death and suicide in general, allowing us to come together and strengthen our relationships.

Personally it has challenged me to broaden my skill set in video production as I was forced to overcome a number of technical challenges while producing this on a shoestring budget. And in learning more about suicide I have been forced to look at the harsh realities of our society and the growing importance of understanding mental health. This in return, has also caused me to look at my own lifestyle and make drastic changes so that I can not only have a healthier, happier and more fulfilling life but also have the ability to educate, inspire and empower others to do the same. Which I believe is what I am meant to be doing at this point in my life in order to continue this fight against suicide which of course is just a small part of a fully rounded suicide prevention strategy that’s needed to be improved upon.

Impact of this project and on the organization and the appropriate community of practice

I am now looking at staring up a foundation (with a number of other partners) that is dedicated to developing other tools to educate and empower youth not only on suicide prevention, but also mental health. By bringing together and working with community partners and helping connect them with youth.

Next steps

1. Implement Marketing Plan
a. Work with local agencies to host and promote the release of the documentary through a premier showing in communities across eastern Ontario and possibly in other major Canadian Cities.
b. Begin PR campaign with local and national media
c. Submit Video to film festivals across the country and around the world
d. Send DVD to Distributors & Broadcasters
e. Send DVD's to youth mental health & suicide prevention organizations as well as resource libraries who may also act as resellers.
f. Develop and create shortened version to show online and send to existing organizations doing in school presentations which would be utilized in conjunction with other community resources as part of a fully rounded suicide prevention strategy (see section 3 for more details).
g. Create presentations (with partners) geared towards youth, parents and those who work with youth to coincide with the shortened version.
h. Promote and book presentations in schools, communities and conferences while partnered with existing local community resources who will be in attendance to provide support and links to resources.


This website is utilized to promote and sell the documentary on DVD, promote events/presentations and to provide people with more in depth information about the documentary and information/links to resources on suicide prevention.

3. Develop a school/community strategy (draft of guidelines & procedures):

a. Links to supportive services:

Due to the severity of the subjects covered and graphic images in the documentary, it can bring out certain emotions with viewers. Therefore it is extremely important to have counselling present during the showing in order to provide support to those who are immediately affected by it. This does not necessarily have to include someone who is fully certified in suicide prevention, but is able to connect them with a professional who is.

It is also important to provide viewers with information on local resources that are available to them such as brochures and/or business cards – and when possible having a representative from that organization come in to connect directly with viewers can be extremely valuable for both the viewers and the organization looking to promote their services.

b. Debriefing sections:
It is also highly recommended that having a discussion afterwards so that they can openly share their feelings and thoughts towards what they’ve viewed (questions listed below). If at all possible it is ideal to have these discussions in groups that are no larger than 12 people so that students are more likely to benefit from the discussion by being more willing to talk more openly.

Questions for discussion…
1. What stood out most for you when watching the video?
2. What do you think Chantal/her friends could have done differently to prevent her from taking her life?
3. How did not talking about her struggles with her parents and/or other adults affect Chantal’s life?
4. Would you talk to someone if you were struggling with something? Why/why not?
5. Why do you think it’s important to be able to talk about our struggles with others? What can be lost from it? What can be gained from it?
6. What are some healthy and effective ways for you to cope with stress in your life?
7. Who would you turn to if you were struggling with something?
8. What can we do if a friend is struggling with something?
9. What should we do if someone is talking about or attempting to end their life?

4. Create in School presentation and online multimedia resource centre for suicide prevention and mental health.

5. Establish Foundation
   Recruit board members, Develop partnerships with existing organizations.

5. Knowledge Exchange Plan

We are further establishing a website (www.stopsuicidenow.com) with more in depth information and links to resources in suicide prevention and mental health that will be connected through Facebook and allow us to interact with youth on an ongoing basis and promote the activities we participate in as well as new information we gather from other resources.

We plan to continue to work closely with existing youth mental health organizations to further develop resources and share latest findings with partners and the public online and through newsletter subscriptions. As well as participate in annual conferences that take place both locally and internationally.

Knowledge exchange activities accomplished to date
• Participated in a number of presentations at the Royal Ottawa hospital educating parents, youth and service providers about suicide prevention – alongside Ann Marie Nicolson from the ROH.

• Completed multimedia presentation at Nepean High School and Perth community partners conference.

**Further plans regarding knowledge exchange activities**

• Conduct Public Relations campaign to promote the release of the documentary.

• Premiering video at “Together Strong” conference hosted by Parents for Children’s Mental Health and the Ontario Association for Suicide Prevention April 15-16 2011

• Presenting at the Leeds Grenville Child Youth Wellness Centre AGM on June 14th 2011

• Presenting at the Phoenix Centre AGM in Pembroke on June 15th 2011
## 6. Budget prepared by Sponsoring Organization

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