

# **SUBMISSION**

## **Australian Human Rights Commission**

**28 May 2014**

### **Issue:**

**Intentional self harm and suicidal behaviour in children**

### **Summary;**

**My grandson aged (13) attempted suicide by hanging as a direct result from physical abuse inflicted by class mates at a public high school.**

**Family name to be kept confidential.**

My grandson is of a small stature and has recently been physically abused on two occasions by larger class mates at a public high school in .

The police have reluctantly been involved on both occasions.

My grandson attempted suicide following the abuse due to anxiety (a pre-existent disorder) and stress directly related to the first instance. He was hospitalised for three days due to the physical effects of the suicide attempt.

He attends counselling through Headspace regularly but remains fearful to attend school at times. His school work has suffered.

This has had a distressing affect on the entire family as it was totally out of character.

The student involved in the first assault was ultimately expelled after having been suspended on other occasions concerning different students. The expulsion was only achieved after my son sent a strong letter of concern to the Education Department who were able then to act on this.

The second assault happened only two weeks after the suicide attempt which had a severe affect on my grandson. This student had previously been expelled from a private Catholic school for similar behaviour and was actually on suspension from my grandson's school at the time of the assault for attempting to choke another student. The offending student returned to school after being away with his parents only to discover he

was suspended and became violent hitting out at anyone who was near, including my grandson, and then absconding from the school.

My main concern is that schools and teachers do not seem to be able to deal with or act upon the increasing incidents of violence in schools and the police state they are 'sick of being called to schools due to violence'.

The principal at my grandson's school did not even leave her office to investigate what was happening even though the police were present in the school which added distress to my daughter in law and grandson.

Unfortunately due to the increased exposure to hostile school environments, some students choose not to continue facing this challenge by taking drastic actions.

A policy and procedure must be put in place in schools to ensure a duty of care which can be upheld to protect school students at risk of violence perpetrated by other students resulting in suicide attempts.

Within a small community group and in only a short period of time, there has been one fifteen year old girl and one sixteen year old girl successfully suiciding and an eighteen year old boy attempted suicide, all persons known to my grandson but not attending the same school as my grandson, since his unsuccessful attempt. Another sixteen year old girl also known to my grandson has regularly self harmed and attempted suicide on two occasions.

This has also affected him greatly.

All of these cases are from good families who are not disadvantaged in any way.

Of note the contagion affect has been clearly evident on several occasions within this same community.

Young teenagers need to be educated regarding how to manage stress and anxiety in schools. Bullies need to be singled out and counselled regarding why they behave the way they do. I realise the behaviour exhibited is not always the fault of the student and there are times when the entire family may need counselling.

Even though bullying and self harm are well publicised and prevalent, schools still fail to use any affective policies or strategies to deal with the issues.

More funding should be provided for a better quality of school counsellors to be employed in areas of prevalence in violent behaviour, to readily recognise and counsel those young students in school at risk of offending or being a victim of bad behaviour.

The school counsellors could deliver effective education campaigns aimed at reducing self harm behaviour and suicidal behaviour in teenage children.

Thank you.