

## **Australian Human Rights Commission: Intentional Self-Harm and Suicidal Behaviour in Children**

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One of the most significant barriers preventing children and young people from seeking help is the stigma surrounding mental health, intentional self-harm and suicide<sup>1</sup>. In Australia, the average help-seeking rate for young people with mental ill health is approximately 23%<sup>2</sup>. Stigma is a principle factor associated to this low rate of help-seeking behaviour, which limits young people from accessing the right type of support for them, or prevents individuals from seeking support entirely.

Batyr runs peer-to-peer programs for school and university students that involve the stories of young people with a lived experience of mental ill health to engage, educate and empower other young people to actively seek help. Young people who have experienced mental illness are trained on how to present their own story, and then share it with other young people. This model has proven highly successful.

Batyr was started by a young person, is driven by young people and engages young people through our programs. According to Sane Australia, the largest changes in attitude surrounding mental health can take place through 'direct personal contact with people who experience mental illness'.<sup>3</sup> Corrigan (2011) states this contact needs to be 'targeted, local, credible, and continuous'. From this research and our observations, young people who drive programs that encourage other young people to seek help lead to higher engagement levels and increased levels of access to support. Being able to share with their peers, we see the disarming of the stigma surrounding mental health, so that young people can connect with much needed services and support.

Feedback about Batyr's program delivery is achieved by asking students to complete post-program questions developed by Batyr, to assist us in identifying levels of engagement and help seeking rates. The data that Batyr collects is used internally and is not conducted by qualified research bodies, however this method of feedback on Batyr's programs has yielded very positive results. 91.6% of students reported feeling engaged or very engaged throughout presentations. 97% of students reported being more likely or maybe more likely to seek help. 94% of the students also reported they had average through to a very good level of comfort in discussing mental health issues. Furthermore 97.6% of students said they had an average, good or very good ability to seek help. To date, Batyr has reached over 11,000 young people with its programs and has seen 55 young speakers trained. Separate from this anecdotal data, Batyr is looking to partner with a mental health research body to

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<sup>1</sup> SANE Australia 2013. *A life without stigma: A SANE Report*. SANE Australia

<sup>2</sup> Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2011. *Young Australians: their health and wellbeing 2011*. Cat. no. PHE 140 Canberra: AIHW

<sup>3</sup> SANE Australia 2013. *A life without stigma: A SANE Report*. SANE Australia

run an independent study on the effectiveness of our programs in order to achieve evidence based research.

Through the delivery of real stories of lived-experiences with mental health and the different journeys young people go through when seeking help, the power of stigma that surrounds mental health is challenged, enabling healthy conversations and support to begin to take place. This fosters a greater sense of community support and encouragement within the schools and universities that we engage with, which is a direct positive result from the unique model of delivery that Batyr uses.

Please note, Batyr does not deliver direct services to young people, but rather advocates for existing services that exist within the local community.