



## **MEDIA RELEASE**

**14 October 2010**

### **"SOCK IT TO SUICIDE' WEEK A REMINDER OF YOUTH SUICIDE**

Raising awareness of suicide, 'Sock it to Suicide Week', developed by the White Wreath Association, is being held from the 18<sup>th</sup> to the 24<sup>th</sup> of October 2010. As part of 'Sock it to Suicide', Sunshine Coast based children's charity, SunnyKids, is using the week to not only raise awareness but to announce an exciting new youth suicide prevention pilot across South East Queensland.

SunnyKids' national award-winning youth suicide prevention program 'Head High' was established by siblings Samantha, Cassie and Will Harrison, after their father's suicide in 2002 when they discovered all the organisations they turned to for help were adult-focussed.

Head High Co-ordinator and Founder, Samantha Harrison, says suicide can have a very isolating effect on those left behind. With 42% of youth suicides in QLD being completed by young people who have themselves been bereaved by suicide, Sam says it is essential that young people bereaved by suicide receive the support they need to deal with the trauma and grief losing someone to suicide can bring.

"People don't really talk about suicide, so as a young person you feel like you are the only one out there with these feelings and having to deal with the unexplainable loss of your loved one. You wish you could ask your mum or your brother or sister for help but how can you when they don't know how to deal with their own grief either," said Samantha.

'Tim', who lost his big brother to suicide when he was 14 says when someone you love and respect completes suicide it's like they open a door in your life that never used to be there. It's there now and it's open, you often want to look through it...but sometimes, when you're feeling down, you want to do more than just look.

The multi-award winning Head High Program provides support and mentorship for young people so they can engage with others who have gone through similar experiences. The program includes support groups overseen by trained facilitators from the Child and Youth Mental Health Service as well as linking Head High mentors with young people who are at-risk. Head High receives no government support and relies entirely on private funding, public donations and volunteers.

SunnyKids' CEO, Chris Turner, says that with four out of every 10 youth suicides being contagion related or 'imitative', it is critical that young people affected by suicide feel connected and supported by people who understand what they are going through.

"With research suggesting that contagion related suicides are amongst the easiest to prevent, it is feasible that by making the right support available we could see a 40% reduction in youth suicide," said Chris.

Recently, Head High provided a youth delegation to the Federal Parliament Round Table on Youth Suicide Prevention, one of only three organisations from across Australia invited to participate in this Forum, participants contributed to ideas and discussions on how to prevent youth suicide.

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In particular, delegates identified a lack of 'strategic support' at school as an area of concern. In their submission to the Round Table, Head High representatives called on the committee to ensure systematic training for key school personnel in how to respond when there is a suicide in their community.

Since attending the national Round Table, Head High has been developing a training program to support school personnel to respond to suicide in their community, including the development of Suicide Prevention Action Groups. The pilot will be a partnership with CAPS (Community Action for the Prevention of Suicide) and will focus on assisting staff, including teachers and other members of faculty, to learn how to adequately care for students affected by, or at-risk of suicide.

At the forefront of providing solutions in response to issues facing at-risk children and families, SunnyKids has developed integrated support systems and child focussed programs including: **Najidah** - Homelessness Services, **Head High** - Young People Living Beyond Suicide and **SCIPS** - Supporting Children In Primary Schools.

Young people, friends or family of young people bereaved by suicide are encouraged to seek support and can do so by completing a 'contact form' at [www.headhigh.org.au](http://www.headhigh.org.au)

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