

Coping with the death of a loved one is tragic enough for teens but a suicide is an added burden.

Bianca Clare looks at the work of support service Head High

Head High helps with heartbreak

DECEMBER marked the seven-year anniversary of Ken Harrison's death. The father of three took his own life 13 days before Christmas 2002 in the north Queensland town of Bowen.

He left a note, but it offered no explanation as to why he chose to leave this world

behind. His children Samantha, then 18, Cassie, 16, and William, 14, who were living on the Sunshine Coast with their mum, found themselves trapped in a dark head space where they felt powerless and lost.

They struggled to cope not only with their grief and questions of why but also

finding someone who could empathise with their situation.

As teenagers they encountered only adult support groups and didn't feel a connection with counsellors.

Realising they were not alone, Head High was established under the auspices of SunnyKids (formerly Najidah).

The initiative was an Australian first and its aim was to offer care and support to young people who had lost a loved one, friend or work colleague through suicide.

Support group meetings are now held once a month, where young people can get together, share experiences and engage with others who are going or have gone through similar tragedies, or just have some fun.

They're overseen by trained facilitators from Child and Youth Mental Health Services.

SunnyKids chief executive officer Chris Turner said one of the risk factors in suicide was being sub-



SUPPORT: Chris Turner.

jected to the suicide or attempted suicide of someone close to you.

"In the period from 2004 until 2007 figures show 42% of suicides from people aged 10 to 17 years were contagion or imitative suicide," he said.

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SOBERING FACTS

A discussion paper submitted to the Commission for Children and Young People on youth suicide reported:

- Queensland children and young people suicided at a rate well above the national average
- Suicide was one of the most common causes of death of Queensland children and young people
- In 78% of suicides the child or young person had a recent argument and/or relationship breakdown with a significant other
- The gender difference within age categories was greatest for children aged 10 to 14 years, with males accounting for 73% of this age group compared to females.
- In comparison, males accounted for 65% of young people aged 15 to 17 years compared to females.
- 63% of children and young people who suicided had significant behavioural problems
- 60% of children and young people who suicided had previously stated or implied their intent
- 58% of children and young people who suicided had expressed suicidal thoughts and plans, self harmed or previously attempted suicide
- 43% of children and young people who suicided had mental health problems
- 42% of suicides were contagion or imitative suicides
- 28% of children and young people who suicided were Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander, most aged between 10 and 14 years.

