

Hobart 'life saver' wins award for excellence in suicide prevention

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Perth, Australia: A Hobart woman who has devoted over 25 years to preventing suicide in Tasmania and around the world has been recognised with a LiFE Award at the 2014 National Suicide Prevention Conference.

Chief Executive Officer of Suicide Prevention Australia, Ms Sue Murray said Ms Mary Parsissons had dedicated her life to the health and wellbeing of others.

"During a 48 year career in midwifery and child health, Mary nursed women through postnatal depression and other issues associated with having children," Ms Murray said.

"Working in a low socio-economic area with one of the highest rates of cot death in Australia, Mary felt she needed more counselling skills, and 27 years ago, trained as a Lifeline counsellor."

Since first volunteering as a Telephone Crisis Supporter, Ms Parsissons joined the Board of Lifeline Hobart, serving as President as well as a National Board member. She was Australia's representative for Lifeline International for nine years, providing training and advice to help people from other countries establish their own telephone counselling services.

Ms Parsissons is also coordinating a steering group of the World Alliance of Crisis Helplines, which is currently completing a booklet on setting up a crisis line for the World Health Organization's 'Preventing Suicide' series.

Ms Parsissons said she was honoured to receive a LiFE Award that 'represents all the individual people who give their time in many ways to prevent suicide'.

"To be given an honour like this says that we all have a role in suicide prevention," Ms Parsissons said.

"When you stand in a church with a blackboard and the pews full of people who want to volunteer their time on a helpline in a town in Fiji, you know you are working with people who are committed to saving the lives of their countrymen.

"When you are in a training room in Taiwan, up three flights of stairs, in cramped conditions, you meet people there undergoing training to work on a helpline.

"In South Africa, there are people who live in informal housing, attend training sessions to help their community.

"I am going to Sri Lanka soon to work with volunteers there, many of these people have very little money of their own, but they give their time on a helpline to help lower the suicide rate.

"Around the world there are people who will never be recognised for the work they do as they fund raise, attend training sessions and give their time on phones or in person to raise the awareness of suicide, to share the skills they have learnt in suicide intervention training.



“Suicide prevention is everyone’s business,” Ms Parsissons said.

Ms Parsissons was named 2011 Senior Tasmanian of the Year and received the 2013 Tasmanian Suicide Prevention Community Life Award.

In nominating Ms Parsissons for the individual Community Engagement category, Miss Sarah Keating of Relationships Australia Tasmania said Mary was considered a mentor and role model by many.

“Mary has spent the last 27 years dedicated to assisting people during their most vulnerable times,” Miss Keating said.

“I have no doubt that countless people owe their life to Mary and her love of humanity.”

Ms Christine Kettleton, General Manager of Lifeline Tasmania said Mary Parsissons is an inspiration to all who have had the privilege of working with or knowing her.

“Her wisdom and knowledge have been invaluable to many and her compassion is evident in her commitment to preventing suicide in the state of Tasmania and on an international level,” Ms Kettleton said.

The annual LiFE Awards recognise excellence in suicide prevention across eight different categories including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, Business, Communication, Community Engagement, Public Sector, Research, Service Delivery and Leadership.

They were presented as part of the 2014 National Suicide Prevention Conference in Perth. Australia’s leading suicide prevention sector event provides a platform for more than 300 delegates to share in the latest research, policy and practice with a focus on delivering better outcomes for vulnerable communities.

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Please refer to the Mindframe Media guidelines for tips on how to talk safely and constructively about suicide: <http://www.mindframe-media.info> and <http://www.conversationsmatter.com.au>

About Suicide Prevention Australia (SPA):

SPA is the peak body for the suicide prevention sector in Australia. SPA works collaboratively to develop a community that knows how to ask for help and how to give help. As the lead agency of the National Suicide Prevention Coalition, we build and facilitate partnerships to reduce the stigma around mental illness and suicide, and to assist the healing for people with lived experience of suicide attempts and suicide.