

Suicide Safer Schools – PAPYRUS and Thrive LDN partnership

Executive Summary

“Before attending the [ASIST] course I had no idea of how I would help someone wanting to end their life. This training really supported me with knowing how to respond, support and signpost. I now know how I can explore the things in life that act as a buffer. For example, a person's love for dogs, family, [a] hobby. I also know how to come up with a suicide plan that a person can use to support them each day at a time. I am a lot more confident in this area and would recommend this training to everyone.”

Phase 3 training attendee

In 2019, PAPYRUS Prevention of Young Suicide was commissioned by Thrive LDN to deliver a series of suicide awareness and suicide prevention training sessions, aimed at equipping schools and young people to become suicide safer across London.

The case for prevention earlier in life is clear: on average, three children in every school class in London have poor mental health; and half of all lifelong mental health problems emerge before the age of 14.

The training has been a means of tackling the disproportionate mental health impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on younger age groups, by enabling those working in schools to spot and address warning signs that a young person might be thinking of suicide.

As a result of the programme, professionals working in education and with young people across all 32 London boroughs have been upskilled in suicide prevention. 1,147 people in total have been trained across three types of workshops: 62 x 90-minute sessions (phase 1), 8 x half-day sessions (phase 2), and 4 x the accredited ASIST two-day courses (phase 3).

Training structure

Phase 1 of the project aimed to improve participants' awareness of the importance of suicide prevention and provide a safe space for professionals to discuss stigma-busting topics and best practice in signposting to appropriate support. We were pleased that a wide range of professionals accessed the training, including school care takers, administrative support staff and play leaders. This will help create suicide safer schools, where a variety of adults are suicide aware and able to spot the signs when someone is struggling.

In phase 2, professionals working directly with children and young people were upskilled in how to approach conversations about suicide and in using a safety plan. The sessions enabled professionals to come together to learn life-saving skills and share concerns they were experiencing in their roles. These actions have equipped

staff to have honest and practical conversations with a young person that can help turn a situation of potential danger into one of safety.

Phase 3 delivery of the ASIST course gave attendees a model to shape the interventions they were having with students and young people, enabling them to become qualified suicide first aiders. Consequently, young students in London will now have many more named and trusted staff members who can help if they are having thoughts of suicide, as well as improved access to resources like HOPELINEUK to help manage their distress.

Some of the key outcomes of the training phases included:

- 92% of phase 1 respondents stated they felt more able to spot the signs of suicide in the months after the training
- 94% of phase 2 respondents either 'agreed' or 'strongly agreed' they had a better understanding of safety planning since attending the training; 25% of attendees had completed a safety plan with a young person since the session
- 74% of phase respondents had subsequently applied the skills learned in the workshop; with 65% having completed an average of 1-5 suicide first aid interventions.

Learning

This project has provided us with a few challenges; particularly with the outbreak of COVID-19 necessitating a move to online training delivery, at a time when schools and young people were adapting to new learning practices. When we developed our online training offer, the safety of participants and the quality of the sessions was paramount which meant the pace of development was slower than anticipated. The investment of time and resource did prove beneficial, as large numbers of attendees accessed the training virtually.

However, non-attendance became a challenge due to school staff experiencing pressured capacity and 'zoom fatigue'. Similarly, in face-to-face delivery of phase 3, a significant number of attendees were prevented from attending due to self-isolation and other COVID-19 related issues. Going forward, additional promotion of the training via pre-session emails and materials will be useful to ensure attendance. Further to this, participants can also be asked to deputise a colleague in the event they cannot attend to sustain participation.

Another challenge was the low completion of feedback forms for the online sessions. While this was anticipated with online training delivery, it may impact the reliability of our quantitative findings. By allowing additional time during the session for participants to complete the survey and circulating reminder emails following sessions with a low completion rate, we hope to strengthen participant insights in future training delivery.

Overall, we are incredibly pleased with what has been achieved through the Suicide Safer Schools programme. Many more staff now feel supported in the work they may have already been doing, without the necessary training required. The project has facilitated a safe space for staff to share experiences, learn skills, and create hope in their communities and institutions.

Following on from the success of the Suicide Safer Schools programme we will be launching our next partnership with Thrive LDN, working with Higher and Further education institutions to create suicide safer Universities and Colleges across London. We will be offering a number of 22 x SP-EAK sessions; 8 x hour long follow up sessions, 3 x ASIST courses as well as a year on refresher session.

For more information please email: london@papyrus-uk.org

To sign up: [THRIVE LDN HE/FE - Papyrus UK | Suicide Prevention Charity \(papyrus-uk.org\)](https://papyrus-uk.org/thrive-ldn-he-fe-suicide-prevention-charity)

Testimonials

Phase 1:

"The training I attended was the best I have been to on the subject of suicide. I learnt more in that 90 minutes than I ever have! I have recommended so many people to attend future training, and forwarded details of PAPYRUS to many of my clients, even those not in the age group you are aiming at. I can't praise you enough!"

Phase 2:

"The training was so informative and helpful. I have had quite a few students divulge suicidal thoughts to me and my colleagues I now feel a lot more confident about supporting young people with suicidal thoughts now"

Phase 3:

"I have been able to use the learning from ASIST many times. I found that I can use the model to shape my conversations with the students that I work with. The resources have been really helpful in reminding me of the model. I really recommend this training to anyone - it has been such a big help in the work that i do and the conversations and support that i have been giving"