



LivingWorks

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Dear Scott,

I am pleased to write a letter of support for the potential I see in the Collateral Damage Project to become a mobilizing catalyst in Canadian suicide prevention that never seems to get sustained traction in our country. Why I say this takes me back to 1995 when I met a lone survivor advocate at an American suicide prevention conference. He had lost his young physician daughter to suicide almost 10 years earlier. At his table he had nothing but a banner (SPAN – Suicide Prevention Advocacy Network) and a draft copy of the UN Guidelines for national suicide prevention strategies developed by Canadian leaders and international colleagues 2 years earlier. His country did not have a national strategy and his dream was to mobilize survivors across the country to help achieve what professionals, academics and public partners had been trying to achieve (without success) for close to thirty years. I was witness to the realization of his dream six short years later when the U.S. launched its first collaboratively developed national suicide prevention strategy in 2001. Ten years later they are engaged in a major update of their strategy and I have the honor of being an appointed member of their revision task force.

When I returned from the conference in 1995, I (and others) had hopes that a similar advocate with the same determined commitment would appear. Many have stepped forward and worked tirelessly to move the suicide prevention agenda forward in our country but we've never been able to capture the full collaboration of all who need to work together in both the public and private sectors. When I was first introduced to you and the Collateral Damage Project almost two years ago I was buoyed by a sense that you were someone who had grasped the possibility that the faces and stories of survivors might be the catalyst to help spark a national movement of sustained suicide prevention efforts. I didn't realize until recently that the beginnings of your journey from the time you lost your dad to suicide is almost identical to the start of my work with others to pioneer the development of standardized gatekeeper training programs. When I started as a citizen advisory member to help implement Alberta's suicide prevention strategy in 1981, it was six years before the release of Canada's acclaimed national Task Force Report on suicide, almost 15 years before it would be updated and more than 10 years before the United Nations invited Canadian leaders to host and organize a meeting of international colleagues to draft the UN Guideline for national suicide prevention strategies. The United States and other countries have used the Guideline to launch their collaborative efforts to tackle suicide as a serious community health problem. Canada has come close to joining these efforts but the will to push forward has never seriously taken hold. The recent parliamentary motion and (almost) all party support is another encouraging sign but the disappointment of past hopeful signs tells me not to hold my breath. However, this and other initiatives across the country suggests that we are close to a significant watershed moment and perhaps the synergies of recent public and private endeavors will see the coming together of a truly national effort to make suicide prevention an integral part of safety in the home, workplace and communities throughout the country.

Starting an initiative is relatively easy. Sustaining it can be a major challenge. The will to stay committed is difficult without funding and social support but recent results from Scotland's national evaluation of their strategy showed that the most successful activity to be

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mainstreamed in suicide prevention is training. They found training to be a sustainable resource that benefits the wider community by building capacity and strengthening existing skills and knowledge. The creation of a proactive dialogue objective in your project is significant and innovative. To take the interim (pilot) project in Nova Scotia to the next level in the form of an expanded field trial in another province or extended across the country is a critical next step to help suicide prevention attain and continue to be a priority focus in communities throughout our great land. With the help of private funding support to take the merits of your project forward with a sound business plan, suicide prevention can be mainstreamed. As I noted at a public presentation in Saskatoon a week ago, the way forward rests on three key pillars: saving lives one intervention at a time, continuity of (quality) care and continued commitments from all sectors of the community.

It goes without saying that I strongly support the merits of your project to stimulate proactive dialogues, lessen the stigma surrounding suicide and aid the sustainability of training resources. I want to close my letter with an indication of how the impact of your exhibit has spread to influence and support the work of our employees who are as dedicated to the cause of suicide prevention as those who are actively engaged in suicide prevention training workshops. As you know I purchased one of the photos and stories in your Nova Scotia exhibit not only because the young woman was one of our trainers but as much because of the power of her story. I have shared this with you but I think if something like this could happen in board rooms and community meetings across the country it will be soon apparent as to why you put it so strongly and poignantly, "Not Talking About it Isn't Working

"Thanks Scott . . . Yes, the print arrived just in time for the beginning of an Orientation Week for new leadership employees . . . It also marked the occasion of inaugurating our recent space expansion and new board/meeting room. We had our staff gather just before noon on the 18th for a special dedication with the unveiling and mounting of the print in a special place of honor in the boardroom. I spoke briefly about your project and more about Veronica, her experience and dedication as an ASIST and safeTALK trainer. The beautiful photo and story is a visible and daily reminder to all of us of why we do what we do. It was a very moving few minutes for all. I don't think there was a dry eye in the gathering. We will be letting Veronica know of the place of honor that her photo and story has on our boardroom wall and in the hearts of all of us at LivingWorks.

It was a proud moment for me to share your work and dedication with everyone in our Calgary office. We will tell the story to the rest of our trainer network so they too can share the meaning of what Veronica's story stands for in all our daily efforts to create suicide-safer communities in our home communities and elsewhere."

Yours truly,

Richard Ramsay
President

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