



Suicide or Survive

Eden Programme

May 2019



Suicide or Survive

Suicide or Survive was set up in 2003. The idea for the organisation was borne through the personal experience of Caroline McGuigan who had attempted suicide and survived. As a result of her own experience she became very aware of the gaps in the healthcare system. From its inception in 2003 the organisation began to attract people specifically interested in suicide and its prevention, who were passionate about being a part of change in relation to mental health. SOS became a registered charity in 2005 and has defined its mission as: “to challenge the stigma attached to mental illness and provide a range of educational and therapeutic programmes that increase understanding of suicide and play an active role in its prevention in Ireland” (Suicide or Survive 2012).

The organisation is premised on the belief that there are major gaps in existing services for those who have attempted or contemplated suicide. One of the key drivers behind the work of SOS is the desire to harness individuals’ own strengths and provide them with the tools to improve their own mental wellness. Underlying SOS’s vision is the idea that “behind every statistic on suicide and self-harm, there is a person” (Suicide or Survive 2012). For this reason, their vision is characterised by four key principles: genuineness, understanding, respect and acceptance (Suicide or Survive 2012).

The aim of the organisation is to fill the gaps in existing services for those who have attempted or contemplated suicide. The gaps that have been identified to date through personal experience and feedback from people who have attempted or contemplated suicide, and through available research literature include a lack of one-to-one psychotherapeutic interventions that can be easily accessed and that are not prohibitively costly to the individual and a safe space to explore experiences and seek support.

The Eden Programme

“It was kind of healing because you are so busy then trying to figure things out and trying not to be how you are when you are just given permission like, ok this is how I am. I am allowed to be like this and just grieve and just cry and just go through the emotions. Because they said ‘we can’t go through it for you but we will go through it with you’. and I really felt that, I felt I am not on my own, I have someone beside me when things are really, really bad they are there giving you a little nudge but without telling you what to do.” (Eden Programme Participant)

The Eden Programme aimed to fill the second gap outlined above. It was first run as a pilot programme in 2007 with the aim of providing people who have attempted or contemplated suicide with an opportunity to explore their own experiences, develop their personal skills, and source avenues of support and assistance. The programme aims to improve mental health service provision with the ultimate aim of suicide prevention in line with Action area 13 of the *Reach Out* strategy.

The Eden Programme is a 24 week closed group programme which is educational in nature with a therapeutic element. It runs for 3 hours one day per week. The programme aims to provide people who have attempted or contemplated suicide with an opportunity to explore their own experiences, develop their personal skills, and source avenues of support and assistance. In keeping with the national mental health policy, *A Vision for Change* (Department of Health and Children 2006), the Eden programme is founded on a recovery approach which assumes that *‘people can and do recover from mental health difficulties and go on to live lives of their own choosing’* (SOS 2013).

The programme forms one part of an individuals’ support system and encourages those who attend to work on building natural supports in their own communities. The programme focuses on empowering participants to make appropriate choices in terms of their day to day lives and more particularly in times of emotional crisis, to reduce the potential of death by suicide, to increase their awareness of suicide and



suicide prevention while also addressing the stigma that exists around mental health, and to highlight the fact that suicide is a permanent solution to a temporary problem.

Testimonials from Eden Programme participants:

'I have been through some dark places this past year but I have been given support to help me to fight for my life, my right to live'

'I now know that for me to have a life I need to open my mouth and tell people what's wrong'

'A sense of acceptance as I am right here and right now is probably one of the most important experiences of being part of the Eden Programme'

'I experienced hope for the future, there is one'

'For me since the programme stopped I haven't wanted to kill myself at all and I haven't self-harmed, which I have been doing since I was ten or nine so that's big...Still thoughts come into my head if I'm having a bad time because I live in chronic pain every day so it's difficult when you have got depression and you live in chronic pain'

Programme elements include:

- Induction
- Therapeutic health education
- Life skills
- Self-awareness
- Introduction to WRAP

The objectives of these modules are:

- To familiarise participants with the aims, objectives, structure and content of the programme, and to develop their capacity to work within a group setting and to formulate personal plans.
- To provide participants with an understanding of a variety of mental health states and the knowledge and contacts they require to select the assistance most appropriate to them in staying mentally healthy.
- To provide participants with the opportunity to develop a range of personal skills to help them to manage and maintain their own wellness.
- To enable participants to become more aware of their thoughts, feelings, and reactions and those of others and how each can impact on the other
- To assist participants in developing a range of natural supports in their own community
- To introduce participants to WRAP (Wellness Recovery Action Planning) and provide them with an opportunity to start developing their own WRAP

The methodologies used are primarily based on experiential learning and group discussion and the approach is participant centred. The programme is run in an atmosphere of genuineness and respect and a non-judgemental approach is adopted at all times. Participants are supported in their personal movement through the programme. This support aims to encourage them to capture and affirm positive experiences and to empower them to use these experiences to make life changes.

The programme is run by a Co-ordinator and a facilitator both of whom have a background in Psychology and/ or Psychotherapy and a wealth of experience in group facilitation and in working with people with mental health difficulties. Careful attention has been given to ensuring that the programme is, at least in part, facilitated by individuals with lived experience of mental health difficulties and/ or suicide and evaluations have consistently found this to be a significantly beneficial element for participants. A range of professionals and individuals with expertise in specific programme areas are also invited to give presentations to participants.

The Co-ordinator and Facilitator attend for regular supervision sessions external to S.O.S. to ensure that they are operating in line with best practice and to provide them with the opportunity to work through any issues that arise both between themselves and in their work with participants.

The Eden Programme has been continuously evaluated with four external evaluations and an internal continuous improvement process that forms part of every programme. The most recent external evaluation carried out by DCU concluded *‘It is also evident that Eden has benefited many who have completed the programme. Some have described it as a transformative life experience while others see it as providing them with the tools to live with life challenges and distresses in a more constructive and rewarding manner. In essence Eden “speaks for itself” at this point in time. The qualitative data indicates that the Eden programme is a useful, relevant and acceptable intervention for people who have attempted or contemplated suicide.’* (2014). Sixteen Eden Programmes have been run by S.O.S. to date based on its success in achieving its aims and meeting the needs of participants. The programme currently runs in 3 locations in Ireland, Dublin, Galway, Castlebar and Roscommon. The programmes in Galway, Castlebar and Roscommon are run in partnership with the National Counselling Service (NCS) which is part of the HSE.

Anyone interested in participating in the Dublin programme should make contact with the programme Co-ordinator Brian Kelly by email at eden@suicideorsurvive.ie or by calling our Lo Call number 1890 577577, for the Galway, Castlebar and Roscommon programmes you can contact Mary Kilcommins Greene on 087 4196463 or by email at Mary.KilcomminsGreene@hse.ie