



香港城市精神健康聯盟

**City Mental Health
Alliance** HK

CMHA HK STORYTELLING SERIES Q&A



ANN PEARCE, YOUTH MENTAL HEALTH ADVOCATE

Ann Pearce lost her 15-year-old son Jamie to suicide in February 2017. In memory of Jamie she set up *The Weez Project*, a community group working to increase awareness of youth mental health issues and campaigning to prevent youth suicide. Ann candidly shares her story [‘Losing a child to suicide’](#) on *The Weez Project* website.

CMHA HK Storytelling Series

Creating Mentally Healthy Workplaces through the sharing of personal stories

The aim of the CMHA HK Storytelling Series is to educate, inspire and break down the stigma around mental health in the workplace.

Welcome, Ann. Firstly, thank you for sharing your personal experience with the CMHA HK community.

Suicide is the leading cause of unnatural death for 15-24 year olds in Hong Kong*. From your experience since your son’s death, what can be done to bring about change to this terrible statistic?

We all have a part to play in preventing suicide. It requires a whole community approach; public health, government, local services, NGOs, youth groups and schools, as well as each of us. As individuals, we need to be open to talk about suicide and to become informed about mental health and suicide. This will help break down the stigma around these topics. With greater knowledge and understanding, conversations can take place and young people can feel better able to reach out to seek help. This way, the people around them would have the confidence to be

able to support them. Granting equal status to mental and physical health would also help to give mental health the attention it deserves.

One of the aims of The Weez Project is to educate parents and the wider community so that they better understand youth mental health issues. How can education in the workplace support this?

The workplace is a good channel to communicate and educate people about youth mental health issues. If the workplace offers mental health education/training, the scope can be extended beyond colleagues and into the home. The learning foundations and techniques are similar. If the organisation has a continuing education programme, they can include family/youth mental health training as a learning option. Employers can make resources easily available to staff.

*Centre for Suicide Research and Prevention

When young people join an employer, their induction should include dealing with stress and managing their personal wellbeing and mental health. Employers should acknowledge the new stresses of the workplace and advise on how the employer can help.

Your own professional background is in finance and education. Knowing what you know now, what, in your opinion, could employers be doing for employees who may be affected (directly or indirectly) by youth suicide?

Employers should make professional counselling services available. They should communicate sensitively with the employee, allowing them to steer the conversations as they wish, and to decide how much they would like to share and the frequency of these kinds of conversations. They should take care not to be intrusive or push them too fast, and avoid linking any conversation with other workplace issues.

Employers should show actively that they care and work sympathetically with the employee.

What does the 2021 World Suicide Prevention Day theme 'Creating Hope Through Action' mean to you?

It's an endorsement that suicide can be prevented and that we can do so by people being prepared to get involved and learn more, pushing their personal boundaries to reject stigma. To echo *The Weez Project* campaign line "Talk, Listen and Care about Youth Suicide", there are plenty of practical ways in which we can each make a difference by directly supporting and looking out for those around us.

How can employers and employees help? How can colleagues support those who are dealing with the suicide death of a loved one?

Allow the employee time and space to deal with the trauma. Check in regularly to see if they are okay and be guided by them on

how much they would like to share and the frequency of these kinds of conversations. Take care not to be intrusive or to push them too fast, and avoid linking any conversation on this topic with other workplace issues.

Is there anything else you would like to add? Do you have any advice for those living with young people as to how they can start conversations to discuss the potential risk openly?

Be open, honest and ensure you listen carefully, without judgement. Conversations can begin by following up on an observation. For example, "I notice you've been looking sad or not your usual self recently. Are you okay?" You can also start a conversation by talking about your own emotions, showing the young person there is no shame in doing so and providing reassurance that you are there for them and you love them.

We would like to thank our storytelling participants for sharing their personal stories with the CMHA HK community. We would also like to thank **Odile Thiang, Anti-Stigma Project Manager at Mind HK** for her review and input into this document.

For further information on Suicide Prevention in Hong Kong, please visit:

- [Centre for Suicide Research and Prevention](#)
- [Suicide Prevention Services](#)
- [Samaritans Hong Kong](#)
- [Mind HK](#)

Youth Mental Health (Hong Kong) resources and initiatives:

- [The Weez Project](#)
- [Cool Minds](#)
- [KELY Support Group](#)
- [#HearforYou](#) (Facebook HK campaign supporting local non-profit organisations)
- [#HOWRU Virtual Walkathon 2021](#) (Co-organised by Samaritans Hong Kong)



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City Mental Health Alliance HK

The City Mental Health Alliance Hong Kong is a collaborative venture founded by city businesses. Championed by senior leaders, the Alliance is business led and expert guided and aims to create a culture of good mental health for workers in Hong Kong, share best practice and increase mental health understanding.

CONTACT

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