LIMERICK’S FIRST MULTI-AGENCY SUICIDE PREVENTION TRAINING

A suicide prevention training workshop held in Limerick Fire Station was the first combined safeTALK (Suicide Alertness for Everyone) event to enable members of the frontline emergency services in the city to support people in crisis, including those feeling suicidal. Report by Grace Heneghan.

Up to 24 members of Limerick Fire & Rescue Service, An Garda Síochána, the HSE National Ambulance Service and the Munster Regional Control Centre (MRCC) attended a half-day workshop on suicide prevention training.

The ‘safeTALK’ event at Limerick Fire Station was hosted by the HSE Mid-West as part of an awareness campaign to coincide with World Suicide Prevention Day on 10 September.

Paul Knapp, a firefighter with Limerick Fire and Rescue Service, said this four-hour training session provided participants with the tools and a common language to reach out to a person who is vulnerable, disconnected and potentially at risk of suicide.

He said that the mission of ‘safeTALK’ was two-fold; firstly, to train emergency services personnel and secondly to recognise and raise awareness of mental health through World Suicide Prevention Day.

“What better way to get some PR and publicity than with the frontline emergency services staff. There was a good synergy; it raised awareness of the issue and it also meant that eight members from An Garda Síochána, Fire & Fire Control Centres, and the HSE Ambulance Service teamed up at Limerick Fire Station for the course.”

This was the first combined event for city and county council personnel following the amalgamation of Limerick’s councils in June.

RAISING AWARENESS

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PROGRAMME TO ASIST

ASIST (Applied Suicide Intervention Skills Training) is the next step in training offered by the HSE’s National Office for Suicide Prevention. This is two-day interactive workshop in suicide first-aid, and is suitable for all those at the frontline of emergency care, such as health workers, teachers, community workers, Gardaí, youth workers, volunteers, people responding to family, friends and co-workers.

Knapp, who had himself completed the two-day ASIST programme, at the start of the year, was invited by Louise Morris, HSE...
FEEDBACK FROM FRONTLINE EMERGENCY SERVICES PERSONNEL

*Garda Niamh Briggs,*
Limerick’s Roxboro Garda Station, who is also an Irish Women’s Rugby International, who had just recently returned from the Rugby World Cup in France:

“I found this course extremely beneficial and it gives great insight into being able to help people in need. It gives you the structures to follow in order to help people. Mental health is a massive buzz word at the moment, and anything that we can do to make things better and not to make suicide as prevalent as it is at the moment will be massive. So I do think this course is very beneficial.”

*James Hayes*, Senior Emergency Control Operator with Munster Regional Communications Centre (MRCC) in Limerick Fire Station:

“It’s important that as emergency services deal with suicide prevention on a daily basis that we play our part in raising awareness of this issue. It’s good in the sense that it gives us a structure and a system of how to deal with, talk and listen to people who have mental health and suicide issues. That’s the important part I took from this course.”

*Pat Mooney*, Senior Manager with the HSE Mid-Western Ambulance Division:

“This course was very beneficial and it gave a great insight into awareness and how to present and deal with patients from a traumatic point of view. It gives an overview of the emotional aspects and how to deal with individuals in their follow-up and care after a traumatic incident. Overall it was very informative and very beneficial and I think we will be looking to introduce it on our information leaflets going forward.”

For more information on safeTALK and ASIST visit [www.nosp.ie](http://www.nosp.ie)
best friends and you share your thoughts on mental health and your attitudes towards suicide. But since it’s a taboo subject that no one will talk about, because it’s a stigma in itself and it continues to be so.”

MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES
Families do not want the stigma of a death by suicide attached to the family, and so he said the fire service in Limerick receive quite a number of calls from family members when it goes to an inquest. “They don’t want that stigma, which is wrong in itself. The Gardaí, the fire and ambulance services are all about promoting physical health but when it comes to mental health and fitness this is a totally different story. Who wants to admit that they have mental health issues?”

The feedback from all participants was that it was hugely beneficial and gave them a co-ordinated approach when dealing with people with mental health issues. “So, it’s certainly time to break down the taboo associated with suicide.”

Knapp They all attested to having learned invaluable lessons from the safeTALK session, with many enquiries in relation to the follow-on ASIST training programme. Due to the dynamics of the course between the frontline services, all members are split into various groups so they’re not with their work colleagues all the time on the course. “This enables people to speak more freely in workshops – essentially it’s about getting a group of people who come from different working environments to together to share their own experiences.

“It will take time to change people’s mind-sets. The feedback from some students would suggest that it’s brave to talk about suicide and to be able to talk about such issues. It’s going to take time with small steps and it is everyone’s responsibility.

“Within the realms of the Gardaí, fire and ambulance services we all have preventative measures within our own jobs, but this is a co-ordinated measure to look after people’s mental health because. Due to the nature of our jobs we come across people who suffer from these particular issues.”