



Making of... Lonely Together

Aims:

- To encourage discussion around topic of suicide.
- Highlight potential factors that can make someone have suicidal thoughts.
- Challenge perceptions of suicide.
- Listen to people.
- Discussing where Jamie can go to for support.



The Research

The play was originally devised in October 2018. At the time it was devised, there was a considerable amount of coverage in the media around mental health, and in particular suicide. As of the research then, it was recorded that there were 590 suicides for people aged under 24, with numbers increasing in older groups (Simms & Sowcroft, 2018, p. 35). Further research suggested that there were few shows that tackled the theme of suicide, with Enda Walsh's *Chatroom* being the most prominent piece to raise the issue.

Thinking about the current affairs of the time, an artist had created 84 statues which raised awareness that 84 men suicided a week. This was a significant project which created the first Minister for Suicide Prevention on 12th October, 2018 (CALM, 2018). There was also greater emphasis from the Health Minister at the time for the arts to play a greater role in addressing mental health issues. Reported in *The Stage* "He [Matthew Hancock] said accessing the arts was 'scientifically proven' to improve mental and physical health, making people 'happier and healthier'" (Snow, 2018).

Research began into various charities' policies and resources on how to talk about suicide with young people. Certainly, the work of



suicide prevention charity, PAPYRUS, aligned itself closest to the aims of this project. They take a direct route of talking about suicide. They strongly support the viewpoint that by “talking openly about suicide[and it] has been proven to help young people reach out for support” (PAPYRUS, 2018), with wider reading supporting this statement. In one article it simply states that “Asking and talking about suicide may bring relief to those who suffer in silence and are in need of a non-judgemental environment to talk about their feelings” (Zortea, 2016).



Zortea strongly denies the idea of the werther effect, whereby suicide in the media is a significant factor in leading to a copycat suicide. With this research strengthening the foundation of the piece, the other prevalent element in suicide prevention is the idea of simply listening.

Advice suggests “It can be really challenging to understand why a young person is feeling suicidal but their feelings are valid, and unfortunately many young people do end their lives by suicide, so it’s really important to listen” (PAPYRUS, 2018). Therefore, it was hugely important for the piece to echo the setup of simply listening. This then influenced the simple setup of the piece of monologues expressing the protagonists’ own struggles whilst other characters either share what they know and are challenged by audiences on what they do not know.



The Play

So why does this play offer a chance for the issue to be discussed safely? As well as being reinforced by the above research, applying Geese Theatre's one step removed approach enables participants to discuss the character's situation from the same page; no one in this room has prior knowledge about Jamie Wilson's situation. By "working at one-step removed [it] is safer than working at a personal level of work because the distance allows participants to acknowledge their connections to the material at a pace they can regulate themselves" (Baim et al, 2002, p. 30), the young people can interpret it in their own ways, and more importantly, can share as much or as little as that as they wish to. We do not pressure our participants into discussion, just simply allow the opportunity.



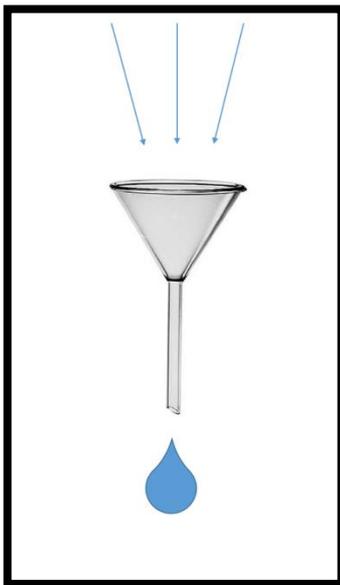
However, that's not to say that the participants' statements are simply right or their questions are too good. Characters and the facilitator have the full right to challenge back. From the facilitator's perspective, he/she must perform "one of the hardest balancing acts...between being challenging and supportive" (Johnston, 2005, p. 72) in order to ensure a question or query from the audience is explored to its fullest.

In April 2018, news arrived that 28 year old Tim Bergling had suicided in Muscat, Oman. He was known in the public eye as the DJ, Avicii. In the aftermath of his death, there were numerous news articles that started to highlight that within the upbeat electric dance music he created were lyrics that may suggest his pain and turmoil, moreso in the posthumous release of 'TIM' this year. As observed by staff at EDM.com, "Lyrics of songs he allegedly had yet to release... [painted] a bleak picture of the Swedish superstar DJ/producer's frame of mind before his death" and whilst they recognise his songs do "inspire hope, different ones portray darker themes. Other lines of the song (Hold the



Line) read, ‘Starting to choke on / Your heart in your throat and / It feels just like / You can’t remember how to fight.’” (EDM, 2018). With this in mind, some of the lines have been used in this play to highlight that no matter how famous a person is, they too can be affected like everyone else. The use of his lyrics in the play acts as a way for Jamie to really share how she feels as the way he tried to in his music. This is also why our poster design for the play includes the Avicii logo respect to him and his lyrics being incorporated. Further reading into Bergling’s life shows how the build up of pressures of touring and extreme alcohol intake were factors in his suicide. Pressures do not have to be that extreme for someone. Research by the University of Manchester's National Confidential Inquiry into Suicide and Homicide by People with Mental Illness between 2014-2015 found, of the 130 people aged under 20 who had suicided, “29% were facing exams or exam results” and “28% had been bereaved” (Buchanan, 2016). These are two factors explored in the play.

The play takes place in a binary form, alternating between scene and discussions. This enables the facilitator to constantly check in with participants, ensuring they feel safe and comfortable, especially with a subject such as this one. What it also enables is to carry out the fixed and free polarity, as suggested by Chris Johnston. Easiest way to think about it is like a funnel.



The funnel is representative of the rules/boundaries introduced to narrow and as a result, a new found energy is formed to dig deeper under the initial surface of the question. In the first discussion, the participants can engage with question how they wish too. The second discussion section aims to be more precise and narrow their focus onto particular aspects of the protagonist’s life. This is our method to “... facilitate the generation of serious and fruitful discussion” (Boal, 2002, p242).



Why create this play?

We understand that mental health is becoming a stronger focus in schools and the workplace and we believe that theatre can be a great tool for opening discussion on topics that people feel discouraged from or do not want to talk about. By allowing participants to reflect their own thoughts upon a fictional character, they can actively discuss thoughts about this topic that they may have kept quiet.



In the latest statistics from the Office for National Statistics published on 3rd September 2019, it was recorded that there were increases in the suicides for 10-24 year olds for both males and females. It was recorded for males that “following a period of recent stability in the suicide rate for this group, in 2018 their suicide rate increased to 9.0 deaths per 100,000 males (542 deaths), up 25% from 7.2 deaths per 100,000 males in 2017 (431 deaths)” (Manders & Kauer, 2019). Meanwhile, “since 2012 the rate has increased by 83% from 1.8 deaths per 100,000 females (106 deaths) to 3.3 in 2018 (188 deaths)” (Manders & Kauer, 2019) in the same age category. Although the 10-24 category is lowest in both genders, education about suicide causes and support could reduce suicide rates in this age group and ultimately, lower the older age group rates.

We recognise the importance to open up discussion on topics like suicide. However, we do not want to simply let young people start to think about suicide in the wrong way. Below, you will see a copy of the post-show workshop. Reinforcement is crucial when discussing the real-world topics, we have to ensure that by “maintaining structures [in this case the play and workshop as one package] enables the group to dive and safely return” (Johnston, 2005, p. 28). Again, the workshop reflects all discussions onto Jamie and her life, but are encouraging participants to actively discuss. The facilitator’s role in this workshop is to refer all points back to the play. The workshop then concludes with a discussion around people we can talk to. Not only are we promoting the various charities who can help, but also those who are reachable everyday i.e. Parents, teachers, friends and pets.



Post-show workshop plan and script notes

[Set room up so that they're in pairs sitting opposite and all have paper and pens.]

Welcome back everyone. So if you'd like to take a seat. So, in your pairs, first thing I want you to do is think about 10 things that can negatively affect someone. It can be things mentioned in the play. You have 1 minute and then I'll select 10 things between you all that could affect someone.

[Share negatives]

Brilliant. Now, underneath, think about 10 things that can help you feel positive. These could be things like hobbies or events that make you feel positive.

[Share positives]

Awesome. When we talk about healthy wellbeing, we're referring to the balance in our lives. It does not necessarily mean feeling happy all the time. Ultimately, these negatives are outweighed by the things that make us happy. The "positives" is what interrupts those negatives. However at the same time, we do not want those positives to glaze over the "negatives".

Can anyone think of a moment within the play where a positive interrupted the negative?

[Callie phone call]

And as good as it is to have an interruption to these negative thoughts, at some point Jamie has to go through the darkness. We saw this at the end of the play. And there was something she intended on doing. It was the final thing she said. What was it?

[Talk to someone]

That's it. Before I go on to discuss who Jamie could talk to, what examples do you guys know? Just rip a piece of paper off, and by yourselves, just write down one person you could talk to?

Once you're done, we'll just do the same as before and just share your ideas. If you've got the same one great, you're all thinking on the same line.

[Collect those answers]

So, during the play, Jamie had the outlets through family and friends whom she could have spoken to, about the pressures and how they made her feel. Of course, for Jamie, now she may need to reach out further. She could go to her local GP and talk through her options with them. Depending on the severity and immediacy of Jamie's situation, she could be referred to the crisis team who would see to her immediately. If not, then she could become part of groups of other people who also have strong suicidal ideation to share their problems and talk through them.

If she doesn't want to do that, then she may feel more obliged to speak to someone on a one-to-one basis. She could seek counselling, who will work with her, in a



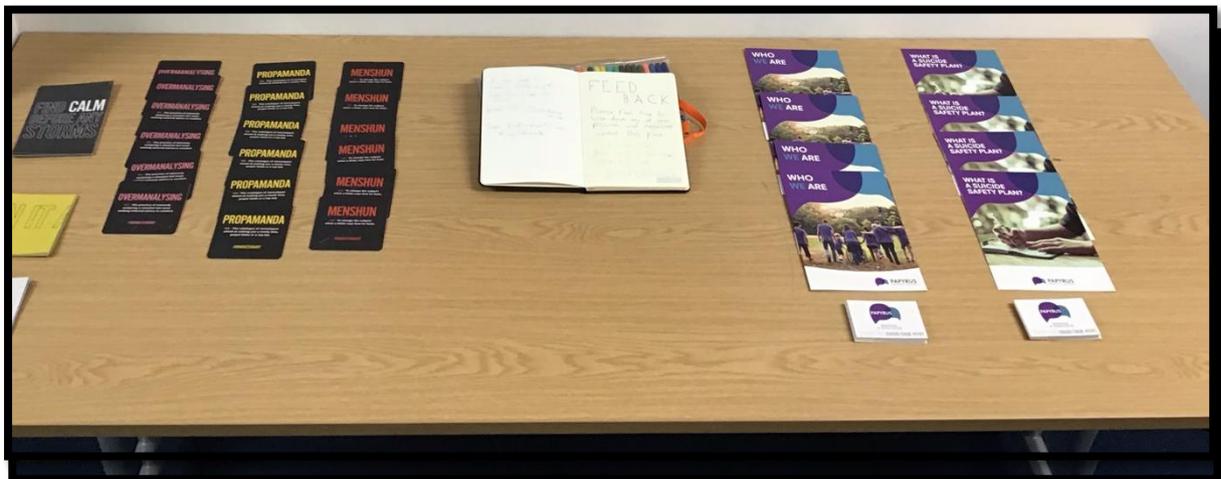
collaborative way to talk about those darker things that stand in her way. Another outlet could be through charities. PAPHYRUS, CALM, Mind and Samaritans as well as many more all have phone numbers and webchats which can be accessed 24/7. There are also many resources and activities on their websites to support Jamie in the moment, especially resources with distractions which can interrupt his train of thought. To talk more about this is (Guest name) from (Organisation/Charity) I think it's important that discussion around this issue is supported by someone who works day in, day out supporting people who are struggling. So, we'll now hand over to (Guest name).

Thank you again for today. If you have any feedback on this piece, then please feel free to email us at dashtheatre2019@gmail.com or tweet us @DashTheatre. Please feel free to help yourself to a leaflet or a beermat on the way out.



Involvement of professionals

We are theatre makers and that is our professional area of expertise. Therefore, when a booking for this piece is made, we would make our best efforts for a representative from a charity to be present. We will invite them to share with participants what work they do, why they do it and will too refer to the play in comparison to cases they have had to deal with. To then further reinforce their work, a display, similar to the one in the image below, will be set out in the performance space. This way, young people are able to take away literature or other products that are created by the charities ensuring they are taking the right advice away with them. This way, we feel that the service as a whole is complete. In the image below are resources from POPYRUS and CALM which were displayed at the original performance at the University of Chester's Kingsway Campus in November 2018. At the same performance, two POPYRUS representatives attended to support the workshop and clarified the relationship between the work they do with the performance and workshop.





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