

PE1725/B

Petitioner submission of 8 January 2020

Thank you for taking the time to outline the wider work going on across Scotland on Suicide prevention and the supports available. However I'm fully aware of the all information on pages 1 & 2, with the exception of the last paragraph page 2.

It may be helpful to provide some information on myself and the charity that I represent; FAMS before I proceed. For the last five years FAMS have been providing lived experience peer-support to people affected by murder, suicide, suicidal thoughts/behaviours; particularly to young adults their families and peers. We are a basically a self funding, volunteer led organisation, based in Lanarkshire, with no paid staff or any Government funding. To date we have touched literally thousands of people with our free peer-support, training and events. FAMS are well know to local MP's, MSP's and NLC & SLC.

I am one of the three mothers who co-founded FAMS 2013. With an ACE score of 10, I vividly remember the childhood traumas I experienced, the isolation I felt in school, trying desperately to fit in, finding it impossible. I attempted to take my own life for the first time at 9 years of age, the second at 15 and the third much later in life.

Unfortunately I have not had the time I wanted to respond to your document dated 03 October 2019. In this 21st "Emotional War Zone" that young adults navigate daily, FAMS are very much in the fighting in the trenches. However we are hopelessly often over run with the demands for our services. As an uneducated school leaver, with lived experiences of all sorts of abuse, a mother and co-founder of the totally and unique FAMS Charity, I will give my response in abbreviated form; due to time restraints.

GIVE YOUTH A CHANCE PETITION

- I don't feel that the response from government has reassured FAMS in any way. It actually confirms our fears that had good money is being continually thrown after bad.
Also the the whole ethos of the "Give Youth A Chance" Petition has been missed
- There is a need for a radical rethink. Our position is that the resources spent by the Scottish Government have been too one sided. Too much has been allocated to the "Effect" caused by young people's mental health challenges, not enough allocated to the "Cause."
- Despite statistics and research showing that their current policies and targets on the Curriculum for Excellence, are not being met, basically the Government's main strategy continues to heap up all services and support for when the child falls off the conveyor belt of life, yet minimal in what's causing the child to jump or fall off.

- Our young people are suffering in silence. FAMS are now working in Partnership with several charities including agencies working with people affected by drug and alcohol addictions. We all share the same position, that young adults in distress suffer from “emotional dysregulation” often seeking alcohol and drugs to help regulate their feelings or engage violence, self harm, anti social behaviour.
- We believe that trauma informed Mental Health & Well-being education on evens terms with literacy and numbers, will almost eradicate young suicides in four – 10 years.
- It is essential that **Mental Health Awareness** should be on taught in **equal** terms with **Physical Health Awareness**. Until this is recognised we will be living in an unbalanced society, malfunctioning society. This is clearly not the current position I.e. over four week period, most high schools have mandatory 8 periods of Physical Education, 4 periods of Religious Education, 0 periods of Mental Health Education
- NSPCC states that although one of the three pillars of Curriculum for Excellence, Health & Well-being does not have equal status or parity with Literacy & Numbers.
- Hiding in Plain Sight. Childline took 278,440 calls 2017/2018. Too three concerns; Mental & Emotional Health – Family Relationships – Suicidal Thoughts & Feelings. These are only the children brave enough to pick up the phone.
- Mental Health Education is not a one hour s period tick box, , it should be a subject as important as any other. We teach our young people who to speak other languages, French, Spanish, German etc. However we fail to teach the the universal language of Mental Health & Wellbeing, empathy, compassion, understanding differences, triggers to mental health, trauma informed safety etc etc . NB. Like all important subjects/languages, the language of positive Mental Health & Wellbeing cannot be learned in one or two sessions. Nor is it a tick the box exercise, it's often a matter of life and death or at least a long and positive life.
- For your information, a selection of seven FAMS Young Volunteers were invited by local MSP Christina McKelvie to visit Scottish Parliament, October 03 2018. We met two MSP's Christina McKelvie and Linda Fabiani. The same question was asked that day as one of the points raised today; “where has all the money made available for mental health support for young people gone?” It hadn't worked it's way down through the various Leadership/Working / Groups /Committees to the kids in the street or schools then and it hasn't till now? We were promised a written response, 12 months later no response and still no sign of re-enforcements or support in the trenches. You may be interested to know, six had an Ace score of more than four, two had been sectioned in 2018, one of them twice; for mental health issues.

- Appropriately 2, 300 people signed the above petition in just a few weeks this year, yet we were not allowed the opportunity to discuss it openly in front of the Committee. FAMS wish to make an official complaint. Several of the points raised in your response would have been answered. Additionally you may be interested to know that a 2,500 signatories were collected on an on-line “Give Youth A Chance” , petition summer 2018. The interest in this movement is high and gathering momentum daily.
- FAMS have taken advice on some Educators regarding your position on that the Scottish Government cannot mandate what is taught in schools. Apologies I used the incorrect terminology, although It was one particular professor who suggested the word mandate. I should have used suggest, influence or leg
- **N.B.** Never at any time did our petition call for mandatory training for parents and cares, that would have been just plain stupid. We ask that training be made available to Carers or parents on demand.
- The evidence is clear, there is almost a 50% increase in young Suicides according to National Stats. Judging by the never ending stream of suicides, and suicide behaviours. FAMS can predict the next figures will be equally as shocking & tragic. All of the above resonates with the experience and concerns of young people referred to FAMS.
- Statements like “You are not alone” or “It’s okay not to be okay” are just rhetoric. How do pupils know they are not alone? How do they know who to go to, if they are not okay ? Do they even now what okay is ? Feels like? Often they are not okay but can’t work out why? What’s up with them ? The slogans, commercials, leaflets are not working.
- Although school counsellors will help, they are certainly not the answer, supporting a minority of pupils in a restricted manner and restricted timescale. The sheer numbers of young adults affected by various mental health issues at differing levels will render their affected to be minuscule. Unfortunately they will support only be able to support the tip of the gigantic iceberg; for example In a school of around 600-700 pupils, how many pupils will the counsellor see ? Maximum four/five pupils each day plus paperwork, waiting lists, restricted appoints. Experience indicates that pupils have are issues with school counsellors inc. trust, confidence and stigma.
- It is our collective position Mental Health & Well being teachers should be paid for in place of Counsellors, although to have both would be good. This will encourage a whole school approach, ensuring open dialogue and discussions with every pupil. Trauma informed mental health and well-being information and education for all. Age restricted.
- Most of young adults who die by suicide are not known to have reported any mental health issues or challenges. What has been done differently to change that ?

- When will the public including children and young people, see the results of the various groups e.g. NSPLG and earlier groups

I respectfully invite you to visit our new Motherwell premises, to meet some of these same young people plus many more who can give you their honest and humbling views on what they need/needed. For example, a young person who has lost four close friends to suicide in the last eighteen months. They live with a family member who has complex mental health needs and has attempted suicide in the past. What hope do they have?