

# Crossing Paths Carer Support



Support for CARERS of loved ones who are suicidal

## Program overview

December 2021

A program developed by:



In partnership with:



Funded by:



# What is Crossing Paths?

**Crossing Paths aims to create communities that support and value those who are caring for someone experiencing a suicidal crisis.**

Crossing Paths is a program that supports carers of a loved one experiencing a suicidal crisis. It is a peer-led, community-based service consisting of seven key components, ranging from connecting with carers at time of crisis through to information, education and opportunities for peer support.

It aims to work closely with existing local services and supports such as The Way Back Support Service and the suicide prevention pathways of local Hospital and Health Services (HHS).

The program's components seek to meet the needs of carers at various stages of their journey — at the time of crisis, in the weeks following a crisis, and ongoing support and connection.

Crossing Paths has been designed to meet the diverse needs and aspirations of carers — including their emotional, educational, connection and practical needs. The program was developed in 2020 based on a review of the evidence base, scan of existing services and programs nationally, and a co-design process with people with lived experience and local stakeholders.

*"You can tell the program has been very carefully thought out about what carers need from a holistic approach. They ease you into it as you're ready and that was exactly what I needed."*

– Participating carer

*"It's very much a complementary service... I love the way it provides that wrap-around care to a carer, but also makes the person who has had an attempt/ ideation know that their carer has support and takes that burden off them"*

– Local stakeholder

# The Crossing Paths model of support



## **Carer peer connection in crisis**

Identifying the carer of a loved one experiencing a suicidal crisis who makes contact with health services and making timely connection with that carer to offer relevant support.



## **Information tools and practical resources**

Facilitating access to hard copy, digital and/or interactive tools to enable carers to increase their knowledge and skill in caring for a loved one at risk of suicide and maintain their own holistic wellbeing.



## **Proactive follow-up**

Making proactive, scheduled contact with a carer already known to the program to offer follow-up support and brief intervention by a trained peer support worker.



## **Service navigation and advocacy**

Sharing knowledge of local service system with a carer over a time-limited period to empower carer to meet their identified needs.



## **Structured educational workshops**

Coordinating a purposefully curated calendar of educational workshops relevant to the needs of someone caring for a loved one who is suicidal.



## **Moderated peer-led support groups**

Coordinating and moderating regular peer-led and suicide-specific support group(s), holding space for carers to connect with, and provide support for, people experiencing similar circumstances.



## **Carer-inclusive places and spaces**

Building a local network of 'places and spaces' that are recognised as an environment where carers can go to connect with other people, obtain information and resources and/or spend time in a way that promotes self-care and wellbeing.

# Why is Crossing Paths needed?

**Carers and natural supports such as families, partners and friends are a known protective factor in preventing suicide and an important part of the support system of a person experiencing suicidality.**

While the evidence base is clear about the impact that caring for a loved one can have on a carer's wellbeing, there is less evidence available around what works in improving outcomes for carers.

Most existing resources and programs that provide support to people in unpaid/informal caring roles relate to caring for someone with a mental illness rather than specifically through a suicidal crisis. Many of these resources and programs can be categorised as standalone materials (e.g. fact sheets, guides) or are provided as part of a suicide prevention support service or helpline. Many are national or statewide programs, rather than place-based approaches that build local connections to support people experiencing suicidality and their carers.

Where previous carer-focused programs have been delivered, there is generally limited information available on what support they provide to carers, how they were developed, and what outcomes they have achieved based on evaluation findings.

In 2019, as part of the Queensland Government's Suicide Prevention Health Taskforce Action Plan, Queensland Health engaged Wesley Mission Queensland to design, test and evaluate a model of support for carers of a loved one experiencing a suicidal crisis. The project aimed to address this unmet need to better support those who care for someone experiencing a suicidal crisis and build the evidence base — which led to the development of Crossing Paths.

*"I don't always know what I'm trying to fix... In times of crisis, I didn't have the tools and I felt inadequate"*

— Co-design participant

*"Identifying carers' strengths, and how they can be used as tools going forward... Activating my community and connections around me"*

— Co-design participant

*"You should be able to access different things that you need at different times, when you need them, not necessarily structured"*

— Co-design participant

# What outcomes did it achieve?

**Over a 12-month period during 2020-21, Crossing Paths was piloted on the Gold Coast, Queensland through a place-based approach.**

This pilot of Crossing Paths reflected the conceptual service model while being implemented within the context of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, existing suicide prevention services in the Gold Coast service system and available resourcing.

The evaluation was undertaken by an external evaluator (Beacon Strategies) and considered the appropriateness, effectiveness, implementation, impact and sustainability of the program. Evaluation methods included client and program data collected by program staff, a self-report outcomes survey, and qualitative interviews and focus groups with key stakeholders (e.g. carers, staff, local stakeholders).

A detailed evaluation report with findings, implications and recommendations was prepared for Queensland Health in September 2021. A snapshot of these findings is included below.

**105**

referrals received from local services over 12-month period.

**2 in 3**

referrals received from The Way Back Support Service.

**70**

total carers engaged and supported in program over pilot period.

**150**

average support contacts completed per month by Carer Peer Workers.

Support contacts with carers involved a mix of

**phone support, group activities, email and face-to-face visits.**

**\$190K**

approx. service delivery costs over 12-month pilot period.  
(excludes co-design & evaluation costs)

Carers who engaged with the program tended to be **aged 36-65 years, female, and a mother or partner** to the person they were supporting.

**94%**

of engaged carers would recommend Crossing Paths to someone else.

9 in 10 carers agreed that they **felt heard and respected**

and that the program was **inclusive and accessible.**

Carers generally presented with higher levels of need around their **caring role, how they were feeling, and finding time for themselves.**

Carers who engaged with the program reported positive impact in their **capability and capacity as a carer, sense of peer belonging and connection, and social and emotional wellbeing.**

Qualitative data highlighted several examples of carers reporting how the program was able to **offer emotional support, help form connections, share information and knowledge, and empower carers** to meet their own practical needs.

## Experiences and outcomes of carers

*"It has been a hard journey over the last 9 months [but] it's been a very positive help knowing there were people there. I started seeing myself in a different light, and learnt to be kinder to myself. You're there to look after someone but sometimes you have to look after yourself too"*

– Participating carer

*"It was little practical ideas to keep my daughter safe that was a big thing... It was little things but they were big to me and helped in a lot of ways"*

– Participating carer

*"You go from totally overwhelmed, wanting to sit in a corner and don't know what to do; to: 'there's a path out, I've got this'. I can sit in the park with a coffee, unload and come home, pick up my load and keep going."*

– Participating carer

*"It was great for them to be there for me when I was in a time of absolute need... it couldn't have been planned any better, it got me through when I needed it at that time"*

– Participating carer

*"I am able to deal with things better. I don't have a meltdown and burst into tears because I feel isolated. I feel calmer myself and I feel lighter... I'm happier and I can do things with a different attitude, I'm more capable... I wish this was around years ago before we got to the stage that we did."*

– Participating carer

*"My partner receives a lot of care from various organisations and it was really humbling for someone to reach out to me personally and say "how are you going?" The first time I heard from them it actually moved me to tears"*

– Participating carer

*"Just knowing that someone out there has the experience, understanding and can help with practical advice [and] emotional support I've found really helpful. I used to talk to friends about it but you feel like you're constantly loading friends with all this information. It's good to be able to do this with a third party"*

– Participating carer



# Where to from here?

**There are opportunities to expand and replicate the Crossing Paths program model into other local communities to respond to the unmet need for supporting carers.**

Based on the evidence from the pilot implementation of Crossing Paths, there are positive outcomes of the program model that could be considered for replication to meet the needs of carers in communities across Australia and Queensland.

To support the sustainability and fidelity of key elements of the program model, replication should consider the following:

- maintain the program's strengths — flexible and holistic support; individual and group-based activities; peer-led workforce; outreach delivery model.
- establish implementation enablers of workforce training and support; joint governance and planning; local relationships (e.g. The Way Back Support Service; Hospital and Health Services).
- build pathways with local services to identify people at the right time to connect to support, and to complement support available for their loved one experiencing suicidal crisis (e.g. Zero Suicide pathway; aftercare services; crisis support services).
- create communication and promotional strategies that are meaningful to local communities — this includes finding the right language to engage those who don't readily identify as a 'carer'.

For more information, please visit our website or contact the Crossing Paths program team.



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