Tomorrow (10 September) is World Suicide Prevention Day. This year’s theme is *Preventing Suicide: Reaching Out and Saving Lives*. The impact of suicide on school communities right across Australia is profound and lasting so can there be a more important goal for all of us who are involved in the education and care of young people?

In 2013 the National Coalition for Suicide Prevention (NCSP) made a rallying call to all Australians to aim to help halve the number of suicides in Australia in the next ten years. Unfortunately our experience suggests we haven’t made a good start.

Globally, one million lives are lost by suicide and in Australia around 2,300 people take their lives every year. Four out of five suicides in Australia are men and for young women under the age of 34 in Australia, suicide is the leading cause of death.

This deeply distressing trend is also borne out in the data from the 29 Primary and 8 Secondary schools in the Diocese of Wollongong. In 2009, 8 young people attempted to take their own lives. Last year in 2014 that number had risen to 40.

Director of Schools for Catholic Education, Diocese of Wollongong, Peter Turner said, “Few things in life are more painful or tragic than the suicide of a young person. As a teacher, these numbers are simply heart-breaking. Suicide is so different to all other critical incidents in schools.”

“We have to take a proactive response and wholeheartedly believe that all suicides are preventable. As Catholic school leaders, our Christian belief is that each individual is precious, made in God’s own image and deserves to have life and have it to the full.”

“All of us, but particularly those closely connected to children and young people; parents, grandparents, teachers, carers, coaches, have a moral obligation to react, respond and prepare for the increasing incidence of mental health issues and mental illness in our community.”

Mr Turner said, “We can’t afford to be ‘spectators on the sidelines’. Pope Francis would say that this is our ‘core business’ and that through coordinating our local efforts, a real difference to the lives of many can be made.”

As a practical response, Catholic Education, Diocese of Wollongong, working in close partnership with *headspace School Support* (National Youth Mental Health Foundation) and CatholicCare, has recently developed and released an excellent resource for schools called **A Light for the Path: Suicide Prevention, Intervention and Postvention**.

School leaders have for some time felt they have had limited resources and training in this area. This resource is a comprehensive tool-kit to help teachers, pastoral staff, counsellors and parents to positively and effectively support children and young people in distress and lacking hope.

The material contained within is informed by the rich research and evidence sourced through trusted health bodies such as MindMatters, the Black Dog Institute and most significantly from our partner, *headspace School Support*. …continues
“It is my fervent hope that this resource will enable all of us who work for, and with, children and young people, to understand and help meet the pressing need of their pain and despair with care and courage; to light their paths in considered, effective, caring, compassionate and safe ways. To do this will help ensure that every school across the country can be a life-giving community, one that helps develop and support hope-filled and resilient young people”, said Mr Turner.

This practical resource is offered to all schools to enhance the learning and wellbeing of students, particularly those who are adversely affected by suicidal thoughts and attempts. More information about the resource can be obtained by contacting Gail Tarrant at Catholic Education, Diocese of Wollongong.
(02 4253 0800, gail.tarrant@dow.catholic.edu.au)

Our Diocese covers a significant geographic area of NSW with more than half of our schools located in the rapidly growing south western suburbs of Sydney, including the Macarthur suburbs of Campbelltown, Ingleburn, Camden and Edmondson Park as well covering the Illawarra, Southern Highlands and Shoalhaven regions.

Further information about World Suicide Prevention Day can be found at www.wspd.org.au

headspace: http://headspace.org.au/

CatholicCare Wollongong: http://www.catholiccare.dow.org.au/

For further information please contact: Tim Gilmour (Media Liaison) on (02) 4253 0938
(tim.gilmour@dow.catholic.edu.au)

Media Contact:
The Director of Schools, Peter Turner is available for media interviews tomorrow morning from 8:00am (Thu 10 Sep). Please contact Tim to arrange a suitable time.

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