



The Butterfly Diaries

Personal Story Teller's Guidelines

Aim & Vision

The aim of this project is to prevent suicide by sharing the stories of people who have been there and made it through.

The Butterfly Diaries will share stories that destigmatise or remove the mark of shame from suicide and inspire hope in readers with stories of recovery and triumph.

The themes of the stories in The Butterfly Diaries are survival, hope and gratitude for life.

When people read The Butterfly Diaries they will come away feeling inspired, empowered and hopeful. Your story will be followed by a summary of your tips for getting through.

Writers have been asked to keep these themes and aims in mind when telling your story.

Introduction

The Butterfly Diaries is a collaborative project between Miriam Larsen-Barr of Engage Aotearoa and poet Michelle Bolton.

Both Miriam and Michelle have personal motivations for creating this project. As well as being a qualified mental-health promoter, Miriam has recovered from being suicidal herself and is motivated to help others see how they too can get through it. Michelle has lost a number of friends to suicide and she is motivated to better connect the community with how they can help. Both have a rich background in poetry and are excited to work with a wider range of writers on The Butterfly Diaries.

Miriam is your first point of contact as a personal story-teller, especially if you find yourself distressed at any point in the course of the project or need help understanding the perspective of your writer.

Time Line

This is an approximate timeline only. Because this is a sensitive project, we will take as long as is needed for each contributor to get a positive experience out of being involved. Both the writers and the personal story-tellers have perspectives that need to be respected and nurtured.

- 28 February: Personal Story-tellers recruited | Self-interviews underway

- 31 March: Writers recruited | Writers Receive Interview Notes
- 30 April: Writers submit first draft for SPINZ consultation and story-teller feedback
- 30 June: Writers submit second draft for story-teller feedback
- 30 August: Writers submit final document for SPINZ and storyteller approval
- 30 September: Type-setting & Proofreading
- 30 October: Printing & Preparation for launch

Story-Teller Guidelines

The information you share will be turned into a set of interview notes. These notes about your recovery journey will be passed on to your writer as the foundation for the work they will create. If they have any questions, we will pass these on to you on their behalf.

How Will Your Information Be Collected?

Information about your story of recovery from being suicidal will be collected in two ways – from your Sign-Up Form and from the information you share in an interview. The interview can be a written self-interview or a face-to-face interview with Miriam, whichever you prefer.

The interview will follow a similar set of priorities as the writers have been given (see below), seeking a brief context, a picture of what your recovery looks like now and a greater emphasis on how you got from point A to point B.

What to Expect from Your Writer:

Your story may be presented in any format from short story, experimental fiction, poetry, prose, monologue, comic strip, essay or traditional written interview or a combination. Engage Aotearoa will summarise your tips for recovery at the end of your story.

When you sign up, you will be able to inform us of your preferred story formats – it may be that you particularly like the idea of your story being turned into poetry or a comic strip, for example.

Writers have been asked to incorporate the following priorities into their writing:

- A brief context on how you came to be suicidal
- A longer focus on how you are now living a happier life
- A greater focus on the resources and strategies that helped during your journey

Writers have been provided with information about suicide prevention and asked to work from this framework. This is summarised in your Resources for Personal Story-Tellers Pack.

The writers will work to capture the true essence and key elements of your story, but we ask you understand to that because there is limited space and specific aims, not every detail will be able to be included. You will have final say over the way your story is communicated and the writer will work with you to ensure that the elements that are important to you are in the story.

Consultation:

Your writer will be prepared to work in a collaborative fashion to ensure the final outcome reflects your desired message in a safe and destigmatising manner. They will submit drafts for you to review and comment on.

All writing selected for the book will also be passed by the communications team at Suicide Prevention New Zealand (SPINZ) to ensure that messages about mental unwellness and suicide are presented in a destigmatising and safe manner.

Simply being honest and real, does not always yield material that promotes positive ways of coping with feelings of suicide. Writers may need to edit their work in order to ensure that they present a destigmatising, hopeful and inspiring view of getting through suicide. Any changes made will be sent to you for approval, so you are fully informed the whole way through.

How Will Your Story Be Communicated?

We want to show that suicide is understandable, relatable and importantly, possible to recover from. Suicide is all about a lack of hope, so any suicide prevention effort needs to focus on inspiring hope. Your writer has been asked to consider the following points when choosing how to write about your story.

The following things are effective ways of reducing stigma about suicide:

1. Positive contact with a person who has experienced suicide and is an equal
 - Positive contact is an opportunity to experience the strengths and skills of a person with personal experience
 - The person with experience of suicide is presented as an equal
2. Being given information about environments, behaviours and responses (context) to provide opportunities to personally relate with the experience
3. Finding out that people can recover or improve their experiences
4. Emphasising the normality of suicidal experiences
5. Finding out the value of suicidal experiences – many people develop a lot of strengths through their experiences, it doesn't have to be a bad thing forever
6. Learning how to deal with it well
 - People often create distance between themselves and suicidal people because they don't know what to do. Suicidal people often don't speak out because they also do not know what to do and they don't want to make others uncomfortable.
7. Learning about the impact of stigma and discrimination and how commonplace it is

The following things are NOT destigmatising and may also increase suicide:

1. Being told only about all of the hardest or most shocking parts of mental unwellness.
2. Focussing on diagnostic labels which people often do not understand
3. Emphasising a solely biological or 'illness' understanding of mental health and unwellness tends to reduce people's sense of optimism and hope.
4. Emphasising the notion that people who are suicidal cannot be stopped or helped by others. The Butterfly Diaries will emphasise how the story-tellers were helped.
5. Sharing the ideas that "people can't get better without medication," "mental illness is a lifelong condition," "People with mental illness need to be looked after/ are unemployable/are dangerous" also increases stigma and reduces hope and optimism.
6. **Sharing methods of suicide has been shown to increase suicide.** The Butterfly Diaries will not share any information about how people have attempted to harm themselves.

Confidentiality

Your involvement in this project is entirely confidential, unless you request otherwise. There is a space on the Sign-Up Form for you to inform us whether you want to be named or unnamed. We will need a name for us to use to discuss your story with the writers, but this does not have to be your real name.

We ask that you respect the confidentiality of your loved ones by avoiding the use of their names or identifying information unless they have given you their permission to do so.

Your Own Safety

It can get distressing to share your story of recovery from being suicidal. For example, you might find yourself worrying about what the writer or the project workers think of your experiences or you might find old feelings coming back up.

Please contact Miriam at Engage Aotearoa if you find yourself having a reaction to your involvement in this project. Often all we need is an understanding ear. But we can also work to resolve any concerns you have as well. Call Engage Aotearoa on (09) 963 9455 Monday – Friday 10 – 5 pm. Please leave a message if there is no answer so we can call you back.

The 0508 TAUTOKO helpline is a 24-hour support resource if you are feeling triggered.

The Coping Kete is an online resource at www.engagenz.co.nz that is full of positive ways of coping with negative emotion. You might find it helpful to experiment with some of these if you find yourself distressed.

Please keep in mind that it is normal to experience some resurfaced feelings or sense of vulnerability when opening up about difficult things such as this. The important thing is having the supports around you to help you comfort those feelings once more. Your friends and family will be an important resource during this time as well.

Signing Up

If you want to sign up as a writer for The Butterfly Diaries, please fill out the Sign-Up form on the following page and send it to admin@engagenz.co.nz by 28 February 2012.

Once we receive your expression of interest, we will assess your suitability for the project and then contact you to arrange an interview and matching you with a writer.



The Butterfly Diaries

Personal Story-teller's Sign-Up Form

Name:

Gender:

Date of Birth:

Phone/Email:

Address:

Do you wish to be anonymous or named?

Would you prefer a face-to-face interview or a written self-interview?

Preferred Writing Style(s): How would you prefer your story to be written?

E.G. Short story, poetry, comic strip, essay, interview...

Motivation Statement: What motivates you to sign up as a story-teller?

What are the main messages of your story?

Please describe any support needs that you would like to make us aware of.