



The Butterfly Diaries **Writers' 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 subject's tips for getting through.

Please ensure that you keep these aims and themes in mind while writing.

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 point of contact if you find yourself distressed at any point in the course of the project or need help understanding the perspective of your story-teller. Michelle is your first point of contact with the day-to-day needs of your involvement or need help understanding the perspectives of friends and family in your story-teller's story.

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.

- 28 February: 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

Writing Guidelines

You will be given a set of interview notes from someone who has shared their story of recovery and triumph. This is to be the foundation for the work you will create.

Format:

You can present the story 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 each person's tips for recovery at the end of each piece of writing.

While your writing can be in any format it must incorporate the following:

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

Consultation:

Because of the sensitive nature of this project, you will need to be prepared to work in a collaborative fashion to ensure the final outcome reflects the desired message in a safe and destigmatising manner.

All writing selected for the book will 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. Your drafts will also be passed by the story-teller to ensure that they are personally happy with the way their story is being told.

Simply being honest and real, does not always yield material that destigmatises or 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. Consultation will begin early on with the first draft so that you are on track from the outset.

Methods of Suicide Prevention:

Typically a destigmatising view is one in which the experiences are presented as being 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.

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.

Payment

This is a charitable project: The sale of The Butterfly Diaries books will raise funds to cover the printing costs and share support resources with those who need them.

At the current time we are unable to financially remunerate writers. We will begin the process of seeking funding to pay contributors in the New Year. Funding will be sought

from a range of annual funding streams as well as by approaching community organisations for sponsorship.

Our aim is to be able to pay each writer at least \$100 for their work; this would be only a token of our appreciation for your time and talents and our hope is to be able to offer more.

Because financial remuneration is uncertain, we are looking for writers who are also personally passionate about this area of work and will find it personally enriching to take part.

Your Own Safety

Putting your hand up to contribute to this project is an extremely generous act, it is crucial that you are looked after throughout the process.

Delving into someone else's difficult experiences and taking on the responsibility to tell their story can be a stressful and/or triggering thing to do.

You may find yourself having thoughts or feelings like your subject has described. This could be a frightening or distressing experience to have.

If you find yourself experiencing or re-experiencing suicidal thoughts or feelings or you are simply finding it distressing at any stage, please contact us. Miriam is experienced in supporting people through difficult times. If you prefer, she will help to connect you with someone else to talk to. It is important that everyone who is finding the project triggering is supported through it. Miriam is available on (09) 963 9455 Monday – Friday 10 – 5pm, please leave a message so she can return your call.

You can also access support from the 0508 Tautoko helpline 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

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 31 March 2012.

Once we receive your expression of interest, we will assess your suitability for the project and then contact you to arrange matching you with a subject. Personal story-tellers have been given the option to input into what genres they prefer to have their story told through and this will have some influence over which subject you are matched with.

You cannot sign up to write your own story. However you are welcome to take part as both a writer and a story-teller.



The Butterfly Diaries

Writer's Sign-Up Form

Name:

Gender:

Date of Birth:

Phone/Email:

Predominant Writing Style(s):

E.G. Short story, Poetry, flash fiction, comic strip, essay, interview...

Please attach a 50 – 100 word biographical note, written in the third person.

Motivation Statement: What motivates you to sign up as a writer for The Butterfly Diaries?

What experience have you had of working in collaboration?

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

Are you committed to producing material in accordance with the guidelines and consultative processes set out above?