



DISCHARGED
An Alternatives to Suicide Approach

Evaluating DISCHARGED Suicide Peer Support Groups

Theme 1 Summary: “All I need is someone to talk to”

This sheet provides a summary of the first theme from the participant findings of our research project *Evaluating DISCHARGED Suicide Peer Support Groups*.

We did this project with Curtin University in 2019 to investigate people's experiences of DISCHARGED suicide peer support groups. We wanted to find out the impact they have on the people who attend them and how or if they are different from the clinical mental health system. The full report of our findings is available on our website.

To make our results easy to understand, we wrote a series of summary sheets. This is the first of three summaries that came from the interviews with participants.

“All I need is someone to talk to”

- a participant reflecting on when they're suicidal

What do people in suicidal distress want from a supporter? They want a trustworthy person who deeply listens to them and stands beside them. This theme explores the experiences of participants within the mental health system and DISCHARGED groups. This theme has four parts which are described below.

- **The ‘knee jerk’ reaction**

In our research project, participants reported that mental health services rarely listened to or explored their suicidal thoughts and where they come from. If people did mention suicide to their clinicians, the police would later arrive at their house unexpectedly to do a welfare check, sometimes arresting or hospitalising them against their will, even when they weren't 'actively' suicidal. Participants told us this made them censor their thoughts of suicide from mental health professionals to avoid these responses – hiding them from the very people who were meant to help.

- **“We'd rather be dead than go there”**

- a participant describing their experience of an inpatient ward

Participants said that mental health professionals often misunderstood them and viewed them as lacking the capacity to know what they needed. When seeking help within the public mental health system, they were powerless over their own treatment and were often treated in dehumanising ways. Participants told us this made them too scared to share about being suicidal in case a voluntary hospital admission became involuntary.

- **“A place where I can talk openly”**

- a participant describing DISCHARGED

Participants told us that at first, they were worried that DISCHARGED might call the police on them if they said they were feeling suicidal. When the police weren't called, their trust in DISCHARGED grew. They realised they didn't have to censor what they said and could instead speak freely without fear of how others might react. Participants also said that the deep listening and curious questions asked by facilitators and others in the group helped them change old beliefs and see their situation in new ways.

- **Witnessed**

We were told by participants that sharing and feeling intense emotions within a non-judgemental group such as DISCHARGED was a validating experience. Some participants said that being seen and heard in this way, being 'witnessed', helped them understand their pain and gave them permission to really feel their emotions. They also spoke about how being a witness to another group members' story was a connecting experience, leading them to feel less alienated and alone.