

## **Messaging relative to the industry's suicide prevention programme – May 2017**

### **1. Purpose**

The purpose of this Paper is to share with industry colleagues work progressed and endorsed by the Suicide Prevention Duty Holders Group (SPDHG) and National Task Force in relation to externally focused messages relative to the industry's suicide prevention programme for promotion by senior industry leaders and media/communications teams.

### **2. Externally focused messages relative to the industry's suicide prevention programme**

National Task Force requested that the SPDHG create a suite of messages that could be used widely to promote the industry's position relative to suicide and suicide prevention when discussing these issues with third parties and the media.

The introduction of a mechanism by which 'current' statistics were readily available to supplement those messages was also requested.

Working with communications teams at RDG and Network Rail SPDHG created and subsequently endorsed (17 August 2016) a set of messages and data that it believed the industry should consistently use to support its suicide prevention programme to allow it to speak with one voice on the issue to stakeholders.

On the advice of communication team colleagues (at Network Rail and Rail Delivery Group) the messages at Appendix i have been designed for two discrete audiences, the:

- 'calls to action' allow senior industry leaders when speaking to third parties to highlight the position the railway holds in relation to suicide and suicide prevention
- the 'media' messages provide focus for communications team members when dealing with the press. They highlight the positive aspects of the industry's suicide prevention programme

When dealing with the media representatives they should be reminded of the World Health Organisation guidance on reporting suicides and in particular Samaritans guidance on reporting them on the railway. A request should also be made that any article references the helpline number of Samaritans – 116 123.

A third set of messages which capture data (facts and figures) relative to rail suicide have also been created for the purpose of supporting quotes or sound bites.

It is recognised that users of the messages may wish to validate them from time to time, especially the data. The industry's central suicide prevention team should be contacted in the first instance to do this via [ariane.ally@networkrail.co.uk](mailto:ariane.ally@networkrail.co.uk) or by contacting 07730 355 125.

***Paper ends***

## Externally focused messages relative to the industry's suicide prevention programme

### 1. **Calls to action**

#### ***Messages for senior leaders to convey to third parties***

When the industry's senior leaders discuss suicide or suicide prevention on the railway they should seek to promote the following agenda or 'calls to action':

- i. mental and physical health should be treated equally, and vulnerable people should be encouraged to seek help;
- ii. the rail industry supports the government's target of a 10% reduction in suicides by 2020/21 and calls for appropriate resources to be made available to ensure it is achieved;
- iii. there should be compulsory suicide prevention training for all those in the health sector;
- iv. all local authorities should engage with the British Transport Police and the rail industry through Network Rail when creating Suicide Prevention Action Plans to ensure that they have the fullest picture of local trends;
- v. more should be done in schools to make our young people aware of mental health issues to allow them to look after themselves and others at any point through life's journey;
- vi. We should not have to rely on our police force (the British Transport Police) supporting vulnerable people until appropriate medical facilities become available for them. A situation brought about by the lack of adequate health care provision for those most at risk in our society;
- vii. the sharing of information held by public bodies with the British Transport Police should be a positive requirement rather than the current cautious approach based around data protection requirements  
and
- viii. the standard of proof required in Coroner's Inquests should be changed. Despite suicide being decriminalized in 1961 Coroners are still required to use the criminal standard of proof (beyond reasonable doubt) before making suicide findings. All other available findings (except unlawful killing) require the civil standard to be met (on the balance of probabilities). This extremely high standard of proof may mask the true extent of suicide and hinder research into it.

### 2. **Media messages**

The following six messages should be promoted by all industry communications teams when dealing with/working on media stories relating to suicide/suicide prevention on the 'over ground' railway:

- i. as an industry we do not believe that suicide is inevitable. We believe it is preventable;
- ii. any death on the railway is a tragedy which has a real emotional impact upon our staff and our customers;
- iii. suicide is a complex issue, and it is not within the railway's gift to prevent it happening on the rail network without the co-operation of others. All of society needs to work together to reduce it;

- iv. there are more than 15,000 rail staff and British Transport Police Officers on the railway that have been trained in suicide prevention. The 'railway family' cares about the health, wellbeing and safety of its passengers and customers;
- v. we must break down the taboo of talking about suicide. We want to reach people before they get to crisis point by raising awareness of the issue in the population, breaking down the stigma associated with suicide, and encouraging help-seeking behaviour among men in particular;  
and
- vi. we call on other industries to follow our lead in the prevention of suicides and end this senseless loss of life.

### **3. Facts and figures**

In any discussion about suicide/suicide prevention on the railway no matter at what level there will be a desire or need to quote meaningful statistics. The following should be those that are used for the over ground railway:

- i. 80% of people who die by suicide on the rail network are men (*Source: Rail Safety and Standards Board*);
- ii. men are three and a half times more likely to take their own lives than women (*Source: Office for National Statistics*);
- iii. those from the most deprived areas are ten times more likely to take their own lives than those from the most affluent areas. Men from deprived social groups are at the highest risk of all (*Source: Platt., Stephen, 2011*);
- iv. we all have a huge part to play in identifying and helping people who may be at risk of suicide. Only 28% of people who died by suicide in England between 2003 and 2013 were in contact with mental health services (*Source: Mental Health Foundation*);
- v. more than 15,000 rail staff and British Transport Police Officers have been trained on Samaritans courses, giving them the skills and confidence to identify and approach vulnerable people on the rail network and lead them to a place of safety (*Source: Samaritans*);
- vi. in 2016/17, rail staff, the Police and public intervened in more than 1593 suicide attempts on the railway (*Source: British Transport Police*);
- vii. in 2016/17 there were 237 suicides/suspected suicides on the 'over ground' rail network. This represents a 7% reduction against the previous year. That's 15 fewer suicides (*Source: Rail Safety and Standards Board*). The 2016/17 figure represents the lowest number of suicides events recorded on the railway since the industry's suicide prevention programme began in 2010;
- viii. 85% of people that take their lives on the railway have not previously come to the attention of the British Transport Police (*Source: British Transport Police*);
- ix. suicide, the biggest single killer of men aged 20 - 45 in the UK (*Source: Office for National Statistics*)  
and
- x. in 2016/17 85 people or one in four who attempted to take their lives on the railway survived. Most were left with life changing injuries (*Source: British Transport Police*).

**Note:** *To validate any of the messages or statistics covered in sections 1 – 3 the industry’s central suicide prevention team should be contacted in the first instance via [ariane.ally@networkrail.co.uk](mailto:ariane.ally@networkrail.co.uk) or by contacting 07730 355 125.*