

–Media Release–

The Reasons To Go On Living Project

Hamilton, ON, July 2, 2008 — A new website, www.thereasons.ca, has been launched as part of a study to better understand the transition in suicidal individuals from thoughts of wanting to die by suicide to choosing to live.

Developed by researchers in the Mental Health and Addictions Program, St. Joseph's Healthcare Hamilton and the Department of Psychiatry and Behavioural Neurosciences, McMaster University through a Psychiatry Associates AFP Research/Education Grant, individuals are invited to submit stories anonymously to the website about their suicide attempt and how they decided to go on living. Once collected, researchers will analyze the stories to better understand how people find reasons to go on living. The Project will also inform healthcare professionals who treat people with thoughts of suicide and will offer public education and support through posting some of the stories on the website.

"We don't really understand how the shift takes place - how someone makes the transition from feeling that they need to end their life and being desperate, to recognizing how valuable and precious life is, and finding the resolve to go on. If we had an understanding of that process, perhaps we could help people make that journey more quickly," says Dr. Jennifer Brasch, Medical Director of the Psychiatric Emergency Service, St. Joseph's Healthcare Hamilton, and Lead Researcher of the project. "We could reduce distress, if we could more effectively help people to overcome their thoughts of suicide. I think it would be a huge step forward."

Much research has been done to identify those at high risk of dying by suicide, but there has been very little research done on the experiences of people who choose to go on living either during or after a suicide attempt. Suicidology is known to be a difficult area to research due to the nature of the content and the stigma that surrounds it.

"There is a growing interest in using the internet for research," says Dr. Brasch. "Researchers have found that people with an illness associated with stigma or disability are more likely to reveal personal information on websites and chat rooms than to seek out support groups where they have to be face to face. They see anonymity as comfort. Our website enables people who have made a suicide attempt to share their story anonymously, whenever and wherever they are. We hope people with a difficult but important story to tell will seek out our website."

"We are planning to post some of the stories we receive on the website. Maybe they will be inspiring to people who may be feeling quite desperate. They could read the stories and think 'You know, that person was where I am now and they've come through it. Maybe I can get through this too.'"

About 4,000 people in Canada die by suicide each year. For every completed suicide, there are 20-40 suicide attempts. Some warning signs that someone may be suicidal may include feeling depressed, anxious or hopeless. Some people who consider suicide are psychotic, meaning they have false beliefs or hear voices encouraging them to end their lives. It's important for family and friends to respond to the distress and help the person seek medical care immediately to keep them safe.

For more information and to send in your story, please visit www.thereasons.ca

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