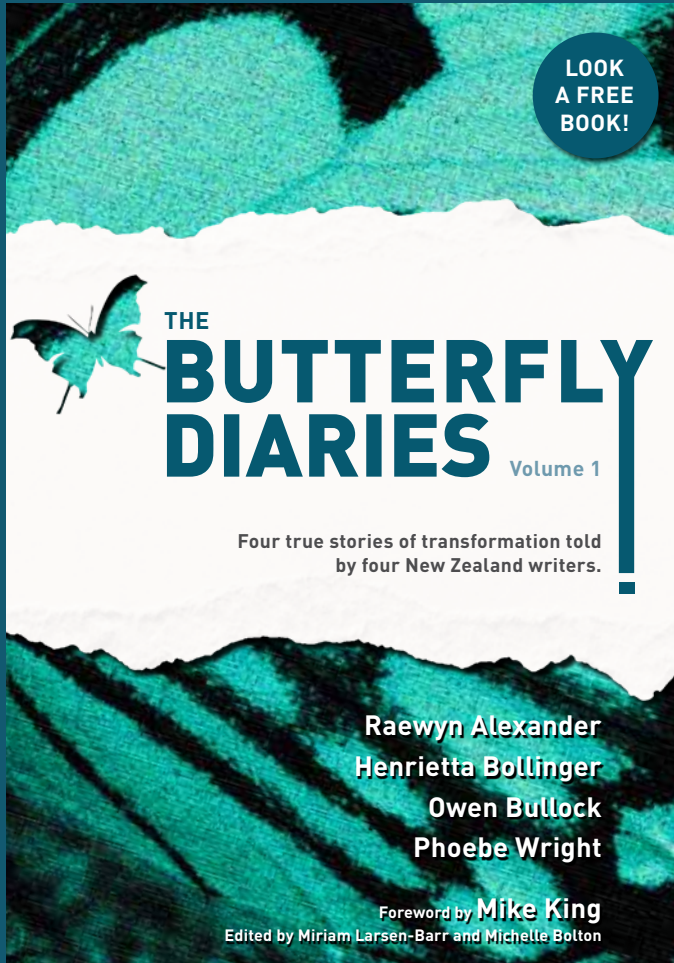


Surviving Suicidal Urges

An e-Resource from The Butterfly Diaries Vol. 1



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www.engagenz.co.nz



The Butterfly Diaries shares four true stories of recovery from the experience of being suicidal as told by four creative writers.

This resource collects together a summary of each storyteller's recovery tips.

In Aotearoa, New Zealand, 1 in 6 people have suicidal thoughts each year. The Butterfly Diaries gives voice to the stories of those who have been there and made it out alive. It is a normal human response to feel hopeless sometimes. It takes a great deal of distress tolerance, brute determination, skill development, support and understanding to survive the urge to act on those thoughts and feelings when they arise. But hardly anyone ever talks about suicidal thoughts and feelings, making it even harder for people to find out how to get through. Sean, Jane, Mary and Brad have all been suicidal, survived their own suicide attempts and found their way to a place where they are glad to be living their lives. In The Butterfly Diaries they share how they strengthened their wings and learned to fly.

“The absolute falsehood inflicted on people who feel broken is that they can never recover. However we certainly can and do...”

~ Raewyn Alexander, Emerging from the Past, Transformed: Mary's Story



BRAD'S RECOVERY TIPS



Remember suicidal thoughts are thoughts we do not have to act on: Brad learned to see suicidal thoughts as warnings it is time to do something enjoyable or take a break instead of signs that he needs to take his life. Brad has learned that suicidal thoughts and distressing voices pass if he keeps breathing and responds to them with self-care instead of self-harm. Brad explains, “*Your thoughts are not you; you alone are in charge of your actions.*”

Talk about it with someone: Whether it is a therapist, a friend, a doctor, a family member or a teacher, someone else or all of the above, talk with someone about how you feel. If they don't react the way you need them to, talk to someone else. Keep talking until you find the people you need and make it through. Talking to supportive people really does help and they are out there to be found.

Learn to enjoy life again by starting small: For Brad, a big part of recovery was learning to enjoy life again. Brad started by doing small things each day to treat himself well. This involved doing more of the things he liked and enjoyed as well as reframing unwanted life experiences, mistakes or regrets as learning tools and being kind to himself. Doing things we enjoy helps us reconnect with a life we feel is worth living.

Build some positive coping strategies: Brad found it useful to learn mindfulness techniques and grounding strategies to help him improve the moment and interrupt unhelpful thoughts. He also finds it helpful to connect with good friends, exercise, limit his caffeine intake and avoid resorting to cigarettes or alcohol, which is how he used to cope with stress. Brad says, “*Cigarettes and alcohol are a quick fix but make it worse in the long run.*” Getting drunk can make us impulsively act on how we feel, so it's wise to find alternatives to alcohol.

Know suicide does not make it better for anyone: It is easy to start thinking that taking our life might be better for everyone. This is a slippery slope that can trick us into acting on our thoughts, and it *is* a trick. Brad says it is important to remember suicide does not make anything better. It isn't better for us because we miss out on the bit where our life gets good, and it isn't better for those around us because they are left with grief and the burden of wishing they could have helped. Knowing someone who has committed suicide puts people at risk of suicide themselves. Only staying alive gives us the option to make things better.

MARY'S RECOVERY TIPS



Refuse to see ourselves solely as a victim: Mary found it helped to see herself as more than what had happened to her and more than the labels she had been given. Mary explains she needed to shake herself out of the lie of victimhood, assert her control and make the choice to not commit suicide. *“What I would say to others is – you do have control of your life so take it!! Don’t let the matrix of thoughts drag you down – take control. Find the people you need to help you.”*

Look after our whole selves every day: For Mary, recovering from being suicidal involved learning to *“live proactively rather than reactively”*. Mary found she had to create and then use physical, mental, spiritual and social routines to keep a general balance. For Mary this means getting regular sleep, balancing her work load, getting sunlight and exercise and connecting with her social supports and spirituality. Mary used Te Whare Tapa Wha to look at her whole life and plan how to fill the gaps.

Tell people what we need and ask them to help: Mary gathered a whole team of people to help with each area of her life and she was honest with them about how bad things were; psychologists, psychiatrists, support workers, whanau, colleagues, church leaders. Mary did not make this journey alone. None of the people in *The Butterfly Diaries* made their journeys alone. Everyone needs people to stand beside them. Mary wishes she had reached out sooner; building relationships with supportive people made all the difference. Having professional support can help our friends and family feel a bit less scared about what we are going through.

Understand where the despair of our loved ones comes from: Mary says *“In our times of brokenness we often can’t see the despair of those who love us. It is not a despair of sadness but one of hope – my husband believed in who he saw me to be and it caused him distress that I denied being that person he knew I could be.”* Being suicidal is really hard. Loving someone who is suicidal is really hard too – but that does not mean our loved ones are better off without us, it means just the opposite; they need us and are afraid of what will happen if we leave. We all need people we can lean on, including the people who care about us. Part of Mary’s recovery journey involved allowing her loved ones to use their own supports to help them cope with the hard parts of sharing her journey.

Find our purpose in life: When we have a purpose, we can get through anything. For Mary, ultimately her recovery journey was about *“finding my purpose in life – my reasons for being here and being alive.”*

SEAN'S RECOVERY TIPS



Let go of trying to be perfect: There were times in Sean's life when others treated his failures, mistakes, distress and difficulties like they were signs he was not good enough. Sean got the sense he had to be perfect to be acceptable to others. For Sean it was also important that he was acceptable (and perfect) to God. Trying to be perfect makes everything we do seem like it is not good enough. Sean says he needed to learn to accept and celebrate being a person who makes mistakes.

Create a positive relationship with our spirituality: Sean is a spiritual man who had a religious upbringing. It was important to him to live his life in accordance with his spiritual values. Part of his journey involved finding a way of understanding his spirituality that allowed him to be a human being without feeling like he was going against his spiritual beliefs and values.

Connect with people who share our interests and values: Sean was suicidal at a time when the people around him had very different views and values from him. This leaves us with a sense of isolation even if there are people everywhere. Part of Sean's recovery journey was about building positive relationships with people who shared his interests and values.

Connect with the things we value: When Sean was suicidal, life was a lot about doing the things that other people valued, the way he thought they expected him to do them. Part of his recovery journey has been about doing activities that allowed him to connect with the things *he* valued and found meaningful, enjoyable, interesting and important. This meant learning to celebrate and appreciate the small things as he slowly started doing more of the things that would make his life feel valuable to him again.

Eat well: Things got really bad for Sean when he lost his appetite and stopped eating. When we stop eating properly we rob our bodies of the strength it needs to cope well with stress and distress. When we have a lot of stress and distress, we need to nourish our bodies even more than usual, because all that stress uses up so much more energy than being relaxed does. We also need to drink lots of water to help our bodies wash out all the stress hormones (like cortisol) that are building up in our systems and making it hard to think.

ALICE'S RECOVERY TIPS



The desire to live can come in unexpected forms, from unexpected places: Look for glimmers of a future you want to be part of and hold on to them. Alice says we can't change others or the past but we can change how we deal with them and set boundaries so the future can be different.

Think of recovery as an active process: Alice says, waiting for change doesn't get us anywhere. It requires a lot of hard work, talking about the things we want to talk about the least, trying things we have been holding back from, allowing ourselves to feel horrible and connecting with things that interest us or finding things that do.

Learn new coping skills: Alice had to learn a lot of basic coping skills from scratch, so she had some positive and neutral tools to use to improve the moment when she was feeling distressed, instead of self-harm or substance abuse. Alice had help from a therapist, but it took more than five therapists to find the one that clicked.

Find a safe place when it is hard to resist acting on urges: Sometimes, even if we don't feel like being around anyone, the safest place to be is where family or friends are around and we aren't alone. Alice, like many people, acted on her urges when she was alone. Being around other people can keep us safe. Sometimes that safe place is in hospital or respite.

Reach out to the people who can help: Other people might be in a position to offer a more accurate or useful view of things when we are in a negative space. To reach out we need to trust others to help. Alice found a therapist, hospital staff and family helped her. Reaching out for training opportunities helped her develop skills, find a sense of purpose and change the shape of her daily life. Reaching out for information helped her understand what she was going through.

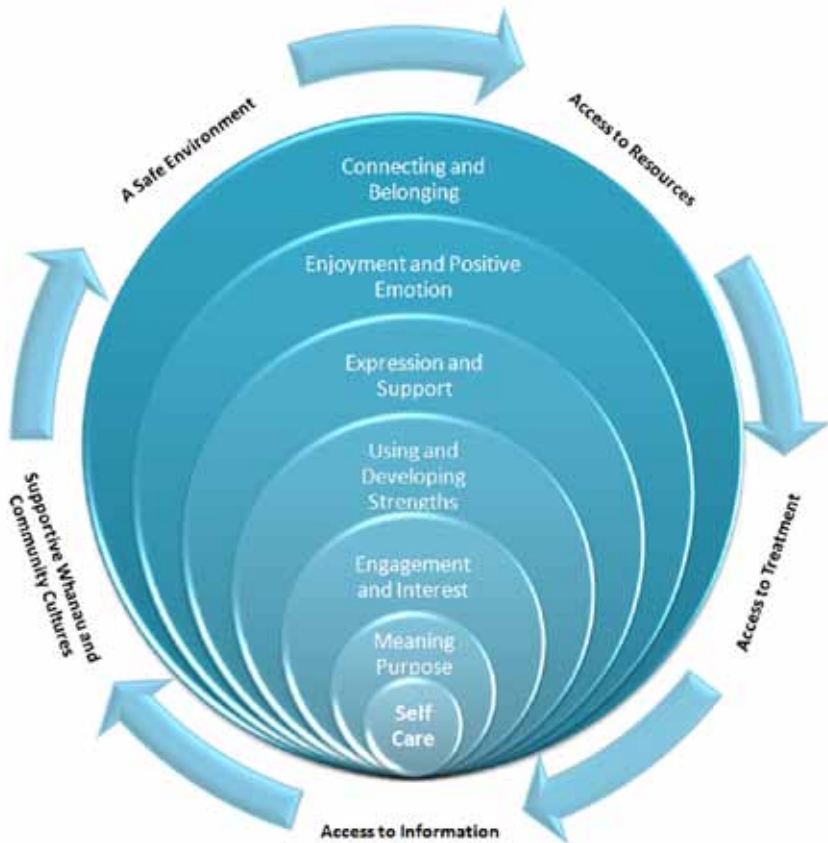
Allow your recovery to take time: It took Alice two years of experimenting for her new ideas and ways of coping to start to feel like they were really hers. Alice says being suicidal was about trying to lose herself. Recovery was about discovering herself in a new light. She says she needed to be stubborn about proving to herself that she could live well.



“I live on Earth at present, and I don’t know what I am. I know that I am not a category. I am not a thing—a noun. I seem to be a verb, an evolutionary process—an integral function of the universe.”

~ Richard Buckminster Fuller

THE ENGAGE MODEL OF MENTAL-HEALTH PROMOTION



When researchers looked for what defines the experience of a meaningfully happy life, they found seven core symptoms of what they termed ‘Flourishing’. People who were meaningfully happy still experienced stress and distress but they also experienced meaning/purpose, enjoyment, interest/engagement, a positive self-view, optimism, resilience and positive relationships. These ‘symptoms’ do not come from no where. The Engage Model breaks them down into the practices that create them and the environments that support them. For example, a sense of meaning and purpose doesn’t just happen, it is something we make by doing meaningful things; enjoyment comes from doing things that are enjoyable and having access to the options we need; a positive self-view comes from the act of caring for ourselves, from using our strengths and from being cared for. We all need to do certain practices and connect with certain environments to experience the symptoms of mental wellbeing. The free resources at www.engagenz.co.nz are designed to help you find what you need to connect with these things and build a life you feel is worth living.

SUPPORT SERVICES | RATONGA TAUTOKO



If the issues raised in this book get you thinking about yourself or someone you know, please reach out for support. You may find the support you need at the other end of one of these help lines.

CASPER

Free phone: 0508 CASPER or 0508 227 737

Lifeline

Free phone: 0800 543 345

Outline

Free phone: 0800 OUTLINE or 0800 688 5463

Tautoko Suicide Helpline

Free phone: 0508 TAUTOKO or 0508 828 865

Youthline

Free phone: 0800376633

Free text: 234

Your Local Crisis Team

Every community in New Zealand has a Crisis Team who are available to respond to people in a mental-health crisis. If you or someone you know is at risk of hurting themselves, call your local Crisis Team.

Emergency Services

If you or someone you know is underway with a suicide attempt, call 111 and ask for the Ambulance, or if weapons are involved, ask for the police. Keep in mind that in mental-health situations, the police are there to keep the person safe, not investigate them for anything. You can even call 111 from a cell phone that has no credit on it.

There are a range of services available in your community that can provide ongoing support.

Your Local GP

Your local GP doctor can refer you to the help you need if you tell them what you are going through. They can link you in with psychiatrists, psychologists, counsellors, support workers and the funded options.

The Community Resources Directory



Find contact details for all the different forms of help, support and connection you might need, including how to find your local Crisis Team, and how to access free therapy, in The Community Resources Directory on the Engage Aotearoa website.

www.engagenz.co.nz

The Coping Kete



Find over 100 different strategies for coping with distress and improving the moment in The Coping Kete on the Engage Aotearoa website.

The Coping Kit Smartphone App is coming soon. Receive updates from The Coping Kete to your phone, search the archive, build a 'Test Kit', schedule practice-point reminders and save your favourites to your 'Personal Coping Kit'. Use the 'Coping Shortcut Button' to instantly display a random favourite in moments of stress and distress.

www.engagenz.co.nz/copingkete

