

Event Report

Promoting & Destigmatising Mental Health Marking International Survivors of Suicide Loss Day 2021

We marked International Survivors of Suicide Loss Day (also known as Survivor Day) on Saturday, November 20th 2021 with two events, which were detailed on afsp.org, and the Dick Vet and DVSU Facebook pages.

Online reflection

On the evening of Thursday 18th November at 7.30pm, the University's Chaplain and Glen Cousquer led an online reflection and spoke contemplatively and sensitively about the benefits of acknowledging suicide and of moving from trauma denial to trauma awareness. Our key theme was the concept of 'home' and 'belonging', and we shared several poems and readings. With permission from the attendees, the reflection was recorded. Upon completion of the recording, we engaged in an unrecorded open discussion. Rosie Allister discussed the work of VetLife, and a rich dialogue was had between student representatives and Harriet Harris about creating a regular Chaplain-led 'open mic' event to encourage student discussions about mental health.

Comments offered during the evening which we feel reflect the success of this gathering include *'I'd like to speak into the void now'*, and *'I feel less alone'*.

Visual installation and charitable fundraising



Between 19th-22nd November, we invited members of the Easter Bush community to hang solar lanterns of remembrance on the trees between the Small Animal Hospital and the Teaching Building. Fifty lanterns were purchased and 32 were hung from the trees; 48 were collected back and stored for future use.

No feedback was sought for this initiative, but many comments were received by Kelly Blacklock and Glen Cousquer (email and in person), including:

'Just wanted to quickly write and say what a lovely idea and thank you for organizing this event.'
'I think this is a thoughtful and symbolic way to try to encourage more openness to talk about those we may have lost or those who are feeling overwhelmed especially following.....'
'thank you for making....the voice of so many who either wouldn't or couldn't...'
'This is a great initiative. Thank you'.

We received several requests from staff and students to make the lanterns a permanent installation.

Participants were invited to make donations towards VetLife and the Samaritans, and £137 was raised. Several donors left personal messages to commemorate a loved one.

The lanterns were very difficult to photograph due to the high ambient light around HfSA, but are shown here:

