

CASE STUDY: BLANK PAGE SUMMIT ON SUICIDE

Mary Victor O'Reeri lost two brothers to suicide. Although devastated, she was not destroyed. Instead, she and her father, Stephen Victor Senior, decided it was time for change.

In July 2009, Ms O'Reeri's home community of Billard, four kilometres from the community of Beagle Bay in the Kimberley, convened the Blank Page Summit on Suicide. Almost 150 people from all over Australia – including the Federal Minister for Indigenous Affairs, Jenny Macklin, Western Australian Chief Justice Wayne Martin and Western Australian Coroner, Alastair Hope – attended in an effort to stop high levels of suicide among Indigenous people.

In 2008, Coroner Hope's report into the deaths of 22 Indigenous men and women exposed the conditions and circumstances that contributed to the suicides of Indigenous people in the Kimberley. It helped to produce the call to action that led to the Summit.

Arising from the powerful work of the Summit over four days, Stephen Victor Senior, Mary Victor O'Reeri and members of the Billard Aboriginal Community invited others to join them in a call for action. This call for action comprised these key messages:

- to create suicide-proof communities in the Kimberley
- to train families to be families
- to encourage self-care through staged support

These strategies aim to protect individuals at immediate risk of suicide as well as to address the phenomenon of 'slow suicide', a gradual retreat into despair that stems from a persistently low quality of life.

The Australian and Western Australian Governments have committed to actions in response to the summit. Many of these measures will be advanced through the four Kimberley communities – Beagle Bay, Ardyaloon, Fitzroy Crossing and Halls Creek – that are priority communities under the Council of Australian Governments' National Partnership on Remote Service Delivery.

In September 2009, the Western Australian Government officially launched its Suicide Prevention Strategy with a commitment of \$13 million. The strategy requires all state agencies to make suicide prevention a priority and to work on a coordinated response. A new Western Australian Ministerial Council for Suicide Prevention will coordinate state wide initiatives for suicide prevention and identify communities and locations requiring additional support.

Through the Remote Service Delivery National Partnership, the governments are seeking to work with communities to improve the quality of life for Indigenous people in the region. Among other measures, this includes the introduction of income management and establishment of children and family centres in Halls Creek and Fitzroy Crossing. In addition, Indigenous Parenting Support Services will be established in the four priority Kimberley communities.