

**WORLD SUICIDE PREVENTION DAY  
St John of God Heritage Centre  
Broome WA**

**SPEECH BY MARY VICTOR O'REERI**

**Friday 9<sup>th</sup> September 2011**

**Good morning everyone.**

**(Acknowledgement of Traditional owners)**

**We've marched today because we want to stop what is happening to our people.**

**We want to [prevent ongoing suicides](#).**

**We know that [one death](#) by suicide is [one death too many](#).**

**As some of you may know, our family lost two boys – my brothers Stevo and Goodie – to suicide quite a few years ago now.**

**As a family, our challenge was to move from 'who's next' to 'never again'.**

**In recent years we have been bringing people together at our community of Billard on the Dampier Peninsula to tackle the problem of ongoing suicides.**

**We've called these gatherings "Blank Page Summits" - we start with a [blank page](#), with fresh and open minds, to really drill down into how we can prevent suicide from becoming a way of life.**

**In 2009 at the [first Blank Page Summit](#), we went deeply into suicide, we asked ourselves the most basic question–**

**[Why are our people killing themselves?](#)**

**[What is the epidemic of suicides by our young people really about?](#)**

**In 2011 at the [Blank Page Summit Youth Mob](#), we explored the question:**

**[Who prevents suicide?](#)**

**These questions apply to the whole of Australia.**

**As you may know, suicide is the [leading cause of death](#) for men and women under the age 34 years in Australia today.**

Friends, today as we gather here with suicide as our focus, I believe we know some deep truths within ourselves.

All is not good in our families, in our communities and in our liarn.

We need to restore the **foundation of family life**.

Family will always be the cornerstone of our lives.

When families break down, when families become unsafe, we lose the most fundamental and precious elements of life – that is love, protection, sharing and rock solid support in times of need and distress.

Turning to our **communities**, whether it's Broome town or across the Kimberley, we are very focused on our country, what it means to us to have access to our land and to have housing and facilities in our communities.

But again there is a deeper question-

Are we creating **livable communities**?

What is the value of a house if it isn't a home?

Are our communities friendly for young people?

These are not questions for government.

Nor for service providers.

We aren't powerless people with no choices.

The ball is in our court about how we live, how we communicate, how we raise our families.

So a livable community is one where all the generations can live in safety and in cooperation.

And where people can resolve their differences.

A livable community is also a place where young people are valued.

The third point is a simple question-

**Who prevents suicide?**

We are in deep water with suicides by young people.

The statistics aren't going down.

In the Kimberley there have been over 20 suicides in the last twelve months or so.

This must make us stop and think deeply as individuals.

To be prepared to renovate:

- ourselves
- our attitude towards young people
- our attitude towards our living and working environments
- our approach to every stage of intervention from prevention through to early intervention, right up to postvention

When we look into **service delivery**, there are real risks associated with ticking boxes.

This includes the trend of building organisations for the sake of building organisations.

Today on the occasion of our Community March, at the time of World Suicide day, I urge us all to have the courage to-

- lay a foundation for young people
- create livable communities
- renovate ourselves, our attitude and our environments

and lastly,

- to lift the standards in service delivery, to stop the rot in organisations and collaborate for the good of the end-users

As people who have live in paradise, who have so many close relationships and kinship ties, we have a wellspring of love and goodness naturally flowing if we can just tap into it and be fair dinkum together.

This attitude can save the lives of our young people.

Our families and communities need human leadership.

We can talk about policies, have many noble plans, invest a lot of money in programs – all that is well meaning.

But the real work is in the ‘tiny dots’ – the families, the outstations, the communities, the suburbs – where it’s the hardest to penetrate. Only through taking responsibility in our tiny dot can those plans and programs come alive and bear fruit.

The ‘dots’ need leaders, the ‘dots’ need advocates, the ‘dots’ need us to care.

**Can I remind you of a well known saying – I don't know who first said it – but it really applies in our lives as Indigenous people needing to break through to get a better quality of life.**

**It goes like this – “the silence of the good people is worse than the action of the bad people”.**

**Let's be clear here. By maintaining the silence, we become perpetrators of those destructive behaviours. Governments and service providers will never be able to resolve the deep issues in the 'dots'. However they can do so much more when **we** are organised in our thoughts, able to communicate and ready and willing to act at the right time in the right way.**

**It's in our hands to decide whether we want to create livable communities where generations of people can live happily ever after.**

**Thank you.**