

### **Impact of despair through compounding grief**

People regularly attend sorry business camps and funerals (often one after the other) and, as cultural practice requires, family members avoid referring to deceased people by name. Loss piles on loss before any resolution can be achieved.

The effect of suicide on individuals and communities is devastating. Not only is the person lost to the family but so is all of their potential. In addition, there is enormous stigma around suicide in communities and this complicates grief resolution. Guilt is complicated by the blame and payback which are the norm in communities. Fear engendered by payback combined with a feeling of guilt can be toxic for vulnerable family members, siblings and friends increasing the potential for copy-cat suicides. Copy-cat suicides do occur, and have led clinicians to negotiate with elders to limit or defer cultural payback processes in order to prevent further suicides.

Everyone in community has been exposed to suicide. Threats of suicide have become normalised. Children play at suicide. Young people frequently threaten to kill themselves for what appear to be trivial or manipulative reasons- because they weren't given \$5, because someone took an article of clothing. 'Sometimes my granddaughter ask for anything, and always 'I'll hang myself', that's what she saying.' Some of these threats, albeit triggered by a minimal issue, result in life-threatening or permanently damaging suicide attempts. Countless stories involve rescuing someone from hanging.

The normalisation of suicide can mean that people don't report attempts or threats because they do not treat the event as anything exceptional. People consider nothing can be done about it, and again, don't see any reason to report.

In the central APY lands in South Australia in the 10 months following a sequence of 6 suicides, the clinic followed up 84 suicide attempts. When resources dictated that clients should be brought to the clinic rather than clinicians searching for people who had run off into the bush, the numbers of attempts coming to the notice of the clinic fell. Despite this, in the year to November 2009, there were 53 attempts serious enough to be brought to the attention of the clinic.

NPYWC notes other significant inquiries that have provided recommendations to reduce the level of suicide on the Lands including:

- Inquests by the State Coroner in SA after the inquests in 2002 and 2004.
- Inquiry into Response by Government Agencies to Complaints of Family Violence and Child Abuse in Aboriginal Communities" known as The Gordon Report 2005
- 'Little Children are Sacred Report' released in June 2007
- Commission of Inquiry Report (Children On The APY Lands) 2008
- Inquest into the death of Kunmanara Forbes, 2009 by the NT Coroner