

TRANSCRIPT for Series 3, Episode 4: It Just Works

Introduction

Welcome to *A World Where LivingWorks*, stories of science and survival. Bringing together our heads and our hearts, to build a suicide safer world.

This podcast is brought to you by LivingWorks, a network of local suicide first aid trainers in your community and communities around the world. Visit livingworks.net to find out how you can play your part in suicide prevention.

Kim Borrowdale, host: You're listening to *A World Where LivingWorks* and I'm your host Kim Borrowdale.

First, I'd like to acknowledge Traditional Owners of the beautiful lands wherever you're listening.

I'd also like to acknowledge everyone out there who has been impacted by suicide, the pain it brings to our lives, but also the desire to make positive change, for all of us to live well.

Today I'm talking again with Richard Ramsay, co-founder of LivingWorks.

This is the fourth episode in season three of *A World Where LivingWorks*, a season focused on learning about the history and evolution of their groundbreaking suicide first aid training practices, now being taught around the world.

We know LivingWorks today as a global leader in suicide intervention. Thousands of trainers in workplaces and communities around the world teaching gold class suicide first aid programs like the two-day ASIST workshop, the half day safeTALK suicide alert helper workshop and now the 90- minute online interactive introduction to suicide first aid, LivingWorks Start. Programs that have been endorsed in more than 50 peer reviewed journals around the world. That have informed international policy and are implemented everywhere from schools to military bases, hospitals to sports clubs and everything in between.

In the last episode we talked about how people really gravitated to the ASIST model of suicide intervention skills training when it was developed with Richard saying, it just worked.

Today we'll talk a little more about the evidence behind that program and others developed by LivingWorks since. They are often referred to as the gold standard in suicide intervention skills training and you can see a full list of ever increased published papers and studies on their website – with more being added by research teams and implementers in diverse settings around the world each day. Let's learn a little bit more some of the key research from Richard's perspective.

Hello again Richard

Richard Ramsay, guest: Hello Kim, great to be back talking with you.

KB:

If I was to say, here are the top three, you know pieces of research that show this works in practice, what would you direct me towards?

RR:

Well the big one is proof that it works with those that receive the intervention, and that's been one of our challenges it's relatively easy to study those who have been trained and have they learned the training and hear from them that says, yeah I tend to use it

KB:

Yep and I've retained it

RR:

And that they've retained it but we have no observable evidence of them actually doing it and then finding out from the people that received it, whether or not it made a difference, the only place that you can easily do that kind of research in this work is with crisis lines because you can do call monitoring and you can listen in on what's going on between the helper and the caller and that's what happened at the NSPL in the United States, they were able to get a large research grant with top notch researchers from Columbia University to do what turned out to be overall a seven year study, it cost two million dollars to demonstrate that those people trained in ASIST compared to people trained in something else, in a crisis line, saw better results in terms of reduced suicidality, reduced depression, reduced anxiety, I think it was and an increase in hope, it's really the only study that's been done in our field of that kind

KB:

And focused on the receiver not on the helper

RR:

Yeah, yeah, the emphasis is on the receiver and the only other place that you can get this kind of research is if you are doing clinical work and you were measuring what happened to a client, let's say, that was one of our big hopes for Suicide to Hope because it was aimed for the clinician kind of person and if the research really gets going on it then you will be measuring or observing those who are receiving the intervention, that's the big research.

Then the other one that's really quite exciting is conglomerate of researchers focused on testing, examining the ASIST or safeTALK and Suicide to Hope and it's a sustained kind of research group over time and that's what happened at the Georgia State University in their teachers college under the leadership of Laura Shannonhouse, and she's developed a cohort of graduate students, who have graduated and they've got jobs at other Universities and they're carrying on this research she did a dissertation for her PhD on ASIST training and she was an ASIST trainer and mentored by our late design and development leader Phil Rogers and she joined the Georgia State University in 2016, she's five years into developing this cohort of young researchers and they've been primarily focused on education, school research but they've now just branched into getting a large grant to look at how people trained in ASIST, I think and maybe safeTALK too, who are meals on wheels volunteers for shut-ins and older people and...

KB:

That's a cool demographic to train

RR:

Yeah, exactly and it's been a real challenge for them to get a toehold because when they first wanted to apply for a grant, the grant reviewers would say, what's the evidence that this works with older people, and you had to come back and say, well we don't know yet

KB:

That's why we need your help

RR:

That's exactly it but their reaction was, you don't get our help until you can give me some of that basic proof

KB:

The aged old research dilemma

RR:

That's right and so they got by that barrier, and they ended up with a \$700,000 grant and now they have a \$1.3 million grant, it's opening the wedge, into a whole new population space

KB:

That's fantastic

RR:

That's pretty exciting and so those are my favorite research stories now in terms of hardnosed researcher saying, show me the proof

(7:20)

KB:

Well I just know, you know, as a trainer myself, other trainers around the world sometimes you believe in what you're doing and what you're teaching and the context you're working in and often you know, you're a member of the community that you're serving, so you know it intimately, but to really understand the evidence behind the model and where its come from, it's just reassuring to be able to say that, in a nutshell I think and helpful to hear it from you, from someone whose, you know started it and had all those late night chats with Brian Tanney and others early on to get us to this position.

RR:

I was just going to say, this is another example of this language of long haul and it doesn't matter if you're a COVID survivor and you're into a long haul but it's in this kind of work too, if you're not in it for the long haul, you don't know what sorts of things you might have started years ago are now catching fire and having some good results because you end up being only able to see where you started

KB:

Yeah true and committing to it, so that you don't chop and change, I like you collected you know experiences from trainers on the ground along the way but didn't shift things too radically in one direction or another until you actually reviewed what was happening and had a look at that as a collection of stories and evidence I guess, that you can then inform the next level of the shift in your approach.

RR:

And we were able to do some things along the line, if an Australian trainer or a group of trainers said this is how we think it would work better here, we would look at it in terms of some other cultures and we would end up with some cases getting feedback that said, well it doesn't work over here and/or it does and eventually we would end up going back to Australia and say to the trainers, well actually, if you guys want to implement this go ahead because your feedback says it works we believe it but don't take it to Singapore or don't take it to somewhere else because we've checked it out and they don't seem to like it quite as well and there are other cases that are like, yeah everybody thinks this is super

KB:

That's a universal learning we can take on

RR:

Yeah, and then that's when we go back into the rewriting of the manual then we can say, this part of the manual came from Australia, it was the Australian trainers that really made this come alive and something that all of us should do now

KB:

That's cool

RR:

That's the other thing we found that was exciting over time is to keep that local community development philosophy and principle so that people would take ownership. In fact, originally we used to say, when you go back to your community having gone through a two day ASIST training, we don't want you to go there and tell the world that you are now trained in ASIST or in LivingWorks training, we want you to take it inside you in such a way that you really end up saying, this is what I've learned about suicide intervention training and this is what I'm sharing with my community and then you get people saying it's you that we need to turn to and it's not these experts somewhere down the road and...

KB:

Someone they trust endorses this approach

RR:

Yeah, we really wanted them to take on ownership and that's a little different than the modern day evolution of branding and marketing we weren't trying to brand LivingWorks, market experts will say, well you've made a mistake, you should have been because people have to know that this is LivingWorks stuff

KB: But your trainer brands are well known

RR: Yeah so who knows what's the best way to market or get the message out and there's lots of different ways

KB:

A few decades on, do you still see the heart and essence the sort of ethos of the values that you embedded from the start, do you still see them being embodied today because you've gone from you know, a couple of you training, two by two in California for example, to something like, thousands of trainers and around 2 ½ million people worldwide who've been trained, do you still feel a sense of the same values and ethos coming through it?

RR:

Yeah, actually we do, for me personally I get from being an observer of the Facebook kind of messages. for those who sometimes will post a little bit about the evaluation or somebody's story has been given back to them and said, you know you have made a big difference in my life, all of that tells me, not in a research way but that those original beliefs are still there and they hold true and we've actually envisioned, of course, I'm out of it now, it's really a new era, as far as LivingWorks is concerned and we're faced with all of the challenges of COVID as to what it's going to do or not do, can we as an approach helping survive it enough so that we're going to come out of that crisis at another end and be better for it in the long run, and the future could look very different than it did 30 years ago or 30 years from now, what it looks like today and you know we may be into virtual training, we may be into a lots of different kinds of ways of training but I think after close to 40 years that those basic principles are holding and there's no reason why they shouldn't hold for another 40 years, unless something really drastic starts to come forward.

If I go back to what I was saying very early on Brian Tanney said he was a community psychiatrist and it turned out that he was, that notion of grounding for the community is fundamental and that's what we needed and it was a mixture of Brian coming from a medical background with a community emphasis, I come from a social work background where it was the social part that was really the big challenge and then the other two founders were both psychologists so they had a different perspective as well and one was a deep thinker person in Bill Lang and one who always prided himself in being able to write the curriculum and bring that manualisation forward without a lot of fanfare that he did it, although if we were in an informal conversation or kind of a close door conversation he was known lots of time to, say, just remember who wrote this thing, it was me so it wasn't that he was, if you want totally ego free, he really prided himself in what he did and he really was a key part of the development team.

Brian Tanney and I were, we were more of the external face, we were the ones that were join IASP or the American Association, we were the ones that would present papers or publish articles, we were the ones that sometimes would be in your face at a conference

(14:51)

RR:

And Roger Tierney, he was that kind of extrovert too but he was magic in the training room, he had so much faith in all the participants, it didn't matter who they were, he would spend time with them and encourage them and say you can do it, I remember one time we were doing, we were actually doing a demonstration training with prisoners, in a federal penitentiary and they took 40 of these prisoner people and they wouldn't tell us what kind of sentences they had, but some of them were pretty serious and they put us in the chapel and left us, no guards, no nothing and we were there for two days

KB:

Oh wow

RR:

Yeah, they just left...

KB:

Faith in the chapel

RR:

And we were convinced that these guys would say that wow I've got two days off from the regular routine of this place, I'm just going to put up my feet and they can babble away, whatever they want to do.

Well it turned out that they were some of the best students that we've ever had, they were keen, they were interested, they wanted to learn but one young guy a street person kind of guy and he was kind of in and out of jail several times in his life and he was illiterate and he became attached to Roger and it was basically read this page to me, tell me what it says and he and Roger were sort of off to the side, so the whole world didn't know what was going on but that's the kind of guy Roger was, he would find a way to make some time for you and to encourage you to keep on trying. When he died in 1997, the year after we got back from Australia, we started to get messages from people, like trainers basically, from all over saying, you guys changed my life, some of them said, you know I'd been dead ended in my job for years and I know I should get out do something else, do what I really want to do but I was chicken or I didn't have the nerve but I've got to tell you that's what you did for me, I'm now in this new job or I'm doing this or doing that.

We weren't getting any of that feedback on any kind of regular basis until Roger died and then it started to pour out and people started to say, this is what this has done for me and I want to thank, a lot of times it was, I want to thank Roger and the rest of you for what you've done but the impact has gone way beyond just teaching us some intervention skills. We never would have understood that which is another way that in recent years talking about, well if you go through the training for trainers and you don't get out there and do training then it's been a waste of time and money and the old guard is sort of saying, well I don't think so.

We don't know what that trainer is doing now that's different than what they did before they were trained and how they are applying that in some other aspect of their life, we don't think any of this is a lost sort of investment.

KB:

Not at all, you always hear from people saying how it fundamentally changes the way that I interact with people or speak to people in my life or how I listen to the words of what's behind the words when I'm in a conversation with anyone, yeah, I'd agree, even if someone doesn't go onto do a training session that's one more person in

their community whose reflected on their attitudes and shifted or made changes or maybe made no changes but they're more aware now in their community.

That's all the time we have today, Richard, thank you again for talking with us on today's episode.

RR: Thank you Kim. Great to talk with you today.

KB: I hope you've enjoyed hearing about the start of LivingWorks from the perspective of one of its founders. Join me for more conversation with Richard in the next episode.

Outro

If you've enjoyed this episode, we'd love you to subscribe on the usual channels, write a 5-star review and, most importantly, share it with your family, friends, and colleagues on social media tagging LivingWorks.

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A reminder that if this episode has brought up tough emotions for you talk to a trusted family member, friend, or local support service about how you are feeling. Visit livingworks.net and click on Find Safety for international crisis services we are there to help you.