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End Youth Suicide Week: Queensland advocate calls for increased peer support

A young man from Roma who once contemplated suicide due to high school bullying is now advocating for more peer to peer support for young people on the national stage.

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A Queensland man who contemplated taking his own life after suffering high school bullying is leading the charge against youth suicide, taking his voice all the way to the Health Minister in Canberra.

Brisbane resident Luke Mitchell grew up in Roma, Southwest Queensland, and contemplated ending his life after retaliating to high school bullies and feeling failed by and mistrusting of the adults around him.

“I was very depressed and angry, after retaliating, my school at the time said ‘either you’re suspended, or you go on this program called Youth Insearch.’”

Youth Insearch is a not-for-profit organisation delivering trauma-informed, peer-to-peer and lived experience support in conjunction with traditional clinicians.

With the support of Youth Insearch Mr Mitchell developed higher self-esteem, resilience and a sense of purpose.

He is now one of the first in his family to have ever completed year 12 and has completed over five certifications.

He was also one of seven inspiring young people who hosted a Parliament House event to acknowledge End Youth Suicide Week.

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Luke Mitchell, prior to speaking on the front lawn of Parliament House, behind CEO at Youth Insearch Stephen Lewin. Photo: Supplied

Suicide was found to be the leading cause of death for 15 to 17-year-olds in Queensland while 20 children took their own lives between 2021-2022, according to the Queensland Family and Child Commission.

At the event, he spoke to politicians and media about solutions to the nation's alarming suicide rates, and asked why a trauma informed, lived experience peer approach is currently not part of the government model.

"We've been saying that 'this is what's missing in our mental health systems', we're not saying the mental health system is broken, but this part of it is missing," he said.



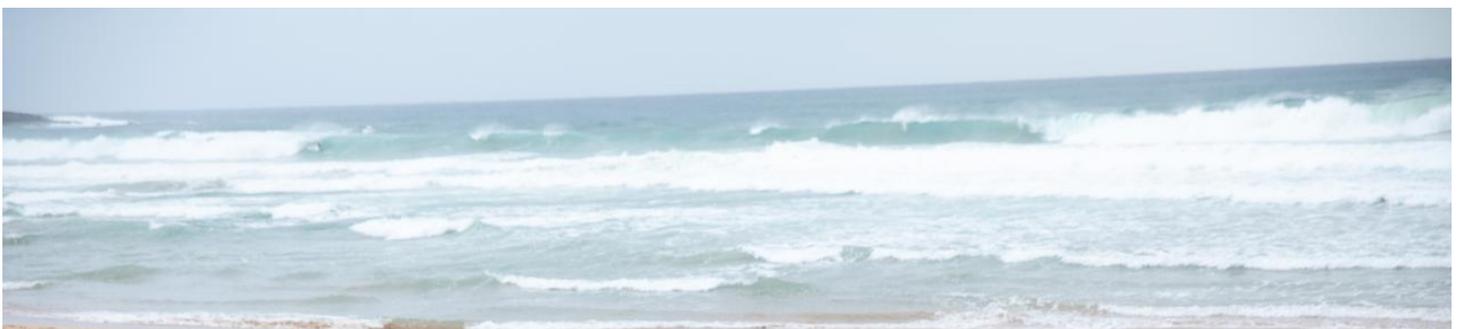
Luke Mitchell behind fellow Youth Insearch activists Joshua Camilleri, Kate Hornick, Courtney Seach, and Nelani Botha on the front lawn of Parliament House, Canberra. Photo: Supplied

He said that being in Canberra gave him and the other young people to directly advocate to MP's like Health Minister Mark Butler and Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Assistant Minister Emma McBride.

“They were receptive and understanding that a lived experience peer workforce, is where we need to go and it does need to happen.”

End Youth Suicide week commenced with a vigil on the Northern Beaches of Sydney on Monday to acknowledge the lives lost to suicide, before the advocates went on to Canberra to address government.

The advocates then made their way to Canberra for a breakfast briefing to politicians and decision makers followed by a media conference on the front lawn of Parliament House supported an instillation of 402 blue heart balloons representing each young Australian aged 15-24 who took their own life in 2021.





Luke Mitchell (back row, 4th from the left) at the End Youth Suicide Week breakfast briefing in Parliament House. Youth Insearch advocates addressed decision makers on the importance of supporting a lived experience peer workforce to supplement the current system. Photo: Supplied.

Now he has urged the federal government for nationwide implementation of the model of support offered by Youth Insearch.

“We have actually rolled out a lived experience peer workforce with some other funding they gave us last year, it’s working really well and we are ready to help the government to roll this out into our entire nation.”

“I think it’s a collaboration of funding and discussion, as well as making sure the peer workforce is supported, because they are young people who have survived their own issues taking on supporting other young people.”