

THROWING OUT A LIFELINE



*“WHEN IN DOUBT,
MAKE THE CALL.”*

It's one of the most important numbers you will ever need to know. But what really happens when you call 13 11 14?

Lifeline's vision for an Australia free of suicide fuels their commitment to ensure that help is at the end of the line 24/7.

Michelle Possingham, CEO of Lifeline Gippsland, takes us behind the scenes of this essential help line.

WARNING: This story contains themes of suicide. If this raises issues for you, call Lifeline on 13 11 14

How does Lifeline work?

Lifeline Gippsland is part of a network of 41 national centres delivering services to Australians in crisis wherever they might be. At the heart of what we do is the national 13 11 14 crisis telephone line. Most people have heard of Lifeline because almost every distressing news article or media segment encourages people who have been impacted to reach out to 13 11 14 for support. What many people don't know, is that we also undertake a range of activities in the community aimed at promoting good mental health, reducing stigma and encouraging people to reach out. We are driven by our purpose of supporting our fellow Gippslanders to be resilient and suicide-safe.

Who works at Lifeline Gippsland?

Lifeline Gippsland has a small, but dedicated team of paid staff. We are lucky to have over 150 volunteers, who undertake a broad range of activities. We have a passionate team of volunteers who answer 13 11 14 calls, called Crisis Supporters. What many people don't realise is that we are only partially funded, and we rely on income generated by seven op shops that are located across the Gippsland Region to keep our service going. Our team of retail and warehouse volunteers generously give their time to help to raise the funds that support the phone line. Some have been volunteering for over 30 years!

When should people call Lifeline?

When in doubt, make the call, it's as simple as that.

We encourage people to have 13 11 14 saved to their contact list, either for themselves, or so they can pass on the number to people they encounter who may be in need of support.

I think a lot of people believe they can only call Lifeline if they are feeling suicidal, but, "we want people to call on their bad days, not only their worst days." Our crisis supporters are there to listen and to sit with

you in your distress or pain. Feeling heard is powerful - and can save someone's life.

We are also available to talk if you are concerned about someone in your life. You can call direct and be one-to-one with a crisis supporter who can help you to decide how you can best support that person. If they identify that the person is at risk of immediate harm, they will advise you to call Triple 000 and get a response immediately.

"WE WANT PEOPLE TO CALL ON THEIR BAD DAYS, NOT ONLY THEIR WORST DAYS."

Calling is courageous

Just as we all have physical health, we all have mental health, and there are times when we need to reach out to someone to get physical or mental health back on track. It's a natural part of the human experience to have times when we feel down, anxious or overwhelmed. If we can come together as a community to support each other, we will have a safer community and ultimately communities that are suicide-free. I encourage everyone to access one of the many training options available across Gippsland, many of these are free, or offered at low cost.

Of the over eight people we lose every day to suicide, six are male. Suicide is a complex issue, but research tells us that one of the reasons we lose so many men is because males are less likely to tell someone when they're struggling. Years and years of harmful messages like: "boys don't cry" and "it's weak to speak" have had a hugely negative impact on help-seeking. We're making progress, but as a community we still need to look for ways we can change the narrative and encourage men to seek help when they are doing it tough.

IF WE CAN COME TOGETHER AS A COMMUNITY TO SUPPORT EACH OTHER, WE WILL HAVE A SAFER COMMUNITY



It takes a lot of courage to pick up the phone and call and to say you are struggling or to tell someone in your life that you're doing it tough, especially the first time. We want to help people to understand that it's a courageous thing to ask for help, not a sign of weakness.

What happens when I make the call?

The first thing you hear when you call 13 11 14, apart from the privacy statement, is: "This is Lifeline, how many I help you?" You will be connected with a highly trained volunteer who is there because they truly care. You will be met with warmth and compassion, and without judgement. It's important to know that all calls made to Lifeline are entirely private and confidential.

Can I text rather than call?

You absolutely can! We offer a text service between 6pm-12pm. Our text service was evaluated earlier this year, and it revealed that 42% of people who made contact by text wouldn't have otherwise contacted us. We are committed to supporting people in the way they prefer.

Lifeline fast facts:

Over 1 million calls every year
Nationwide service
Offers support, referrals and advice for you and others
Fully confidential
24/7 service

Top tips

Put 13 11 14 in your phone contacts.
When in doubt, make the call.
Asking for help is not a weakness
You can call on your bad days, as well as your worst.
Always available for emotional support, not just in times of crisis.
You can call for advice on how to assist someone else.
The people on the end of the phone are highly trained and are there to listen because they care.



Michelle Possingham – CEO Lifeline Gippsland

I am honoured to be in a role where I get to see the best of humanity on a daily basis. Our staff and volunteers are some of the most passionate people I've encountered in my career. The old adage "if you love what you do, you'll never work a day in my life" rings

true. I love what I do, and the people I do it with, so I never feel that I'm working a day in my life, unless the photocopier plays up, then it's work.

Where's your happy place?

I'm really boring! My happy place is binging a great series on Netflix on the couch. I spend more time than I'd like at my desk, so I've been trying to be more active – my other happy place is jogging while listening to my favourite music. If I get the chance to pat a dog on my run (especially a Pug) that is my happiest place!

WHO TO CONTACT

Lifeline 13 11 14
www.lifeline.org.au
Beyond Blue 1300 22 4636
www.beyondblue.org.au
Suicide Call Back Service
1300 659 467
Emergency 000

This article is part of the #storiesstrong suicide prevention campaign which highlights a series of twenty articles developed by a diverse range of people with lived experience of suicide and experts in the field.

Stories Are Strong is an initiative of the **Place-Based Suicide Prevention Trials** project which is jointly funded by the Victorian Department of Health and Human Services and Gippsland PHN.

For more information visit www.gphn.org.au

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Gippsland PHN acknowledges Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people as the traditional owners of country throughout Victoria and their continuing connection to land, sea and community. We pay our respects to them, their cultures and their elders past and present. We also recognise, respect and affirm the central role played in our work by people with lived experience, their families and/or carers. Gippsland PHN is committed to providing inclusive services and work environments where people of all backgrounds, sexualities, genders, cultures, spiritual beliefs, age, bodies and abilities are valued, supported and celebrated.

