



## FROM THE PRESIDENT

### The passing of two telephone helpline pioneers

In recent months suicide prevention workers around the world have mourned the passing of two pioneers in the development of telephone help for suicidal persons, [Chad Varah](#) and [John Kalafat](#). Reverend Varah, the founder of the Samaritan movement, has had a major impact on the development of volunteer-based help for persons in distress. Vanda Scott, who worked with Chad Varah for many years, has written a brief article on his life and work in this IASP News Bulletin. Below, are some brief words about John Kalafat, who is less known outside of North America:

John Kalafat, Ph.D., died suddenly at his home on October 26, 2007 at the age of 65. For over 35 years, John has been an articulate and inspiring spokesperson for the development of quality crisis services for suicidal individuals. John was co-founder and director of the Telephone Counselling Referral Service in Tallahassee, Florida from 1970 to 1977. He published extensively on crisis hotline training approaches and research on outcomes and most recently, with Dr. Madelyn Gould, he conducted ground breaking research on evaluation outcomes of crisis lines in the United States. He was a Professor in the Department of Applied Psychology, Graduate School of Applied and Professional Psychology, Rutgers University, where he taught courses on "systematic observation and interview", "advanced school supervision", and "crisis intervention," and chaired many doctoral dissertations. He was a past President of the American Association of Suicidology and throughout his career has been involved in committees and organisations that promote best practices in crisis intervention and suicide prevention in schools. He was involved in evaluating the Lifeline school-based adolescent suicide prevention programme that has been implemented in several states in the United States. John had the personal qualities of a warm and empathetic colleague who was passionately devoted to his work and research projects. He constantly sought to improve the quality of suicide prevention programmes and insisted on the importance of rigorous training and careful evaluation. He will be sorely missed by his family, colleagues and people involved in suicide prevention around the world, who have grown to appreciate his thoughtful insights on how to improve skills and advance the cause of suicide prevention.

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## Dr Chad Varah - founder of the Samaritans and Befrienders International

The Rev Dr Chad Varah died aged 95 on 8 November 2007. In 1953, Dr Varah founded Samaritans in 1953, "to befriend the suicidal and despairing". Having extended throughout the UK and Ireland, Dr Varah also promoted the same principle internationally through Befrienders International (known as Befrienders Worldwide) which now operates in more than 40 countries. Born in the heart of England in the small town of Barton upon Humber, County of Lincolnshire, in 1911, Edward Chad Varah, the eldest child of nine and the son of an Anglican Church minister founded a worldwide movement of volunteers who are dedicated to offer emotional support to those who are suicidal and in despair. Chad Varah recognised, in the repressed UK in the early 1930s, the extent of confusion and ignorance about many social issues, which were shrouded in taboo. He observed the disturbing way this was, in many cases, the cause of suicide.

Chad Varah read natural sciences at Keble College, Oxford and later studied at the Lincoln Theological College from where he was ordained as a priest into the Church of England. One of his first duties as an assistant curate in 1935 spawned his lifelong commitment to suicide prevention. He officiated at the funeral of a 13 year old girl who was so confused and isolated, believing that she was mortally ill and would die a slow and painful death, that she killed herself. In fact she was experiencing the onset of menstruation. Chad Varah was deeply moved and upset at that suicide and during the next few years he continued to encounter suicidal people in hospitals and within his parish. He was aware of the lack of facilities for the suicidal and that many who were at the brink of killing themselves did not necessarily wish to see a psychiatrist. He believed suicidal people needed a way of being in touch with someone to whom they could talk at any time of day or night that was right for them.

The opportunity arrived to help such people when Chad Varah was appointed as rector to St Stephen Walbrook, the City of London church in which he founded The Samaritans, a volunteer resourced organisation dedicated to befriending those going through emotional distress. In 1953, remembering the young girl and responding to the despair and suicide known to be prevalent in London, Chad Varah advertised in the press and opened the first drop-in centre where emotionally isolated and distressed people were able to come and talk of their despair and suicidal feelings. Such a service or facility at that time was envisaged as a counselling programme but within months he recognised that significant number of people who were in crisis and suicidal had nowhere or no-one to turn to for emotional and psychological support and the majority of visitors wanted to talk to someone who would give them time and space; to whom they could express their deepest most anguished thoughts; to someone who would be prepared to listen, in confidence with acceptance and compassion.

To meet the huge response Dr Varah organised volunteers to talk with those waiting to see him and soon observed interaction between the many and varied callers coming to talk and the lay volunteers who listened empathetically and acceptingly. Professor Brian Mishara states "Chad Varah was unquestionably one of the most important influences in the development of telephone help lines around the world. His dedication and actions have resulted in the saving of countless lives." Today there are now thousands of volunteers in over 40 countries dedicated to giving emotional support to the suicidal as first conceived in the 1930s by the charismatic Dr Chad Varah, CH. CBE. MA.



Chad Varah with the original Samaritans telephone

## The IASP Postvention Task Force

has produced the first of what will be regular newsletters. These newsletters will be emailed to everyone on the Task Force email list, and will be available to IASP members on the IASP website - go to the Task Forces, Postvention - tab.

The news letter editors welcome contributions to the next newsletter - please send to Sean.McCarthy@hse.ie or "Michelle Linn-Gust" michelle@chellehead.com

## The De Risio Award 2008

The World Psychiatric Association (WPA) Section on Suicidology has established a Permanent Award in memory of Prof. Sergio De Risio. This award will be attributed to the best presentation/paper in the field of suicidology performed by young researchers (below 35 years of age) and accepted for a WPA official meeting or Congress.

The next WPA World Congress of Psychiatry will be held in Prague, in September 2008 ([www.wpa-prague2008.cz](http://www.wpa-prague2008.cz)).

For further information about this Award please contact the General Secretary of the WPA Section of Suicidology, Professor Marco Sarchiapone Email: [marco.sarchiapone@gmail.com](mailto:marco.sarchiapone@gmail.com)



Photographs taken at the IASP Congress in Killarney are now available at the photographer's website:

<http://www.macmonagle.com>

To view the photos type **iasp** into the box marked 'proof' at the bottom right hand corner of the screen.



## SYMPOSIUM AND CONFERENCES



### 12th European Symposium on Suicide and Suicidal Behaviour 27th - 30th August 2008 Glasgow - Scotland

The 2nd Announcement is now available at <http://www.hamptonmedical.com/pdf/2008/esssb12/announcement.pdf>  
Registration is now open and closing date for submission of abstracts is 3rd March 2008

### The 41st American Association of Suicidology (AAS) Conference 16 - 19 April 2008 Boston Park Plaza, Boston



[www.suicidology.org/displaycommon.cfm?an=19%20](http://www.suicidology.org/displaycommon.cfm?an=19%20)

### 2008 Conference



Jointly presented by the Canadian Association for Suicide Prevention and Association Québécoise de prévention du suicide  
Quebec City, October 2008

For more information, please check: [www.aqps.info](http://www.aqps.info)

### 3rd Asia Pacific Regional Conference of Suicide Prevention Suicide research and prevention in times of rapid change in Asia. Opportunities and challenges

31 October - 3 November 2008,  
Hong Kong

The 3rd Asia Pacific Regional Conference of the International Association for Suicide Prevention will be held 31 October - 3 November 2008 in Hong Kong. This meeting is organized by the International Association for Suicide Prevention and the HKJC Centre for Suicide Research and Prevention, Faculty of Social Sciences, the University of Hong Kong. A further announcement and call for abstracts will be made before the end of January and will be posted on the conference website at <http://csrp.hku.hk/iasp2008> and on the IASP website <http://www.med.uio.no/iasp/>.

**The deadline for abstract submissions is 30th April 2008.**