

Suicide Prevention in Scottish Agriculture

Josie Barclay, Suicide Prevention Lead, RSABI

I am very proud to have joined a great team at RSABI who provide such valuable support to those working or retired from farming and crofting, as well as those involved in Scottish agriculture.

Having grown up on a family farm in Moray, I understand the challenges faced by farmers and how they can very much impact on mental health, and in my new role with RSABI I am looking forward to taking positive steps to raise awareness and support the mental health needs of Scotland's agricultural communities.

RSABI provides a range of financial, practical and emotional support for people of all ages, including those affected by illness, financial difficulties, accident and bereavement, providing emotional wellbeing support and more. My role focuses specifically on Suicide Prevention in our communities to help raise awareness of mental health needs and to work alongside organisations specialising in suicide prevention in Scotland - many thanks to the Alistair and Margaret Miller Charitable Trust for funding this role.

Free 24/7 Helpline- **0808 1234 555**

Live Webchat via our website: <https://www.rsabi.org.uk/>

E-mail: Helpline@rsabi.org.uk

What we do

A key focus for me will be working in **collaboration** with organisations involved in Suicide Prevention in line with the Scottish Government and COSLA's joint Suicide Prevention Strategy, 'Creating Hope Together'.

We know that farming is a wonderful occupation and lifestyle in many ways, but appreciate the **unique challenges faced by farmers** which are often unpredictable, such as environmental factors, weather, working long hours, cost of living impact and agricultural policy changes.

We aim to **support our agricultural communities** to raise awareness of mental health and suicide by providing information of where to seek support if you are worried about your own well-being or someone else's. We are highlighting a new campaign launched by Suicide Prevention Scotland to support people with how to ask directly, and clearly about suicide, as we know talking about suicide in this way will help to save lives. They have also created a service directory that highlights many of the services available locally and nationally: www.suicideprevention.scot/services



Over the past three years we have worked with former Royal Marines at IED Training Solutions to deliver Mental Health First Aid training and, through that training, there are now **over 900 mental health first aiders** across our communities. This training is to support people to know how to respond if you are concerned someone is struggling and where to encourage them to get further support. If you are interested in undertaking this free training, please find more information and how to sign up via the RSABI website or email mentalhealthtraining@rsabi.org.uk We are thankful for the continued support from NFU Mutual to enable us to deliver this course.

Our hope is to **expand training opportunities** in the coming months to agricultural communities to also include suicide prevention specific training called - Applied Suicide Intervention Skills Training (ASIST) approved by the World Health Organisation. This two-day training course will provide tools to help increase willingness, confidence, and capacity to provide suicide prevention first aid for someone in need.

We are working with the University of Glasgow on a PhD research project aimed at understanding and preventing suicide within Scotland's farming and crofting communities. We are delighted that this three-year project will be supervised by Professor Rory O'Connor, Director of the University's Suicidal Behaviour Research Lab, who is one of the world's leading experts in the field of suicide prevention. This research undertaken by Katie Bryan will investigate the suicide risk in Scottish agriculture, which will help to influence our suicide prevention work taking place and support to shape services, targeted campaigns to support those at risk and for those who have been affected by suicide.

We are encouraged to see the **stigma around mental health reducing**, helped by industry support for initiatives like our #KeepTalking campaign which urges people to look out for each other and make time for those who may be at risk of feeling low or lonely. We feel this is **particularly important for farming communities** as often you can be working alone but we know that the farming community are often the first to offer support for others when they are in need. We would encourage farmers, crofters and anyone working in agriculture to talk with a neighbour, fellow farmer or a relative and by speaking openly helps to support that our mental health is just as important as our physical health.

Our RSABI welfare team can **provide emotional support and counselling support** is available with counsellors we work with that understand the farming sector and we can arrange this quickly if urgent support is needed. You can also access our Thrive App free of charge. This provides access to mental health support including mindfulness and relaxation techniques, there is also an option for live chat with a trained counsellor to access professional support.

In 2024/25, our RSABI welfare team **supported over 2,000 helpline calls** and have identified areas of need for emotional and counselling support, along with practical support, as being the highest areas of need across all ages. This support can include receiving regular emotional support calls,



accessing counselling support and the team can also help with liaising with third party agencies to access funding and support you through difficult times.

There are a range of **financial support options** that our team at RSABI can also provide, such as Help for Heating grants along with assistance with household goods and other items, support and advice around benefit entitlement, debt solutions and employment queries. Our welfare team can talk through the questions or concerns you may have and help you to find out answers and a way forward.

If you are worried about someone you could call our helpline to talk things through and discuss how to approach the situation. You could also suggest that the person you are concerned about calls our free confidential helpline or, with their permission, you could refer someone through our helpline. We can give them a call to find out how best we can support them, which could include accessing things like counselling, financial support or a business review.

RSABI's **Health Hut Initiative** aims to **take good health into the farming community** and encourage those working in the industry to take care of their physical and mental wellbeing. It offers an opportunity, at markets or shows across Scotland, to receive general healthcare checks, and hundreds of blood pressure checks have been taken. With the friendly approach of our Health Hut team built up of nurses and doctors from farming backgrounds, this initiative offers a valuable opportunity to discuss any physical or mental health concerns you may have.

RSABI's free confidential support service is available 24 hours a day, every day of the year, by calling 0808 1234 555 (calls won't show up on phone bills) or through a confidential webchat service, available on RSABI's website www.rsabi.org.uk

If you are struggling with your mental health or are having thoughts of suicide, please reach out for help, speak to someone you trust or call one of these helplines:

- ♥ Samaritans: 116 123 (Available 24/7)
- ♥ NHS 24 mental health hub on: 111 (Available 24/7)
- ♥ Breathing Space: 0800 83 85 87 (Available Monday to Thursday 6pm to 2am. At weekends, open between Friday 6pm and Monday 6am)

If you, or someone you are with, are in an emergency or immediate danger, you should dial 999 right away.

