



Celebrating 60 years

Just over 60 years ago, Wesley Mission's then Superintendent, Rev. Sir Alan Walker invited a small group of friends to his home. Troubled by increasing phone calls from people in distress, including a man who had later taken his own life, Alan Walker invited the group to find a way with him they could ensure all calls for help would be answered.

After some time and much prayer, the answer came to them. They would create a centralised 24/7 telephone crisis support service, and they would call it Lifeline.

This commemorative anniversary edition newsletter celebrates 60 years since the first Lifeline call was taken. You'll read stories from some of the people who, like you, help make up our wonderful community - our telephone Volunteer Crisis Supporters, our donors and supporters as well as people who have called Lifeline themselves in times of crisis.

Alan Walker saw a need 60 years ago and responded to it with a compassion and pragmatism that continues to underpin Lifeline activity across the globe today. Thanks to his vision and legacy, millions of people across the world have experienced connection in the face of isolation and hope in place of despair.

At Wesley Mission, we've continued to play a leading role in Alan Walker's movement to prevent suicide deaths in Australia. Our work is ongoing, and commitment is resolute. Our steadfast vision is a nation that is free from suicide altogether, and as such, our programs are designed to ensure that every person has access to the help they need when they need it.

Our landmark Lifeline Sydney & Sutherland centre is currently answering record numbers of calls. Further increases are expected this year, with cost-of-living and financial stress now impacting people's mental health¹. We're committed to ensuring we have enough trained Volunteer Crisis Supporters so that each call for help can be answered, as Alan Walker and his congregation members envisioned all those years ago.



"As the city of Sydney grew, many were languishing on the sidelines of society and the turning point came one Sunday night in Sydney, just after midnight, when the telephone rang at our home in Roseville.

"From a desperate call, the tragedy of suicide and a helplessness that was felt by many... the amazing work of Lifeline was born." Sir Alan Walker.

1. State of the Nation in Suicide Prevention, Suicide Prevention Australia, September 2022



Do all the good you can because every life matters

Lifeline Sydney & Sutherland milestones...



The origins 1961 - 62

The concept of Lifeline is conceived at a special meeting called by then Superintendent of Wesley Mission (known then as the Central Methodist Mission) Rev. Sir Alan Walker in response to rising numbers of crisis calls. Planning begins.

The launch

The Lifeline Centre, Darlinghurst opens 16 March 1963, taking 50 calls in the first night and 11,664 in the first year. A 'trouble team' car fleet visited 100 Sydney homes to offer in-person support.



The early years 1964 - 69

Lifeline features in a Time magazine article that leads to similar services being established overseas. Rev. Sir Alan Walker forms Lifeline International to ensure high standards of practice are protected.

How Simon survived the storm in his head

"I'm awake again, shaking, sweating. My heart is racing, and I stare into the dark. I can't close my eyes. I fear the images. They swim behind my eyelids ... suicides, heart attacks, murders, car crashes" Simon Gillard.

Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is a debilitating mental health condition triggered by experiencing or witnessing a terrifying event. Its symptoms can include frightening flashbacks, nightmares and severe anxiety that can affect every aspect of day to day living. PTSD affects around three million Australians at some time in their life².

For Simon, it was a 16-year career as a Police Officer tending to multiple horrific events as part of his profession – that triggered his PTSD. His symptoms became so severe, Simon made four attempts on his life. Had they been fatal, Simon would've left behind his family who he loved so dearly, including three beautiful children.

On one attempt, contemplating the happy faces in his family photo was enough to stop Simon from continuing with his plan to end his life. On another, though, the unbearable pain overwhelmed him until, at the very brink of suicide, he called Lifeline Sydney & Sutherland.

Guided by the Volunteer Crisis Supporter who answered his call for help, Simon was able to calm the thunderstorm raging in his mind and bring himself back into the reality of the present moment. His life was saved that day.

Simon was then able to seek the professional help he needed to understand what was happening to him and how to manage his PTSD. Feeling empowered, he set about to raise awareness – and ultimately, save lives – bravely sharing his story through the media and through motivational and inspirational speaking engagements.

In 2017, he even wrote a book, *Life Sentence: A Police Officer's Battle with PTSD**.

"At times we can be in despair and lonely, but we're never ALONE. Lifeline is always there to listen and help us through any difficult situation. Making that call to Lifeline was the best decision I made, it saved my life," Simon says.



Simon remains a supporter of Lifeline Sydney & Sutherland. He recognises the critical need for the crisis support services that saved his life is on-going and continues to evolve with changing times.

*Life Sentence: A Police Officer's Battle with PTSD is written with Libby Harkness and published by Penguin Random House.

2. <https://www.healthdirect.gov.au/post-traumatic-stress-disorder-ptsd>.

A global phenomenon 1970 - 79

Lifeline becomes truly global with affiliated centres in 100 cities internationally. In 1976, David Walker launches youth counselling service, Youthline. The Lifeline centre moves to Pitt Street, Sydney in 1979.



Expanding and adapting to save lives 1989 - 2019

Wesley Lifeforce community suicide prevention program begins in 1994. Lifeline transitions to a single national priority number in 1994 with SMS support launching in 2018. In 2003, tributes flow following the sad passing of Alan Walker.

Responding to crises 2020 - 2023

Natural disasters including bushfires and COVID-19 took call volumes to new heights. Lifeline received the highest number of calls in its history on 19 August 2021 (3505 calls). In this last year, Lifeline Sydney & Sutherland has seen an increase in calls of 67 per cent.



Volunteers, the beating heart of Lifeline Sydney & Sutherland

Throughout our 60-year history, volunteers have been the lifeblood of Lifeline Sydney & Sutherland.

Ken White is currently our longest serving Accredited Lifeline Volunteer Crisis Supporter, celebrating 40 years with us this year. Ken was initially drawn to volunteering following his own challenging times, where he experienced first-hand the difference that speaking with someone can make. He resolved to help others as he himself had been helped, through listening.

“Talking something through, just verbalising itself, can bring whole new perspectives and that’s what we’re doing at Lifeline that’s so powerful,” says Ken. “We’re there as a listening ear for people whether they call us sobbing uncontrollably or are calm and can explain what’s on their mind”.

After 40 years, Ken has quite literally become part of the furniture at the Lifeline Sydney centre, with a dedicated Ken White Booth established in his honour. Other accolades include Senior Volunteer Award Winner and 2020 Volunteer of the Year. Ken has seen a lot over the decades, and has saved many lives, but there’s more to come from him yet.

“There’s still such a need out there,” says Ken. “I thought I’d finish up after ten years, then fifteen, but I’m still here after nearly forty years because if I’m not here, that’s one less person for people to talk to”.

It’s people like Ken who keep our critical service running, people who are generous in both time



and spirit. Without our amazing team of volunteers, Lifeline Sydney & Sutherland simply couldn’t exist. Thank you to Ken and thank you to every volunteer for their driving compassion and ongoing commitment to helping people in their darkest times.

Could you become a Volunteer Crisis Supporter?

If you have empathy, resilience, open-mindedness, commitment and good communication skills, you can help us by volunteering in our Lifeline Sydney & Sutherland centres.

You’ll complete training to become a fully accredited, qualified Volunteer Crisis Supporter, responding to people on the phone so they’re not alone when they most need someone, and empowering them to take positive action.

If you’re passionate about suicide prevention and want to give back to the community, we’d love to hear from you. Learn more and register your interest here: wesleymission.org.au/volunteercrissupporter

A legacy that lives on in our work



David's* relationship with Wesley Mission spans many years. A popular figure at our organ recitals and Christmas Day lunches, he's remembered as a friendly, lovable man with a strong sense of community and service.

It wasn't until David passed away last year that we learned he had chosen to entrust his legacy to our care. He had dedicated his entire estate, including the Sydney apartment he'd lived in since the 60's, to supporting our Lifeline Sydney & Sutherland crisis support centres. It was a truly remarkable gift for us to receive, one of trust in our work and one which has a significant impact on our ability to ensure calls for help in a crisis are answered.

It was a gift of hope for people in despair.

We're forever grateful to David for such a commitment to, and firm belief in, our mission and values. He was a faithful friend of God who has left behind a legacy of compassion.

The lives of those disadvantaged and marginalised can be transformed by everyday Australians like David leaving a gift to Wesley Mission in their Will. For over 200 years, these legacies have helped us strengthen the vulnerable, comfort the lonely and give hope for a brighter future.

To discuss how you can make a powerful impact for generations to come by leaving a gift to Wesley Mission in your Will, please call Steve Burfield on (02) 9263 5561.

*Names and photo changed for privacy

What's next for Lifeline Sydney and Sutherland

If anyone can appreciate the value of Volunteer Crisis Supporters, it's Lifeline Sydney Centre Manager, Jay Hannant. Jay joined Wesley Mission last year, driven by a motivation to make a positive difference. He also had lived experience of mental health issues and had called Lifeline himself in the past.

Jay knows only too well how distressed callers can be. "There are calls from people who are in desperate suicide scenarios but it's also important to remember that suicide prevention isn't only about people on the brink of suicide," he says. "A call with a Lifeline volunteer can be what gets someone out of bed that day which all impacts on mental health and is critical in preventing the spiral down".

Jay has seen the impact the cost-of-living crisis is having on the number of calls to the centre. "What we know is that when the Reserve Bank announces an interest rate increase, we do get more calls, and unfortunately with the economic conditions forecast this year, it's logical that we'll see more calls coming in".

A recruitment drive for Volunteer Crisis Supporters will help ensure Jay's centre can answer the increase in calls for help, but there's an urgency to recruit now so the volunteers are trained in time to cope with the influx.

"Volunteer Crisis Supporters can expect to learn a lot during their training. They'll learn more about themselves from listening to others. There is often a sense of gratitude in listening to others' stories and reflecting on your own life," says Jay. "Most of all, volunteers can expect to be supported deeply the whole way".



60 years and counting! Help us continue the work of Lifeline Sydney & Sutherland

You can donate

With the number of calls to Lifeline Sydney & Sutherland growing, we urgently need your help to ensure none go unanswered.

\$39 can help answer a life-saving crisis support telephone call

\$149 can help provide vital resources to Wesley Lifeforce Networks who are working in the community to prevent suicide

\$290 can help fund suicide prevention training for ten people in Wesley Lifeforce Networks, helping them recognise when someone in their community is at risk of suicide

\$500 can help keep our Lifeline Sydney & Sutherland centres open 24/7

How to donate

 **Online:** wesleymission.org.au/autumnappeal2023

 **Phone:** 1800 021 821

Scan here to donate now

