

Borgersen, Finn:

The Norwegian Organisation for Suicide Survivors (LEVE)

www.levenorge.no

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Quite a few people have long thought about and sensed the need to establish a Norwegian association for those left behind after a suicide. During the evaluation of the National Plan for Suicide Prevention last autumn some guidelines were suggested by the Norwegian Board of Health, indicating that support activities for suicide survivors would be a priority area in future plans.

Following these considerations the Norwegian Organisation for Suicide Survivors was established: *LEVE* (the Norwegian acronym for the organisation, means "live") . The group of initiators included Lars Mehlum, Professor, and Nils-Petter Hauge, Sociologist, at the Suicide Research and Prevention Unit (Norwegian acronym SSFF), Kari Dyregrov, Sociologist at the Centre for Crisis Psychology in Bergen and Nils Petter Reinholdt, Project Manager at the Norwegian Board of Health. The board was constituted in the middle of last December, and the first national assembly was scheduled. This will be arranged on 14 and 15 October this year at Gaustad hospital. One day has been reserved for seminars for professionals and the following day for national meeting issues.

LEVE has three main areas of interest:

- Care – to ensure that families and others who have lost someone close to them because of a suicide will receive active help and support. A public follow-up scheme is also important.
- Information – to undertake activities to inform and distribute information about suicide and the situation of suicide survivors in the general population and among healthcare workers.
- Research – to work proactively to provide funds for research purposes, to prevent suicides and to improve the care given to suicide survivors.

Building a national association will necessarily take time, but the board has already managed to launch a number of activities.

First we are searching for and trying to recruit persons who are willing to take on the responsibility of *heading the county and regional chapters of the national association*. If you would like to recommend someone for such a position, a person who is willing to assume responsibilities for such an important matter in the public interest, then please contact the undersigned or one of the members of the board (please see the next page).

Furthermore, we have produced a *folder* to provide preliminary information about our activities. This can be obtained from the association's secretariat, which will also supply payment slips for membership or other types of financial support.

Initially we will inform professionals about LEVE's activities through the magazine *Suicidologi* (in the Norwegian language). However, the association will endeavour to issue its own membership magazine in the future. If you know about persons who might be interested in this type of information work, and who have the required skills and a burning desire to help in this area, then please let us know.

We are also planning to set up our own website. We shall initially post information on SSFF's web site, <http://www.med.uio.no/ipsy/ssff/>. Currently the list of all registered Norwegian support groups for suicide survivors, including the contact person for each group, is being updated. This is intended to give us more specific information about groups focusing entirely on suicide survivors and the organizations and persons that are behind these. This is an essential aid to our work to assist all those who are left in a desperate situation and who turn to our association.

If you have ideas and thoughts about how we should proceed with the establishment of the new Norwegian association I hope that you will contact us over the telephone or write to us. We heartily welcome all those who are interested in joining forces to build an effective association for suicide survivors.

LEVE – Landsforeningen for etterlatte ved selvmord (the Norwegian organisation for Suicide Survivors – the Norwegian word "leve" means live.)

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The LEVE board

Chairperson:

Finn Borgersen, 54 years old, is employed by Kirkens Bymisjon and works as the general manager of Ullern Frivillighetssentral (volunteer centre) in Oslo. In recent years he has worked with peer support groups focusing on the grief processes of those who have experienced break-ups of marriage or cohabitation or have been bereaved by a suicide.

Deputy chairperson:

Ingvald Liland, 75 years old, has worked as an economist for many years and has been an official in various organizations. He lost his daughter through suicide two years ago.

Secretary:

Ellen Andersen, 36 years old, is a nurse in an intensive care ward at Ullevål hospital. She lost her father through suicide when she was 14 years old. She has chaired a peer support group for suicide survivors since the autumn of 1998.

Treasurer:

Ellinor Engelsen, 58 years old, has worked in the healthcare system and various organizations in her local community. She lost her son through suicide two and a half years ago.

Other members of the board:

Arild Refsland, 48 years old, is a police officer at the Eigersund police chamber. He lost his son through suicide two years ago.

Astrid Stormo, 53 years old, is a nurse at the Chief County Medical Office in Finnmark. She lost her son through suicide two years ago.

Kari Dyregrov, 49 years old, is a sociologist and works as a researcher at the Centre for Crisis Psychology in Bergen. She manages the project "Omsorg for etterlatte ved selvmord" (Care for suicide survivors).

Lars Mehlum, 43 years old, is a psychiatrist and professor of suicidology, and heads the Suicide Research and Prevention Unit at the University of Oslo. He has been engaged in a number of projects concerning crisis psychiatry and suicidology concerned with research, prevention and clinics.

Nils-Petter Hauge, 33 years old, is a sociologist and research fellow at the Suicide Research and Prevention Unit. "Arbeidsplassen som helsefremmende arena" (The workplace as an arena for fostering good health) is his main project, and through this he has come into contact with number of suicide survivors.

Nils Petter Reinholdt, 42 years old, is a psychiatric nurse/consultant at the Oppland County Hospital, the Gjøvik division, and a project worker for the Action Plan against Suicide. He has carried out a great deal of clinical studies with persons who are suicide survivors.

This article was published in December 2000 (Suicidologi 2000, no. 3):

LEVE has existed for more than a year now, holding its first national congress on 15 October in Oslo. Below are some excerpts from the annual report for 2000 which was submitted to the congress.

During the evaluation of the Norwegian Plan for Suicide Prevention in the autumn of 1999, some guidelines were suggested by the Norwegian Board of Health with the aim of giving higher priority to suicide survivor programmes. Bearing this in mind, an initiative was taken by the Suicide Research and Prevention Unit (Norwegian acronym SSFF) and the Centre for Crisis Psychology for the establishment of a national suicide survivor association.

The board that has functioned during this period has included:

Finn Borgersen, Chairperson
Ingvald Liland, Deputy Chairperson
Ellen Andersen, Secretary.
Ellinor Engelsen, Treasurer.
Arild Refsland, member of the board.
Astrid Stormo, member of the board
Kari Dyregrov, member of the board
Lars Mehlum, member of the board
Nils-Petter Hauge, member of the board
Nils Petter Reinholdt, member of the board

Articles of organisation, name and objective

The national board discussed and passed the articles of organisation at the first national board meeting on 21 and 22 February. Later amendments/changes have been passed, all adopted at board meetings.

The articles approved the name, being:

LEVE – Landsforeningen for etterlatte ved selvmord (The Norwegian Organisation for Suicide Survivors – (in Norwegian LEVE = live)).

Furthermore it was adopted that the organisation's *objectives* would be to:

- 1.1. Ensure adequate assistance and support for persons who lose one of their loved ones through a suicide, and to initiate follow-up schemes, whether public or private, for survivors in all regions of the country.
- 1.2. Contribute to preventing and reducing the number of suicides and suicide attempts.
- 1.3. Undertake information programmes for the general public and health professionals on suicide and the difficulties encountered by survivors to modify the public's perception of and ability to understand the situation of suicide survivors.
- 1.4. Give survivors higher visibility and use them as a resource for grief support and suicide prevention activities.
- 1.5. Support scientific research on the situation for suicide survivors by making funds available/contributing to research.

Measures and activities that have been launched

Information

LEVE published its first information leaflet early in 2000, and in September a revised version was issued. An association logo has also been designed. The information committee of LEVE has been in contact with the media, and the secretariat has received a number of inquiries, particularly from weekly magazines.

Organisation building

Prior to the board meeting on 21 August the board has approved four county chapters: Finnmark, Sogn and Fjordane, Rogaland and Oslo. Moreover, contacts have been established with persons and communities in a number of counties, and the board's ambition is that ten county chapters will be in operation from the start of 2001. The board has initiated work on developing an information folder to be used by county chapters of the association. The folder will contain important information about LEVE and how the national association should be developed and run.

The work of updating this overview/database register is an ongoing process, and is considered by LEVE to be a very important aid in our work with survivors.