



MAYTREE

a sanctuary for the suicidal

Anne Hogg and Paddy Bazeley

BASED IN A TERRACED HOUSE in Finsbury Park, North London, *Maytree* offers a brief stay of four nights for a maximum of four guests who are in danger of taking their own lives. Paddy Bazeley and Michael Knight saw the great need for a safe place for actively suicidal people to stay for a few days. Paddy, who had worked at the Samaritans full-time for 30 years, teamed up with Michael, himself a Samaritan volunteer, psychotherapist and management consultant, and set about raising funds to start the project. *Maytree*, with the backing of trustees and friends, opened its doors to the

first guest in autumn 2002. Since then over 350 guests have stayed at *Maytree* and the house continues to get busier as both professional and voluntary sector agencies, friends and families, and those themselves in crisis, get to know about our service.



We believe two things at *Maytree*: firstly, that it helps to talk, and secondly, that everyone needs to be treated as an individual and with respect. This kind of help is rarely available for those who can see no light at the end of the tunnel. Often, those who are feeling desperate and isolated are reluctant to reach out for help, fearing that they may not be taken seriously or, conversely, put into hospital under section. When in a suicidal crisis many people express ambivalence: "I don't want to die but I don't know how to live." They are

THE FACTS:

- More people die from suicide than are killed on the roads.
- It is the largest cause of death for males under 35.
- For every suicide, there are around 20 attempts.
- 75% of those who kill themselves are not in touch with mental health services.



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“Twelve years ago my son took his own life. I wish a place like Maytree had been there for him. It could have made all the difference.” (Maytree Sponsor)

who have been exploring suicide on the Internet and come across our website. Once someone is in touch with us, whether by telephone or email we can begin to explore whether a stay at *Maytree* might be beneficial. All things being equal, a potential guest will be invited to visit for an assessment or, if they live outside London, an assessment may be carried out on the telephone.

The assessment is essentially a discussion to make sure that *Maytree* is the right place and can offer the right degree of support. Because the essence of *Maytree* is befriending and talking, we're not able to accept people who use drugs or alcohol to the degree that they're not able to relate and who couldn't agree to refrain from using these substances. Depending on each individual's need and circumstances, he or she may stay straight away or they may come back to *Maytree* within a few days. Each guest has his/her own room and meals are shared in the kitchen. *Maytree* is staffed largely by volunteers but is backed up by four directors and an office manager. Our aim is to explore what has brought someone to the edge of suicide and involves deep

and often painful conversations but equally therapeutic work that goes on round the kitchen table or in the garden.

Maytree doesn't have many rules but we don't allow alcohol or non-prescription drugs on the premises and the house must be kept a safe environment for everyone. There's no television in the house, which comes as an unwelcome surprise to some people when they arrive. It does mean, however, that scrabble and jigsaw puzzles are popular and inevitably means more talking gets done. Guests are free to come and go as they please and to have family members or friends visit them.

Making the first contact and then coming to stay at *Maytree* can be very difficult for many guests; leaving can be equally difficult. We offer a one-off stay and no on-going support when a guest leaves *Maytree*. We do, however, do our best to set up onward referrals for guests when they leave if they want. It is very sad for us to say good-bye but deeply satisfying to witness how much someone can change in just a few days. Guests often look like quite different people by the time they are ready to leave.

concerned that if they contact the doctor, anything they say will be put on their medical record and, should they survive, that it will impede future job prospects. It is well known that even serious thoughts of suicide can be temporary, and there is evidence to show that if you can be helped through this point, you can go on to live a happy and successful life and may never be suicidal again. *Maytree* has no magic wand but many guests find that by re-connecting with others, they begin to re-connect with life again. *Maytree* is not a religious organisation but many guests comment on its atmosphere of peace and spirituality.

There are three questions which we are often asked: 'How do those who are feeling suicidal find *Maytree* and arrange to stay?' 'What happens when a guest is at *Maytree*' and 'what happens when he/she leaves?' Some of our guests come through referrals, others self-refer and increasingly we are contacted through email, by people

“For the first time I feel as if I can make sense of things and I don't feel too afraid about starting to take those very tiny steps towards a more peaceful life.”



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