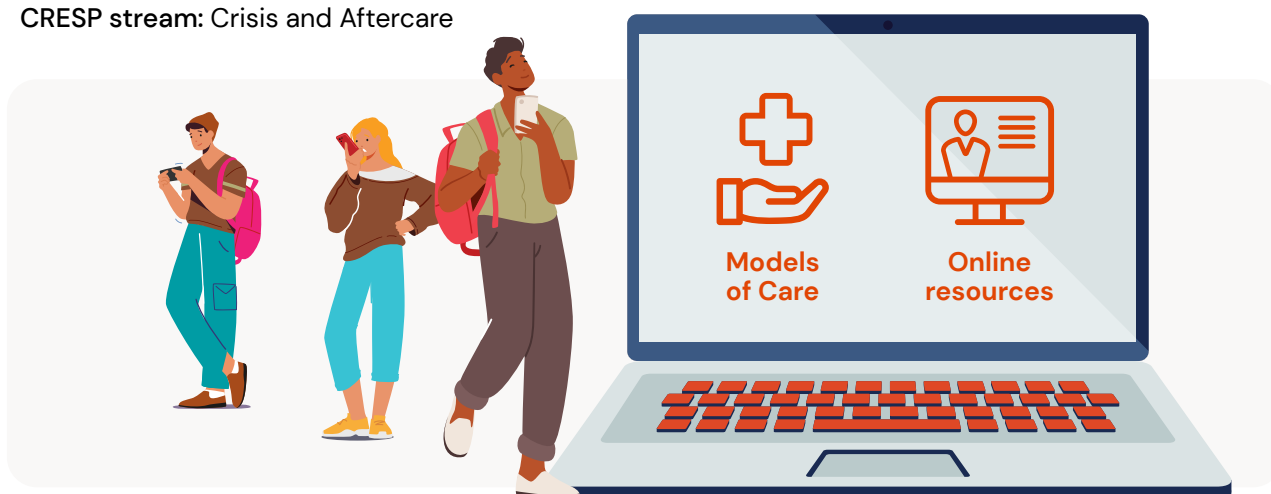


May 2023

# Reconnecting After Self-Harm (RAFT)

Funder: Suicide Prevention Australia, Ottomin Foundation, Australian Rotary Health, Society for Mental Health Research, CRESPI

CRESPI stream: Crisis and Aftercare



## Research aims

To evaluate the clinical effectiveness of RAFT, a text-message-based brief contact intervention for people who have recently been discharged from hospital after self-harm or a suicide attempt.

This project will investigate whether and to what extent RAFT reduces:

- the frequency and severity of suicidal ideation (primary outcome)
- the event rate of repeat self-harm episodes, suicide attempts and hospital presentations (secondary outcomes).

## Overview

Many people who attempt suicide or engage in deliberate self-harm receive little or no follow-up from public health services in the days immediately after being discharged from hospital, which is known to be a high-risk period<sup>1</sup>.

Previous research has shown that brief contact interventions – that is, brief engagements between patients and health care services, such as post-discharge letters and phone calls – can reduce future suicide and self-harm attempts. Digital brief contact interventions delivered via text messages, email or social media offer significant potential for maintaining connections with people during this post-discharge period; however, little is known about their clinical effectiveness. This project makes an important contribution to the evidence base.

## Project timeline

1 Intervention development (2017)

2 Pilot study (completed 2020)

3 Clinical trial (2022 onwards)

<sup>1</sup>CRESPI 2015. Care after a suicide attempt.

## Research activity

### Phase 1: Intervention development (2017)

RAFT was developed in consultation with a lived experience design group and clinicians at the Black Dog Institute. Lived experience participants provided insights into their own needs and experiences and identified how a digital brief contact intervention could provide meaningful support. This work help articulated RAFT's key structural requirements, which included:

- prompt post-discharge outreach
- initial distraction activities with low cognitive demands
- ongoing support over time.

### Phase 2: Pilot study (completed 2020)

A non-randomised, single-arm-intervention, mixed-methods pilot study at Royal Prince Alfred Hospital in Sydney and Toowoomba Hospital in Queensland demonstrated RAFT's feasibility and acceptability among its target audience.

A small group of participants aged 16–65, who had all presented at an Australian emergency department for self-harm or a suicide attempt in the previous seven days, received weekly messages for the first six weeks followed by monthly messages for 12 months. In addition to supportive content, the text messages contained links to therapeutic resources.

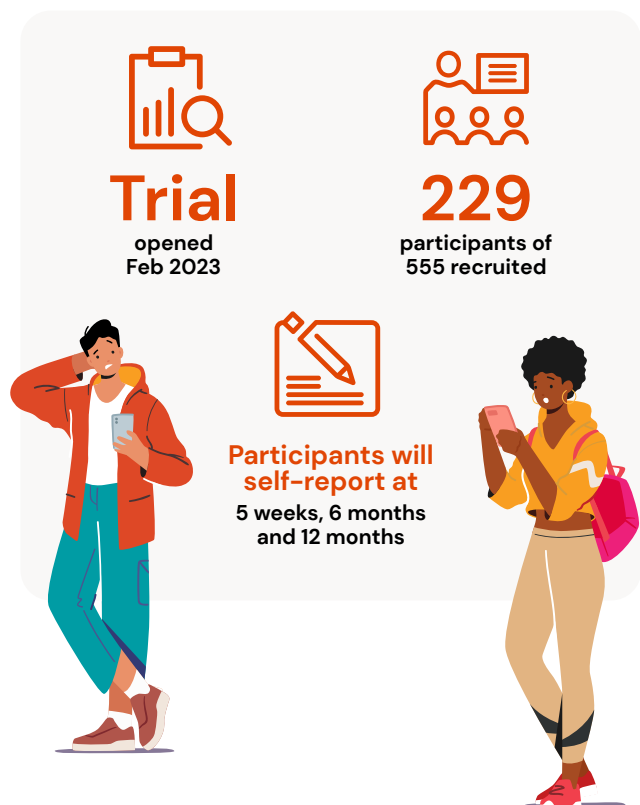
The data showed a significant reduction in self-reported self-harm episodes in the 12 months after baseline, as well as a reduction in suicidal ideation, although there was no comparative control group.

### Phase 3: Clinical trial (2022 onwards)

RAFT is currently the focus of an Australia-wide clinical trial to assess whether it can reduce suicidal ideation, self-harm and repeat hospital presentations. The trial will also explore the intervention's most effective features by comparing text messages alone with text messages that link users to online therapeutic resources.

Further, the trial will examine whether there is benefit to including a nominated support person in the intervention who will receive information about supporting someone who has self-harmed.

Recruitment for the trial opened in February 2022; as of May 2023, 229 participants of an expected 555 have been recruited. Participants will answer self-report measures at five weeks, six months and 12 months. Following the trial, a data linkage activity will be conducted with state and national health records to further assess trial outcomes.



## Impact

RAFT offers a low-cost and highly scalable adjunct intervention to complement traditional aftercare interventions and address a significant and unmet need in the suicide aftercare space. By keeping individuals connected to health care services in the post-discharge period, RAFT has the potential to reduce the risk of suicide and self-harm among a highly vulnerable cohort.

## Research team

### Black Dog Institute



Associate Professor  
Mark Larsen (project lead)



Dr Natasha Josifovski



Associate Professor Fiona Shand



Mr Adam Theobald

## Publication list

Larsen M.E, Shand F, Morley K, Batterham PJ, Petrie K, Reda B, Berrouiguet S, Haber PS, Carter G, Christensen H. A Mobile Text Message Intervention to Reduce Repeat Suicidal Episodes: Design and Development of Reconnecting After a Suicide Attempt (RAFT). JMIR Ment Health 2017;4(4):e56 [doi.org/10.2196/mental.7500](https://doi.org/10.2196/mental.7500). PMID: 29237584. PMCID: 5745353.

Josifovski N, Shand F, Morley K, Chia J, Henshaw R, Petrie K, Reda B, Li E, Theobald A, Onie S, Torok M, Berrouiguet S, Batterham PJ, Carter G, Haber P, Christensen H, Larsen ME. A pilot study of a text message and online brief contact intervention following self-harm or a suicide attempt: A mixed methods evaluation. Gen Hosp Psychiatry. 2022 May-Jun; 76:1-2. [doi.org/10.1016/j.genhosppsych.2022.03.002](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.genhosppsych.2022.03.002). Epub 2022 Mar 11. PMID: 35303519.

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The Centre of Research Excellence in Suicide Prevention (CRESP) is a collaborative program led by Black Dog Institute that aims to reduce the suicide rate in Australia.

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