

# GIRL WITH NO WORDS – SUPPORTING YOU

## WE MIHI TO YOU OUR AUDIENCE

If you are someone who self-injures or a support person or suffering in any way we hope you have gained something from our performance. We offer you all our hope love and care.

In devising this theatre piece we have spoken to many people who have self-injured, to their families and to professional supporters. We want to thank you for telling us your stories. They have enriched our understanding and we hope our production reflects that. We have also read many books, novels, autobiographies and textbooks for professionals on self-injury. While we are not 'experts' we have gained some insights into the experience of self-injury and we want to offer you our support.



## SUPPORT FOR FAMILY AND FRIENDS

Like all of us people who cut need others around who love and care for them. However this can be very challenging for family and friends. If you are close to someone who is self-injuring you need to care for yourself as well. Do not be afraid to ask for help yourself. In New Zealand, **Supporting Families** is an organisation specifically to help families of people suffering mental distress. Caring for others in distress can raise complex issues. You may want to discuss these issues with your general practitioner or see a psychologist or counsellor yourself.

## SUPPORT FOR PROFESSIONAL HELPERS

Eric Cassell asserts that the purpose of medicine is "the alleviation of suffering". Whether we are suturing their wound or connecting with the human being who has cut themselves we need to remember this purpose. People who cut can challenge us personally and professionally. May we work with knowledge and compassion. And care for ourselves. **The Nature of Suffering and the Goals of Medicine** by Eric Cassells. NEJM 1982 306(11) 639-45.



## SUPPORT FOR THOSE WHO SELF-INJURE

Recovery from self-injury is a very individual and courageous journey. It involves many things.

The specific recovery themes we have focused on in this production are: -

- **Finding voice.** Cutting is essentially a voice-less experience in which suffering is communicated without words. It seems to us that finding words and being able to think about the feelings that precipitate cutting is an important part of recovery.
- **Connection.** Cutting is often an experience that occurs in isolation and results in isolation. We see that connecting with other human beings is part of recovery.
- **Agency.** It seems important to be an active and instrumental agent in your own recovery, rather than a passive recipient of care.
- **Compassion towards yourself.** Our sense is this grows out of receiving compassion from others.
- **Telling your story.** Our production is imbued with the idea of narrative – that in telling our stories we move towards self-understanding.
- **Making the beast beautiful.** Loving ourselves and each other scars and all.

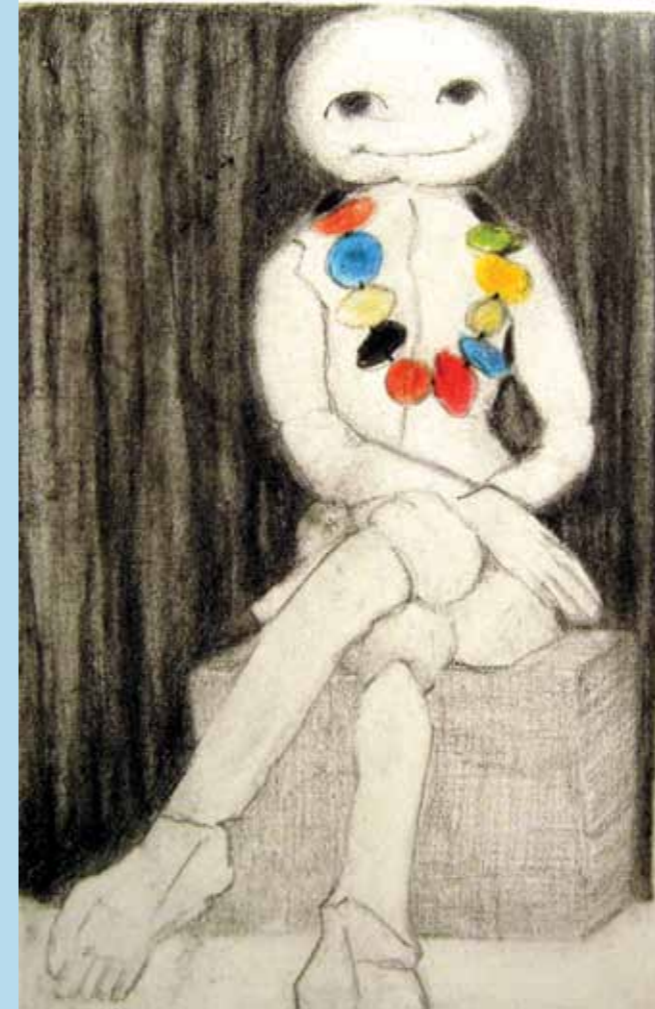
Recovery is possible for everyone. Cutting is an act of survival and it is that instinct that will support recovery. It is helpful to have supportive family and friends and professional helpers.

Finding professional help that works for you can be difficult but we would encourage you to keep searching, even if you have had some unhelpful experiences. Each therapist or mental health worker offers something different. This is because their training and approach to the problem is different. It is also because even individuals with the same training may offer you a very different style or type of relationship.

What seems important is to find someone you trust. It may be best to find someone with experience in helping people who self-injure. You might find someone who you know has been helpful to others. It seems important that a professional helper is respectful of you, can offer you some knowledge about self-injury and is hopeful and encouraging.

Your general practitioner or mental health worker or school counsellor may be able to recommend someone. In New Zealand mental health workers work in community teams which include nurses, psychiatrists, psychologists and social workers. Community mental health teams exist in most communities and their help is free of charge.

Psychologists, psychotherapists and counsellors often work in individual or group practices. They can be funded but often you will need to pay. Helplines like [www.youthline.co.nz](http://www.youthline.co.nz) and [www.lifeline.co.nz](http://www.lifeline.co.nz) may be useful to you in a crisis situation. Suicide Prevention Information NZ has good crisis links at [www.spinz.co.nz](http://www.spinz.co.nz). Talking to others who have themselves had experience of self-injury may be helpful. Reading books by people who have self-injured or about self-injury may be useful.



## RESOURCES

There are many many books and articles and websites about self-injury. We have looked at a great deal and have included here, what we think are the best ones.

## WEBSITES

**"SELF HARM – An Information Booklet For Young People Who Self Harm And Those Who Care For Them."** This is one of the best information booklets we found and is available online in pdf [www.decs.sa.gov.au/speced2/files/pages/chess/hsp/Information/revised\\_selfharm\\_finalweb.pdf](http://www.decs.sa.gov.au/speced2/files/pages/chess/hsp/Information/revised_selfharm_finalweb.pdf)

NATIONAL SELF HARM NETWORK from UK is survivor-lead and also has some great information for support people as well. [www.nshn.co.uk](http://www.nshn.co.uk)

FIRST SIGNS is run by directors and supporters with experience of self-injury and is a large interactive website with information for those who self harm as well as supporters and professionals. [www.selfinjury.org.uk](http://www.selfinjury.org.uk)

S.A.F.E. ALTERNATIVES is an American 'nationally recognised treatment approach, professional network and educational resource base, which is committed to helping you and others achieve an end to self-injurious behaviour.' [www.selfinjury.com](http://www.selfinjury.com)

BRISTOL CRISIS SERVICE FOR WOMEN is a 'national organisation that supports girls and women in emotional distress particularly women who self-injure. Through our work we have developed a deep understanding of the reasons individuals harm themselves and of the things they may need to help them overcome their self-injury. We also have wide experience of the concerns and needs of workers in different settings and disciplines, and in developing good working practice.' [www.selfinjurysupport.org.uk](http://www.selfinjurysupport.org.uk)

YOUTHNET.UK is a registered charity that aims to be the first place all young adults turn to when they need support and guidance through life. TheSite.org is their larger website and the self-harm section can be accessed at [www.selfharm.org.uk](http://www.selfharm.org.uk)

SIDRAN TRAUMATIC STRESS INTSTITUTE is an American professional organisation that 'helps people understand, recover from, and treat the developmental, emotional, psychological, and spiritual injuries that can result when people experience or witness traumatic events.' They have some incredibly good resources. [www.sidran.org](http://www.sidran.org)

## BOOKS

**Bodies Under Siege: Self-mutilation in Culture and Psychiatry** by Armando Favazza.

American psychiatrist Armando Favazza comes first because he was one of the first authors to write about self-injury in a comprehensive way from a clinical and cultural perspective.

**The Language of Injury: Comprehending Self-Mutilation** by Gloria Babiker and Lois Arnold. Blackwell Publishing 1997. ISBN: 1854332341. Written by a psychologist and community support worker this was one of our best resources. They write about self-injury in a thoughtful and respectful way. It is intended as a textbook but is very readable.

**Risking Connection: A training curriculum for working with survivors of childhood abuse** by K Saakvitne. The Sidran Press. Available at [www.sidran.org](http://www.sidran.org)

We thought this was an incredibly insightful resource looking at the effect of childhood trauma. Compulsory reading for anyone who faces childhood trauma in their lives or in their work.

**The Silent Scream** by Josh Cannon. John Murray Publishers. A harrowing but compelling account of a man's recovery from abuse and self-injury.

**A bright red scream: Self-mutilation and the language of pain** by Marilee Strong. Published by Virago. An interesting, readable account of self-injury. However it is written by a journalist and we felt it had a slightly voyeuristic feel to it!

**Cutting: Understanding and overcoming self-mutilation** by Steven Levenkron. Published by Norton. Written by a psychotherapist with many years experience helping with clients who self-injure, Levenkron takes us inside the self-injurers' world.

**Right where it hurts** by David Hill. ISBN/ISSN 9780908783700. A New Zealand author! A novel for young adults and a good introduction to the topic.

**Red tears** by Joanna Kenrick. Published by Faber and Faber. Also a good novel for young adults.