

Talking book breaks barriers

The South African Depression and Anxiety Group: NGO finalist

M&G reporter

Suicide accounts for 9% of all teen deaths and is the second leading, and fastest growing, cause of death in South Africa. In rural areas it is at its worst.

After eight years of dealing with teen suicides in rural areas, the South African Depression and Anxiety Group (SADAG) found that it had to break existing barriers to reach its target. To do this, it devised an innovative solution — a series of speaking books.

The interactive book has text and a soundtrack by high-profile celebrity Lillian Dube that guides the reader through a step-by-step journey to recovery. The book, *Suicide Shouldn't be a Secret*, complements SADAG's existing teen suicide prevention pro-

gramme of the same name, which was launched in 1998. This programme is ongoing in Gauteng, Limpopo, Kwa-Zulu-Natal and Free State. The books are distributed to teens in conjunction with the programme in schools.

Research shows that the areas of need in suicide prevention include psychosocial services, the link between low levels of literacy and depression, and the fact that low literacy levels inhibit awareness of mental illness and impede treatment compliance.

World Bank research shows that hearing and reading a message increases understanding and retention by 50%. The impact of the speaking book is measured through questionnaires, which evaluate knowledge and understanding of depression and suicide prevention before and after exposure to the books. Each book reaches up to 27 teenagers and SADAG's research has shown a turnaround in attitudes to mental illnesses.