



Sport / Hong Kong

Father walks 62 kilometres around Hong Kong Island in honour of son and suicide prevention

- Tony Bruno trekked anticlockwise around the island and raised more than HK\$150,000 for suicide awareness
- Bruno, who tragically lost his son at 15, says getting people talking is crucial in helping erase the stigma around suicide



Patrick Blennerhassett + FOLLOW
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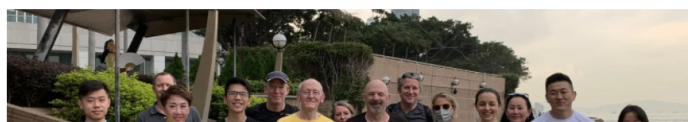
Tony Bruno walked 62 kilometres in just under 13 hours around Hong Kong Island to help raise money for suicide awareness. Photo: Handout

When Tony Bruno set off at 5.30am on February 26 at West Island School to walk around Hong Kong Island to help raise awareness for suicide prevention, he had more than a dozen supporters alongside with him.

He also had the memory of his son Jamie to help him as well.

"He was with me the whole way," said Tony, who completed the anticlockwise 62 kilometre trek in just under 13 hours. "I was doing it partly in his memory, partly with his spirit and partly to make the most of what is essentially a senseless death. And that is tough, but a lot of the way I was supported, and that eased things, my friends, colleagues were there with me too."

Tony, 59, who completed the walk as part of the KELY Support Group, a local NGO which focuses on youth services and specifically the mental health realm, said it is also part of a week long event called Weez Week, which aims to help break down the stigma around suicide. Four years ago Jamie tragically took his own life at the age of 15. Tony's walk started and finished at the Pok Fu Lam school his son attended.



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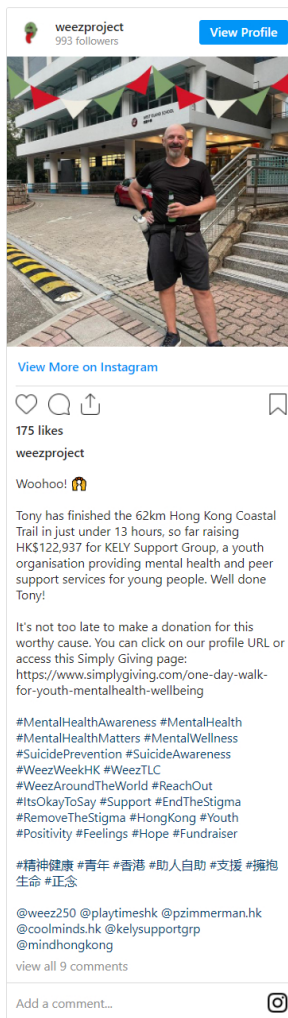
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Tony Bruno arriving at the Hong Kong Convention Centre checkpoint, with supporters cheering for him. Photo: Handout

In 2019, Hong Kong's suicide rate was around 13 per 100,000 people, higher than the 12.3 figure reported in 2018. Hong Kong's suicide rate among older adults is nearly twice the population average. For an international comparison, Hong Kong's age-standardised rate was estimated at 9.7 in 2019, which is slightly lower than the global rate of 10.5.

Suicides accounted for 30 per cent of all unnatural deaths among Hong Kong children and teenagers over the course of two years, according to a government report released in 2019. The report reviewed found school work problems were the biggest reason for young people killing themselves.



Tony, who has raised more than HK\$150,000 so far, said his goal is to get people talking, plain and simple.

"Mental health is still somewhat taboo [in Hong Kong] and suicide most definitely is. I've had people I know go through similar tragedies and aren't able to talk about it to any great extent. So there is an ongoing desire to increasingly create awareness around the subject. The more we can talk about it, the more we can resolve our problems and help ease people's pain more and help these tragedies from occurring again."

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The World Health Organization estimates close to 800,000 people commit suicide every year, and that suicide is the third leading cause of death for kids ages 15 to 19 years old.

Tony said his walk, which started before sunrise and finished in the dark, had a little bit of everything including some stairs, some beautiful harbour views and of course a requisite period towards the end where his mind had to carry his body.

Tony Bruno: HK Coastal Trail

Distance | Pace | Time
62.13 km | 12:32 /km | 12h 58m



Tony Bruno's route around Hong Kong Island. Photo: Handout

"My back was aching, my feet were aching, my whole body was aching," he said about the last few kilometres. "Actually the only part of me that wasn't aching was my bad knee, which I thought was going to be the problem, but it was the rest of my body," he said with a laugh.

Multiple studies have shown that regular exercise, or playing a sport of any kind, be it an individual one or team based competition, can greatly improve one's mental health. Those who are physically active report less instances of depression and anxiety, and a higher rate of happiness and sense of belonging and purpose.

For Tony, who hopes his work, and goal of "zero suicides in Hong Kong" can help others avoid the difficult path he has had to navigate along with his wife, said talking has definitely helped him through the process. He said part of it is also physical, in activities like getting out for a walk, even if it's not all the way around Hong Kong Island.

"One of the big things now is exercise and just getting outside and getting some fresh air," he said. "Especially right now with Covid and people are cooped up, and I know I have overcome my own mental health crisis through going out and getting out into the hills and hiking and running in Hong Kong."

If you are having suicidal thoughts, or you know someone who is, help is available. For Hong Kong, dial +852 2896 0000 for The Samaritans or +852 2382 0000 for Suicide Prevention Services. In the US, call The National Suicide Prevention Lifeline on +1 800 273 8255. For a list of other nations' helplines, [see this page](#)

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