

In Recognition of National Suicide Prevention Week September 7-13: A Success Story

By Stephen Roggenbaum and Storie Miller

I was told my son is a hero - that he may have saved a life. In reality, he was one of a number of heroes. A whole group of friends - and friends of friends - took action because they recognized warning signs and they didn't ignore them. Whether having learned the warning signs at school, or through TV or billboard campaigns, it doesn't matter. What matters is that they reached out when a young girl was hurting and may have saved her life.

After an argument, the girl went for a walk on her own, and left text messages with friends saying "I am sorry, but this is the only way." Friends began to rally, reaching out to many they had programmed in their cell phones, asking to look for their friend.

My son and his friend were the ones who found her, alone and crying. "We have mutual friends who are worried about you and care for you very much," my son told her. "They have asked many friends to look for you, so get in the car. I'm taking you home." She resisted at first, but eventually let them take her home.

When my son returned home and told me the story, I was so proud that he reached out. He was even going to contact her parents, if one of her friends hadn't agreed to do so. The circle of friends kept closer-than-usual contact with her for the next several days.

When this story was shared with me, I was the one who told the mother her son was a hero. Talking, writing or hinting about suicide is an urgent danger sign, and one of the most important things that help a person through periods of crisis is their family, friends or community.

Suicide is a serious public health issue and challenge for the nation, Florida, and our local communities. Florida had more than nearly twice as many suicides in 2006 than homicides. Depression is common and can be serious when prolonged. Regardless of age, people who are depressed have a higher risk of suicidal behavior.

According to the CDC's 2008 Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance system, within 12 months of the survey about 8 % of 2007 Florida high school students reported making a suicide plan, nearly 6% had a non-fatal suicide attempt, with slightly more than 2% making an attempt serious enough requiring medical intervention.

Preventing suicide is like the many fragments of a puzzle. We are the pieces of the puzzle. We need to work together – until the pieces of the puzzle come together, until we come together to address this serious issue.

If you or someone you know is at risk of suicide, call 1-800-273-TALK (8255), 911, or your local mental health care or medical provider.

The American Association of Suicidology has created an easy phrase to remember warning signs: IS PATH WARM? This is something everyone can learn and remember. It stands for

- I Ideation (talking of wanting to hurt or kill him/herself)
- S Substance Abuse (increased alcohol or drug use)

- P Purposelessness (no reason for living; no sense of purpose)
- A Anxiety (anxiety, agitation, unable to sleep/sleeping all the time)
- T Trapped (feeling trapped - like there's no way out)
- H Hopelessness

- W Withdrawal (withdrawing from friends, family and society)
- A Anger (rage, uncontrolled anger, seeking revenge)
- R Recklessness (doing risky activities, seemingly without thinking)
- M Mood Changes (dramatic mood changes)

These are a few ideas on how we can be better prepared to intervene when we see a friend, co-worker, neighbor, or relative in distress. Just as the friends did above, we need to trust our gut feeling. Don't be afraid to tell your friend that you're concerned. This open dialogue can help individuals seek professional help, and ultimately, save a life. Don't keep it a secret; get help for someone at risk.