

Suicide Prevention: It's Everybody's Business

August 2007, Issue 5

A Newsletter from the Kentucky Suicide Prevention Group

CONGRATULATIONS KSPG!!!! The Kentucky Suicide Prevention Group was awarded the 2007 Commissioner's Best Practices Award for an advocacy program at the Kentucky Conference on May 23, 2007. Thank you **ALL** for all of your hard work!!!

Kentucky Suicide Group Awarded 2007 Commissioner's Best Practice Award For Advocacy Program



The Award

Members of Kentucky Suicide Prevention Group

Photo Courtesy Steve Ulrich

In photo from left to right: Bottom Row: Jan Ulrich, Pat Anderson, Phyllis Combs, and Jim McFarland
Middle Row: Margaret Pennington, Kate Overberg, Julie Cerel, Marcia Egbert, and Barbara McFarland
Back Row: Commissioner John Burt, Denis Walsh, Vickie Greenwell, Barbara Kaminer, Carolyn Burtner, Jenny Jones, Jean Glore, and Carl Boes.

NATIONAL SUICIDE PREVENTION WEEK IS SEPTEMBER 9th-15th

Are you or your agency planning an event for this week? If so, KSPG would love to know about it. This is a great way to share ideas, and promote your efforts of reducing the occurrence of suicide. Please share your efforts with KSPG by e-mailing KYSuicidePrevention@gmail.com. Thanks!

A Life is Too Much to Lose



Hope From A Survivor

by Jan Ulrich



On June 8, 2002, my life and the lives of my family changed forever, although we wouldn't know it until nearly 48 hours later. That day, I became a survivor of suicide.

On that June day, my 20-year-old son Nathan Eisert ended his life. Nathan had been a basketball player at Western Kentucky University. Over the course of 9 months Nathan sustained a troubling and painful injury, lost his place on the basketball team, and endured the loss of a significant relationship. We all missed the signs of depression, his family, his coach and teammates, his friends, and the girlfriend who was the last known person to see him alive.

The day or so after Nathan was found dead, my father, Jim McFarland, came walking into my house with a stack of papers that he had printed off of the internet. At the top of the stack of papers, I saw the words "suicide prevention". I just stared at him. "Suicide Prevention? My son is dead, don't tell me anything about suicide prevention!"

My dad said "No, wait, there are some things that you need to know. Every year in the United States, there are a known 31,000 suicide deaths. Every 17 seconds, someone in the country takes their life." I remember staring at him incredulously. I thought "why didn't I already know this? I knew to teach my kids to look both ways before crossing the street, to wear a seat belt, not to talk to strangers. But I didn't know to talk to my kids about depression, about what to do when you feel hopeless.

My thirst for more knowledge immediately became insatiable. I found out that suicide is the second leading cause of death for college students, and the second leading cause of death for 15 to 34 year olds in Kentucky. On that day, although I could never predict some of the directions that it would take me, I became a suicide prevention and awareness advocate.

During the funeral, our church was packed with young people - Western's men's and women's basketball teams, volleyball and soccer teams, and many, many young people whose lives Nathan had touched. One by one, these young people got up to talk about Nathan, how they had turned to him when they had problems, how he was the nicest guy they had ever met.

While the words were comforting, I knew there was more that needed to be said, HAD to be said. I knew that I did not want a single young person to walk

out of that room feeling like suicide was the answer to the pain and hopelessness that they were feeling. I walked to the microphone, beside my son's casket, in front of the very altar where he had been baptized as an infant.

As I addressed the sea of grief stricken faces, I focused on the young people in the church pews. I told them there is "nothing in the world" that they could do that their parents couldn't forgive them for and that there was nothing in the world that God could not forgive them for.

But if they felt like they were a burden to their families, I wanted them to envision something. "Picture your mother having to walk into a room filled with coffins. Do you want this one with dark wood? How about this one with light wood? How about this nice padded one? (I never really got that). What about this blue one? Oh, Nathan would have never gone for that.

I told them I couldn't do it. I went to the floor. Then you have to pick out a little plot of ground for your child's "eternal resting place." Then they tell the family "we need \$11,000 before you can bury your child." I told every young person in the room "if you are feeling hopeless, reach out to someone, ask for help, there is hope. If you recognize that someone is hurting, feeling depressed, reach out to them.

They may not have the strength at that moment to "reach out and ask for help."

That day I became something else. I became a rebel. You see, I didn't know that I had "broken the code", the code of silence, secrets, and shame that surround the issue of suicide. Even in the survivor group meeting that I attended a couple of weeks later, talking about suicide prevention and awareness was somewhat taboo. But the silence, secrets, and shame that surround this topic contributed to the death of my only son, and I would stand for it no longer.

Two weeks after Nathan's death, a friend told me about a newly formed Kentucky suicide prevention group in Frankfort. The next day, I headed to the meeting in Frankfort. At that meeting I found out about an upcoming Suicide Prevention conference in Washington DC.

Five weeks after Nathan's death, my husband and I accompanied other members of the Kentucky Suicide Prevention Group to the SPAN conference, and visited our Kentucky senators and

Hope From A Survivor (cont.)

representatives, including our present governor, Ernie Fletcher. I only recently learned that a few weeks after that visit, Governor Fletcher himself lost a close family member to suicide.

Since that time, I have participated with suicide prevention and awareness efforts on a national, state and local level. I have helped to raise awareness of depression/suicide among college athletes with the NCAA. Someone once told me that what I was doing was "action therapy". I like the term.

"Action therapy" is not about by-passing your grief. One of the SOS facilitators told the group that "there is NO fast-forward in grief. There is only pause and play". Becoming an advocate for this cause has not been a substitute for dealing with the grief and pain of losing a child. I shed the same tears as any one else stricken with grief and loss. I've broken down, thought that I could bear no more, like everyone else enduring this same pain.

But what I have learned to do is to harness that grief. Grief is the most powerful of emotions; maybe it is all other emotions combined. I've heard that grief over a suicide loss equates to the devastation of living in a concentration camp. I knew that I could take that concentration of grief energy, and turn it in my self, which would destroy me; turn it out on my family and friends, and destroy those relationships; or I could harness it, and use it to make a difference.

If you are a survivor of suicide, a survivor of suicide attempts, either your own or someone else's, or a concerned citizen, how do you become a "rebel, like me"?

First of all, everyone is different; most people don't become suicide prevention and awareness advocates the day after their loss, **and that's okay.**

Second, if you make a decision that you want to take action, and become an advocate, your family members MAY not want any part of it. And that's okay too. People deal with grief in different ways.

Third, take stock of your strengths and your passions. If you feel called to help others who have gone through a suicide loss, you might want to get involved with an SOS group, or other grief and loss support groups.

The Kentucky Suicide Prevention Group or KSPG is looking into the possibility of launching LOSS teams - people who would be trained to go in almost as first responders when a family experiences a suicide death, to help them through some of the most difficult hours of their entire lives.

SOS groups and LOSS teams are called Postvention.

If your passion is like mine, preventing families from having to go through the loss in the first place; there are a number of options.

KSPG is a well-established state group that absolutely could not function without the passion of survivors - those who have experienced loss, and those who have experienced suicide attempts either by family or friends, or even themselves. KSPG is also working to plant the seeds of local organizations, like those that exist in Owensboro, Lexington, Paducah, Somerset, Louisville, Northern Kentucky and other cities across our state.

There are several national organizations related to suicide prevention and all have made important impacts on shining a light on this issue, in their own way. If you are a survivor of suicide, one place to start would be the organization SPAN - Suicide Prevention Action Network, which was founded by survivors, and fueled by survivors. There is a virtual alphabet soup of organizations with their own strengths, SPRC, AAS, ASFP, SAVE, NAMI, Mental Health America, and Yellow Ribbon. I promise you, there is a place for you, if you decide to harness your grief, and invest in "action therapy".

And **fourth**, it's okay to take a break when you need a break. This work is rewarding, but it is intense, sometimes frustrating and draining, and not always popular in the family. You **HAVE** to build in time to take care of yourself and your family. Hey, it's not always easy to be a rebel.

To close, I want to leave you with the word of the chorus of a faith-based contemporary song. It goes like this:

**Carry your candle
Run to the darkness
Seek out the helpless, deceived and poor
Hold out your candle
For all to see
Take your candle
And go light the world**

Go out into the world and shine your light on the darkness of the silence, secrets and shame that surround this issue. Without that light, particularly the light of survivors, your stories of grief and pain, and hope and survival, too many families will experience the same losses that we have experienced.

Jan Ulrich is one of the founders of the Nathan Alan Eisert Foundation. For more information go to www.tellthemomma.com.

[Engaging Youth in Suicide Prevention](#)-by Kate Overberg, KY Partnership for Families and Children

The Kentucky Suicide Prevention Group, this newsletter included, very often sends out updates on suicide completion rates within specific populations. They've reported, more than once, that suicide is the second leading cause of death for 15 to 34 year olds, and that it's the fourth leading cause of death for five to 14 year olds. All the statistics don't amount to much when someone is faced with figuring out how to talk to a young person about not attempting suicide. It is extremely important, since, it's very likely much harder to explain to a young person why their friend died by suicide, or worse, having to understand why your child died by suicide.

All young people are susceptible to suicide. However, teens suffering from a mental health issue such as depression and bipolar, and youth suffering from a substance use issue, are often at higher risk than other young people, as are young people who have been victims of bullying, including cyber bullying. Also at higher risk are youth who fall into a minority category, such as youth of color (African Americans, Hispanics, Native Americans, etc.) and youth of a different sexual orientation. Because these youth do not fit into what is considered the main stream, they become high risk by being outsiders.

Another group of young people at higher risk of suicide attempts are those youth who are in environments unhealthy to their emotional health. For example, young people who are in homes where they have experienced physical, emotional, or sexual abuse, and young people who have run away from home. Additionally, if their school environment does not feel like a safe place as in instances of bullying, then risk of suicide is increased.

Engaging young people to help prevent suicide, and charging them as gatekeepers will have a greater impact than if only parents and professionals are weighing in. Peer involvement has proven effective in reducing bullying in schools, reducing the instance of substance use, and reducing the stigma related to mental health disorders; all factors in those who are at higher risk for a suicide attempt. Empowering young people to take on these kinds of responsibilities will create safer environments where young people will feel more in control of their own lives.

Below are some tips from StopYouthViolence.org on how young people can create a safer environment.

What Young People Can Do

- Make a commitment not to contribute to violence in any way. Do not bully, tease, or spread negative gossip about others. Step in when you see someone being bullied, don't be afraid to stand up for someone the way you would want someone to stand up for you. Respect others and value differences. Try to broaden your social circle to include others who are different from you.
- Avoid alcohol and drugs. Stay away from alcohol and drugs as well as people who use them. There is a strong link between the use of alcohol and drugs and violence. Be aware of those you think might be using alcohol and drugs, and let your friends know that if they have a problem, they can come to you no matter what.
- Learn about ways to resolve arguments and fights without violence, and encourage your friends to do the same. Many schools, churches, and after-school programs offer training in conflict resolution skills.
- If you know someone is planning to harm someone else - report him or her. Most of us have learned from an early age that it is wrong to "tattle," but in some instances it is the most courageous thing you can do. Tell a trusted adult, such as a teacher, guidance counselor,

principal or parent. If you are afraid and believe that telling will put you in danger or lead to retaliation, find a way to anonymously contact the authorities.

- ➔ The same rule goes for someone who might be thinking about hurting themselves. In many cases they're telling you about their ideas of suicide as a cry for help, and intervening on their behalf to an adult will only help them. Having a friend mad at you for intervening in their thoughts of suicide is better than the alternative; not having them around at all.

More ways to empower youth to help prevent suicide are teaching them what to do if they think a friend is thinking about hurting themselves. The Youth Suicide Prevention Program (www.yspp.org), a youth suicide prevention program in Washington, encourages teens to show the person they care, ask the question-are you thinking about suicide, and to go for help when someone says they are considering suicide.

[KSPG's Challenge to YOU!](#)

KSPG firmly stands behind "Suicide Prevention: It's Everyone's Business", so we're challenging parents, youth workers, schools, and anyone else directly involved with young people to actively work towards the prevention of youth suicide. This challenge is for the young people too. Learn all the warning signs of suicide, learn QPR or another suicide prevention training, start talking about suicide and reduce the stigma. If suicide is no longer stigmatized, more people will start talking about how they feel and suicide will become more easily preventable! If you're interested in setting up a QPR training for your group, contact KSPG to find a QPR trainer in your area: KYSuicidePrevention@gmail.com or <http://mhmr.ky.gov/mhsas/kspg.asp>.

Thanks to Steve Ulrich, and Emerson Drive, the concert held on Wednesday, July 11th, 2007 at 4th Street Live in Louisville, was a fantastic success. There was a great crowd of young faces. Jenny Jones with Bluegrass Community and Technical College, and Jim McFarland, both members of KSPG's Steering Committee, were present. Jan Ulrich, Suicide Prevention Marketing Specialist with the Kentucky Department of Mental Health and Mental Retardation Services, presented Emerson Drive with a plaque on behalf of KSPG, for their record single *Moments*. Fortunately, also present were a number of the group's members, and managers to receive the plaque on stage. *Moments* was written by long time song writers Annie Tate, Sam Tate and Dave Berg (all are famous for hit records). If you have not heard *Moments*, the video and lyrics are available at http://www.naef.org/qpr_emerson_drive.htm. The lyrics for *Moments*, are extremely powerful because they were written about a real moment, a real bridge, a real Vietnam vet, and a real homeless man.

Pictured at Right are:

Jan Ulrich presenting the plaque
from KSPG to members of
Emerson Drive,
Stephen Ulrich, Jenny Jones,
Jim, McFarland, and
Barbara McFarland.



Suicide Support Groups

Survivor of Suicide (SOS) Support Groups

- Ashland area – Contact: Paula Rymer (606) 836-7966 PaulaKRymer@aol.com
- Bowling Green - Contact: Anita Hudson (270) 202-3204 or anita_hudson1968@yahoo.com
- Campbellsville - Contact: Alice Steele (270) 456-6009
- Fort Thomas/Northern KY - Contact: Ken & Carol Himes (859) 441-1958 or spbears@fuse.net
- Frankfort – Contact: Anna Columbia (502) 330-7542 or acolumbia@kybar.org meets 3rd Thursdays at 6:30p.m. Capital City Christian Church on Versailles Rd.
- Hazard- Contact: Phyllis Day (606) 439-2111
- Lexington - Contact: Magdalena Lehman (859) 277-2700 or (800) 876-6005
- Louisville - Contact: Glenn Raymond (502) 583-5676 or Gage Donohue (812) 283-1111
- Owensboro- Contact: Bob Robey (270) 276-5531 or rwrobey@earthlink.net
- Paducah - Contact: Karen Winkel (270) 442-3722
- Somerset – Contact: Beverly Hargis (606) 679-7428 or beverlyhargis@aol.com

Local Suicide Prevention Groups

- Ashland area – Contact: Paula Rymer (606) 836-7966 PaulaKRymer@aol.com
- Bowling Green/Barren River area – Contact: Evelyn Libe elibe@lifeskills.com
- (Lexington) SYSC – Hatim Omar Hatim.Omar@uky.edu
- London – Contact: Barbara Cottrell Barbara.A.Cottrell@usps.gov
- Louisville – Contact: Julia Richerson jricherson@FHCLOUISVILLE.ORG
- Northern KY – Denis Walsh DWalsh@northkey.org
- Owensboro – Bob Robey rwrobey@earthlink.net
- Somerset – Beverly Hargis (606) 679-7428 or beverlyhargis@aol.com

Local Suicide Prevention Foundations/Non-Profits

- Lee Eric Drake Foundation – Contacts: Dan Padgett Dan_Padgett@bgmetalforging.com or Kelly Bush Kelly.Bush@leeericdrake.com
- Nathan Alan Eisert Foundation – Contact: Stephen Ulrich Ulrich@bellsouth.net, www.tellthemomma.com
- Zach's Hope Yellow Ribbon Foundation – Paducah area: Tina McKnight paultina@accessus.net

***If your support group is listed incorrectly, or if your support group is not listed and you would like for it to be, please contact the KY Suicide Prevention Group at KYSuicidePrevention@gmail.com.

KY Suicide Prevention Group Steering Committee

Julie Cerel, Chair, University of Kentucky	julie.cerel@uky.edu
Pat Anderson, Vice Chair, Mt. Comp. Care Center	panderson@mtcomp.org
Anna Columbia, Secretary, KY Bar Association	AColumbia@kybar.org
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Jenny Jones, Bluegrass Community & Technical College	Jenny.Jones@KCTCS.edu
Jim McFarland, Survivor	jam_mcf9@msn.com
Kate Overberg, KY Partnership for Families and Children	kate@kypartnership.net

If you would like to share or submit information for the newsletter, please contact KY Suicide Prevention Group at KYSuicidePrevention@gmail.com. All information is subject to the approval of KSPG and the steering committee.

National Strategy for Suicide Prevention:

Goal 1: Promote Awareness that Suicide is a Public Health Problem that is Preventable

Goal 2: Develop Broad-based Support for Suicide Prevention

Goal 3: Develop and Implement Strategies to Reduce the Stigma Associated with Being a Consumer of Mental Health, Substance Abuse, and Suicide Prevention Services

Goal 4: Develop and Implement Suicide Prevention Programs

Goal 5: Promote Efforts to Reduce Access to Lethal Means and Methods of Self-Harm

Goal 6: Implement Training For Recognition of At-Risk Behavior and Delivery of Effective Treatment

Goal 7: Develop and Promote Effective Clinical and Professional Practices

Goal 8: Improve Access to and Community Linkages with Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services

Goal 9: Improve Reporting and Portrayals of Suicidal Behavior, Mental Illness, and Substance Abuse in the Entertainment and News Media

Goal 10: Promote and Support Research on Suicide and Suicide Prevention

Goal 11: Improve and Expand Surveillance Systems

Upcoming Meetings & Events

See the KSPG calendar at <http://mhmr.ky.gov/mhsas/kspg.asp> for more information, updates, cancellations, etc.

8/24 KSPG full group meeting will be held 10a.m. to noon, location will be announced later

9/9-9/15 **National Suicide Prevention Week - We are asking that every QPR gatekeeper trainer (and other suicide prevention trainers), every member or friend of KSPG, arrange at least one suicide prevention training opportunity to be conducted during Suicide Prevention Week. Contact Jan Ulrich at jan.ulrich@ky.gov, or 502.564.4456 ext. 4436 for more info.**

9/21 KSPG full group meeting will be held 10a.m. to noon, location will be announced later

Kentucky Suicide Prevention Group

KY Department for Mental Health & Mental Retardation Services

100 Fair Oaks Lane, 4E-D.

Frankfort, KY 40621

RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

