

Working Together to Save Lives

MAY 1, 2007

Suicide Prevention Coalitions

of Coshocton, Guernsey, Morgan, Muskingum, Noble & Perry Counties

Contact: Sandra Harstine, Regional Coordinator—740.454.8557

Rick's Story. . . .

At a recent meeting of the Perry County Suicide Prevention Coalition, Rick T. shared the story of a devastating journey he began in his early teens that eventually led to a suicide attempt.

Rick noted that he began a downward spiral of depression at the early age of 14, although at the time he did not realize what it was. Rick's depression eventually drove a wedge between him and his family—with his reaction being to turn to the abuse of alcohol and drugs. "The drugs and alcohol became my friends and family," he said.

When he was in his early 30's, Rick and his father had re-established their ties. Sadly, however, Rick's father was killed by a falling tree when he was helping Rick to clear some tornado damage from his property in Illinois. This tragedy led Rick into a deeper depression. He noted that, after his father's death, he felt like an outcast from his family—even though they let him know they did not blame him for the accident. Rick's family, however, did not approve of his abuse of alcohol and

drugs.

For the next year or two, Rick led his life in a bar. "I stayed with people who didn't criticize me, and I could tell them things," he said.

Not long after his father's death, Rick's uncle killed himself with a rifle that Rick had given him. "I then felt responsible for the deaths of two of the best people in my life," Rick noted.

Shortly thereafter, when Rick learned his girlfriend was cheating on him, he attempted to take his life by swallowing a large quantity of his heart medication. Rick noted that after taking the pills, he suddenly realized that he didn't want to die. Rick's doctors did not expect him to survive the suicide attempt; however, his condition slowly improved to the point that he was able to be transferred to a psychiatric ward for a brief stay. Rick noted he did not want to leave the psychiatric ward, because "that ward was my safe haven."

Upon his release from the hospital, Rick was invited to attend a church in Illinois, and he was able to begin turning his life around.

Recognizing that he needed to get away from his old environment of drugs and alcohol, he moved to Perry County near his half-brother.

Rick is now on medication for his depression, and he is in alcohol/drug recovery. Rick is very involved with a local church and notes that his relationships with God and Christ and his church family have helped him achieve his recovery.

Rick expressed appreciation to the members of the Perry County Suicide Prevention Coalition for caring about the problems of depression and suicidal thinking and then taking a stand to do something to help prevent the loss of lives.

Rick has joined the Coalition and looks forward to helping them achieve their mission of "working toward ending self-injuries, suicidal attempts, and deaths by suicide through

awareness, intervention and prevention strategies."



Rick's Recommendations

- ▶ When people say they are going to kill themselves, pay attention. Let them unload on you. . . . don't criticize. . . . just listen.
- ▶ There is no sense in dwelling on things over which you have no control. It is important not to blame yourself for the loss of a loved one or friend to a death by suicide.
- ▶ It is important to know the symptoms of depression. Depression is an illness, and learning the symptoms will help you to get help when you need it.

Muskingum Coalition Receives Mini-Grant

The Muskingum County Suicide Prevention Coalition was recently awarded a \$2,300 mini-grant from the Ohio Suicide Prevention Foundation. This grant will fund the cost of re-printing the Coalition's brochures and fact cards. The Coalition's fact cards list:

- ◆ Common Warning Signs
- ◆ High-Risk Life Events Associated with Suicide
- ◆ What to Do
- ◆ What Not to Do
- ◆ Where to Get Help

Since the Coalition's formation in 2003, brochures and fact cards have been distributed to over 1500 people at 80 community events. Fact cards were also mailed to 220 churches and 160 service providers in the county and were distributed at Coalition-sponsored training programs such as SuicideTALK, Applied Suicide Intervention Skills Training (ASIST), Seeking and Finding Everyone (SAFE), and Crisis Intervention Team (CIT) training for law enforcement officers.

Some activities being planned for the remainder of this year include:

- ◆ A suicide awareness "media blitz" in September.
- ◆ A "National Survivors of Suicide Day" candle-lighting and walk in November.
- ◆ Several displays at key community events.
- ◆ Training and distribution of Fact Cards to first responders (law enforcement, clergy, fire departments, EMTs, coroner, funeral homes, ER staff, and Hospice workers).

Statewide Gatekeeper Training—"Train the Trainers"

The Ohio Suicide Prevention Foundation is offering a Statewide Gatekeeper Training:

► **When:** Monday, May 14, 2007 from 9:30 am to 4:30 pm (lunch on your own—excellent cafeteria available on premises).

► **Where:** Ohio Department of Transportation, 1980 West Broad Street, Columbus, Ohio.

► **Who Should Attend:** All Suicide Prevention Coalition members who wish to learn to provide Gatekeeper Trainings within their home counties.

► **Trainer:** Ellen Anderson, Ph.D.,

LPCC, Consultant, Ohio Suicide Prevention Foundation

The gatekeeper training will enhance the resources and tools you use to increase local awareness and intervention goals. Participants will receive a CD with training materials, as well as training in how to use the materials to reach those who could become life-savers in their communities.

(CEUs will be available for Counselors and Social Workers.)

Seating is limited, so please register by May 9, 2007. For more information, contact:

Cheryl Holton, Program Director
Ohio Suicide Prevention Foundation
1900 Kenny Road
Columbus, OH 43210-1090
614.688.4480 or 1.800.848.4815, ext. 84480
Fax: 614.292.1260
www.holton.32@osu.edu

The training is sponsored by the Ohio Suicide Prevention Foundation—through support from the Ohio Department of Mental Health, the Ohio Department of Alcohol & Drug Addiction Services, and The Ohio State University.

Training: Before Their Time — Juvenile Suicide Prevention

Date and Location: July 17, 2007 — Cambridge, Ohio

Who Should Attend: Juvenile Court Personnel and Juvenile Detention Center Staff

(For more information, contact the Judicial College at 614.387.9445)

Reaching Out Gives Ms. Laird a Sense of Purpose

(Written By Judie Perkowski of the Cambridge, Ohio, Daily Jeffersonian)



Nancy Laird's life has been a lot like many other 60-year-old women: Get married,

have kids, and go

through life's usual ups and downs—with one exception, one of her four children was a victim of suicide.

Laird's life changed dramatically on July 21, 2001, when Kassie, her 28-year-old daughter, put a gun to her head and pulled the trigger.

"After a long battle with bipolar disorder, she just gave up," said Laird.

In a state of shock and overcome with grief, Laird said she almost immediately went to grief counseling at Hospice. She said they helped, but her need went beyond what Hospice could provide. She needed to talk to people in the same situation and began looking for a support group. Adding to her anxiety, there was no suicide support group locally. The closest meetings were in Zanesville and Canton in the evening, and she worked nights.

"So I turned to the Internet. I did a search for "loss of child" and found a group. I joined a chat room; but, when I said my daughter died by suicide, no one would respond. They said that particular chat room was (for the most part) for people who lose young children to a disease or some other dreadful thing. Eventually, I found two other people who lost kids to suicide and joined a suicide survivors' support group on the Internet," she said.

Recounting the painful memories leading up to Kassie's death, Laird said she didn't know anything about bipolar disorders and tried to rationalize Kassie's behavior.

"When Kassie was growing up, she was a troubled child....she had a hard time adjusting to change. By the time she was diagnosed and we found out

about her illness, she was out on her own....I couldn't force her to get help. She was on medicine, but it was expensive. When she quit taking her medicine, she would withdraw for long periods of time. She couldn't hold a job and started to self-medicate with drugs and alcohol. Then when she was on an 'upswing' we didn't realize she was more at-risk than usual. Our family thought she was getting better. I didn't realize she was so vulnerable."

Laird said Kassie never mentioned suicide until the year before she died.

"I never thought she would do it. We weren't educated about mental illness and certainly didn't know anything about bipolar disorder," she said. "There was a lot of blame. I kept asking myself why didn't I see what was going on, and if I only...." she said.

Laird noted: "One of the problems you face is that it's very surprising how people react when you mention suicide. They do not know how to react when they talk to you—it's almost like they are afraid they will say the wrong thing. People would talk about my other children but never mentioned Kassie, like she was never born."

"I felt the need to talk face-to-face with people, either one-to-one or in a group, but there was nothing available. Then, miracle of miracles, Guernsey County received a grant and formed the Guernsey County Suicide Prevention Coalition, but we still needed a survivors' support group. Hospice stepped up and provided us with a meeting place and a counselor.

The support group has given Laird a sense of purpose.

"I'm doing okay. My thing in life is to reach out and educate, so no mother has to go through what I went through," she said.

Local Survivors of Suicide Support Groups

- ◆ **Guernsey County Support Group meets every third Thursday at 6:30 pm at Hospice of Guernsey, 9711 East Pike Road, Cambridge. For more information, call Nancy Laird at 740.432.7963.**
- ◆ **Muskingum County Support Group meets on the first Tuesday of each month at Genesis Hospice Morrison House, 713 Forest Ave., Zanesville. Meeting time is from 6:30—8:00 pm. For more information, call Rev. Tim Patton at 740.454.5364 or 1.800.953.7673.**

Website—Suicide Prevention Coalitions



www.localcommunities.org/lc/maspc

One of the benefits available with the MHRS Board's Network of Care was the opportunity to build a website for all six of the region's Suicide Prevention Coalitions.

This site offers individual information about each of the six Coalitions in Coshocton, Guernsey, Morgan, Muskingum, Noble and Perry Counties—as well as educational materials about suicide and suicide prevention, a message board, and an interactive calendar.

A big THANK YOU to Dale Bookless, MHRS Board President and also a student intern at the Board, for his work in building the website for the Coalitions!