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April/May 2017 Newsletter
FLORIDA SUICIDE PREVENTION COALITION
*A statewide, grassroots organization
of survivors, crisis centers, & interested citizens*

FSPC NEWSLETTER SIGN-UP

Don't miss the latest updates. FSPC encourages you to sign up with your email address to receive an email announcement directly to your inbox when each Newsletter is posted on the FSPC website. Email Steve Roggenbaum, Vice Chair, to register at roggenba@usf.edu

2018 FSPC MINI-CONFERENCE. YES – 2018!

FSPC encourages you to make plans now to attend *FSPC's 2018 Florida Taking Action for Suicide Prevention 3rd Annual Mini-Conference*. The event will be held Monday/Tuesday February 19th (pm) and 20th (am), 2018 at Florida's Department of Children and Families (DCF) in Tallahassee.

NEWSWORTHY

Article from *SEC Country*, by Marq Burnett (2/28/17).

Nick Saban Receives Award For Contributions To Suicide Prevention

TUSCALOOSA, Ala. — Alabama coach Nick Saban received the Grant Teaff/Jason Foundation "Breaking the Silence" Award for his contributions to suicide prevention on Monday.

Saban, in his 11th season at Alabama, has dedicated his time and resources during his time in Tuscaloosa and throughout his career to help prevent suicide.

In March, Saban, Alabama state Sen. Gerald Allen and Jason Foundation president Clark Flatt held a press conference to announce the legislative introduction of the Jason Flatt Act — Alabama SB. The Jason Flatt Act,



which was passed in 16 states, provides required training for school educators to be better able to identify and assist possible at-risk youth who may be struggling with thoughts of suicide.

The Jason Foundation is a national leader in youth suicide awareness and prevention. The foundation was founded in 1997 after the suicide of Flatt's son, Jason Flatt. Clark Flatt and Saban have known each other since Saban's days at LSU.

In Alabama, suicide is currently the second leading cause of death for middle and high school students, ages 12-18. It is also the third leading cause of death for the age group 10-24.

Article link: <https://www.seccountry.com/alabama/nick-saban-receives-award-contributions-suicide-prevention>

RAP ARTIST LOGIC RELEASES SONG "1-800-273-8255," HIGHLIGHTS THE NATIONAL SUICIDE PREVENTION LIFELINE AS RESOURCE

The new song is named after the Lifeline's national phone number and encourages individuals in crisis to reach out.

NEW YORK, N.Y. (April 28, 2017) – Today, Def Jam artist Logic released his single "1-800-273-8255" ahead of his upcoming album *Everybody*. The song is an anthem that shares a story of an individual in crisis who finds help, and encourages his fans and other individuals in crisis to contact the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline for support. Alongside the song's release, several montage video PSAs were created and released that feature Logic's fans expressing how his music has helped them, as well as the Lifeline logo and phone number.

The song "1-800-283-8255 (National Suicide Prevention Lifeline)," featuring Alessia Cara & Khalid, details the story of a person in suicidal crisis who calls the Lifeline and finds hope through the support of a Lifeline crisis counselor. "In [this song] we hear a person at the end of their rope," says Logic. "We then hear words from the perspective of the Lifeline counselor who in turn gives them many reasons to keep fighting for their life... Finally, we hear the caller express their new lease on life and outlook on a life that they thought was over but had actually been far from it all along."

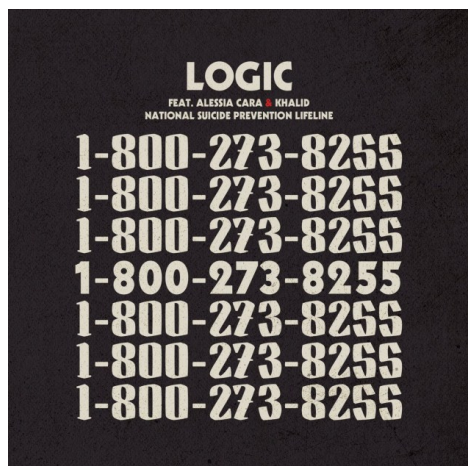
The National Suicide Prevention Lifeline has long shared the message that suicide is preventable, and that healing, hope, and help are happening every day. For every person who dies by suicide, there are 278 individuals annually who think seriously about suicide but do not die. These untold stories can change lives.

"By sharing these stories of recovery from individuals who have been there and have survived their own crises, we can change the conversation about suicide from one of tragedy and isolation to one of hope," says Dr. John Draper, Director of the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline. "It's an honor for us to be working alongside Logic to help people in despair find hope and meaning."

The Lifeline's national network of local crisis centers provides free and confidential emotional support to people in crisis 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, across the United States. The National Suicide Prevention Lifeline is funded through the [Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services](#)

[Administration](#) (SAMHSA) and administered by the [Mental Health Association of New York City](#) (MHA-NYC).

“At MHA-NYC, we thank Logic for raising awareness of the Lifeline’s 24/7 services, sharing a powerful story of hope and recovery, and adding his creative voice to the message of suicide prevention,” says Kimberly Williams, President of the Mental Health Association of New York City.



Listen to the song (<https://itunes.apple.com/us/album/everybody/id1221017205>) or watch the PSA videos (https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLiP-eOwiHXLy1lmOEdK8iffhNid6_EHVQ). If you are in the United States and in crisis or emotional distress, call the Lifeline at 1-800-273-TALK (8255) at any time. For more information about the Lifeline, visit suicidepreventionlifeline.org.

Article link: <https://mhaofnyc.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/Logic-Lifeline-Press-Release-Final.htm>

IN FOCUS

Get to know a Regional Director or Officer a little better in each newsletter.

Rene D Favreau is FSPC Treasurer and previous Regional Director. Rene has been a member since the Florida Suicide Prevention Coalition's inception over 15 years ago. He has more than 20 years of experience working on a 2-1-1 hotline answering calls from the community on a variety of issues, but he feels the most important are from callers that want to end their lives. Even though he has not had to endure the loss of a family member or close friend to suicide, he shares the pain and suffering that others face on a daily basis due to the loss of loved one to suicide. The passion to prevent suicide is what drives him to be a part of the Florida Suicide Prevention Coalition. He currently lives in Palm Beach County, is married to his high school sweetheart, is an avid animal lover, & serves as an active American Red Cross Volunteer.

Rene believes in Pro-Life, stating that everyone deserves a fighting chance regardless of his/her challenges. Rene also emphasizes that suicide awareness and prevention education are very important to the safety and well being of residents of Florida. Fighting for an equal opportunity for all to have access to mental health counseling (treatment) and to create a healthier environment is what keeps Rene motivated and passionate about the FSPC.

Rene considers that being a part of FSPC, an organization that can help to prevent suicide, is a privilege and an honor. FSPC is lucky to have had Rene consistently serve as our Treasurer for years and it's notable that he has an Associate's Degree in Business and Accounting.

HEART OF FLORIDA UNITED WAY EARNS THE 2017 AMERICAN ASSOCIATION OF SUICIDOLOGY'S CRISIS CENTER EXCELLENCE AWARD

The AAS Crisis Center Excellence Award honor was presented to Caree Jewell, Heart of Florida's Senior Director at the annual AAS conference in Phoenix last month, April. Caree received an AAS

Service Recognition plaque and spoke eloquently about the center's staff, their commitment, preparedness, and dedication despite being thrust into an unexpected crisis following the Pulse Night Club shooting. Heart of Florida United Way is one of 11 nationally certified crisis lines as part of the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline (800-273-8255 or TALK).

Following are excerpts from the nomination submitted by Christian Burges, [Director, Disaster Distress Helpline, Mental Health Association – New York City](#).

On June 12, 2016, 49 people were shot and killed and 53 others injured at the Pulse LGBT Nightclub in Orlando, FL. The incident was the largest mass shooting by a single shooter and the deadliest act of violence against LGBT people in U.S. history. In addition, it was the deadliest terrorist-motivated attack in the U.S. since the 9/11 attacks in 2001.

Under these circumstances, the “circles of impact” following this event were extraordinary: not only were the survivors of the incident, their loved ones and the victims’ loved ones, and the first responders, rescue and recovery workers traumatized, but the reverberations were also felt deeply across the entire city of Orlando, the region, the state of Florida, across the entire country...and across the world.

Within these circles, survivors and victims’ loved ones of past acts of terrorism, shootings, and other incidents of mass violence would have been especially vulnerable to distress, and also two other groups of people- Latinos and lesbian, gay, bi, and transgender women and men, as the attack specifically targeted an LGBT nightclub hosting a “Latin Night”, members of these communities.

Across all groups impacted by this tragedy, across the country, & across the world, people rallied together in the immediate aftermath and during the months that followed under the banner of “We Are Orlando / Somos Orlando”, demonstrating that there is strength in unity and a commitment to building a better world together in the face of hate.



The mission of the United Way is to “improve lives by mobilizing the caring power of our community to advance the common good” and Heart of Florida United Way is Central Florida’s largest supporter of local health and human service agencies.

Under this guiding mission, Heart of Florida, based in Orlando, perfectly captures the spirit of “We Are Orlando” as exemplified through the mobilizing of their staff, coordinating resources, and providing 24/7 crisis support *immediately* once news of the shootings broke in the early morning of June 12th, a response that was helped in no small part due to their pre-existing commitment to their community, a commitment that has been fiercely strengthened in the months following the tragedy. The overall response of Heart of Florida and the reasons for this Crisis Center Excellence Award recommendation are further described, below.

As the Director of the Disaster Distress Helpline, a sub-network of the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline, I saw first-hand the commitment of Heart of Florida following the Pulse Nightclub shootings. Heart of Florida has been a part of the Lifeline network of crisis centers since 2010 and a DDH ‘Core Region’ text center since 2013. Following the first reports of the shootings, I immediately reached out to Caree Jewell, Senior Director for 2-1-1, checking in to see how their staff were doing and to offer support and resources. Caree immediately reached back as of course they were already engaged at the local level, and reported back that while their staff were all safe and accounted for, of course they were shaken- but, in the true spirit of all crisis centers, determined to do

the best they can do to be there for individuals, families & communities in need, with 24/7 crisis counseling and support.

Furthermore, being a gay man myself, I automatically knew that cultural sensitivity and awareness of the LGBT community would be vital to the mental health response following this incident, and Caree was pro-active (before I even had the chance to check in on that point!) in her initial response, assuring me that Heart of Florida was already in touch with LGBT-identified/trained and trusted providers who would be referral resources and a part of their overall community response.

I can't highlight enough the importance of this part of the reason for my recommendation: So often in mental health (and many other services, from housing to substance abuse treatment, school-based services to sexual health education), providers may think they have the capacity to serve a unique/diverse population such as the LGBT community, yet haven't done anything to actually recruit providers from that community and/or train providers based on sound clinical practices and accepted cultural norms. More so, other providers may have underlying or overt homophobic/transphobic practices that risk further isolating or harming LGBT people in need of support, which can exacerbate distress and other mental health concerns following a community tragedy.

After my interactions with Caree and the Heart of Florida team following the Pulse Nightclub shootings, as a gay man and social worker...I knew, with confidence: They get it.

And although it's only been a matter of months since the shootings, I *still* know that Heart of Florida is staying engaged in their community (and they have continued to share resources and updates with the entire DDH network), and will continue to play a vital role during the long-term recovery in the months and years to come.

Orlando is in good, caring, compassionate hands with Heart of Florida United Way 2-1-1 as a crisis center resource.



The narrative below by Caree Jewell, Senior Director, Heart of Florida United Way 2-1-1

"As we heard about the PULSE shooting in the early morning of June 12th, Heart of Florida United Way 2-1-1 (HFUW 2-1-1) activated our emergency staffing plan. We contacted staff to start determining who would be available to come in on that Sunday. We doubled our normal Sunday staffing and an additional manager was on site. Additionally, we began to utilize our resource manager to use both traditional and social media as well as contacts coming in to 2-1-1 to start identifying where to send inquirers as well as those in crisis. Initially our chats, texts and calls were primarily from individuals wanting to volunteer and donate. Our resource manager was able to verify resources such as One Blood and The Center (our local GLBT support center) who were accepting blood donations as well as water and food for those congregating at the center and One Blood sites. This information was entered into our resource database to ensure our 2-1-1 Specialists were able to successfully direct those who wanted to help. We also received initial contacts from therapists who were interested in volunteering. These individuals were vetted by ensuring they were licensed in the state of Florida and then were directed to The Center. On the first day, most of the affected individuals were congregating at The LGBTQ Community Center because it was a known safe place. We also had a family counseling center with all bi-lingual licensed therapists reach out to us and we were able to connect them to The LGBTQ Community Center as well as enter them into our database as available for those who were affected.

“It wasn’t until the afternoon and the evening that we really saw an increase in contacts from family and friends worried about those who they couldn’t contact as well as individuals who were either at the night club or were supposed to be there. We began to also have contacts from individuals in the LGBTQ community who were afraid to leave their homes because they were afraid they would be targeted. We were able to offer the option to everyone to use the Facebook tool to check in that you are safe and to check to see which of their friends had checked in but we did caution them that official sources had yet to confirm who was safe and who had been injured. This social media option was effective and reassuring for many inquirers who were able to find that their friends had checked in safe. The LGBTQ Community Center had also encouraged us to have individuals contact them to check in and to also inquire as to whether or not their friends and family had checked in. Many community members actually went to the LGBTQ Community Center when they heard what had happened to offer support and to find their friends or family.”



“To summarize, on the first day of the tragedy, HFUW 2-1-1 doubled staffing, increased our monitoring and entering of resources as they became available, vetted therapists who were interested in volunteering and directed general community members and affected individuals to places where support and assistance was immediately available.”

“After the first day, spontaneous volunteers and donations began to drop off and we started to see more consistent contacts from individuals, families and friends directly affected as well as those belonging to the targeted community who were experiencing significant fear and anxiety. We maintained an increased staffing level as the situation evolved to ensure that inquirers were served

in a prompt manner via chat, text and phone.”

“On June 15th, 3 days after the PULSE tragedy, the Emergency Operations Center of the City of Orlando with the support of Orange County Government set up a crisis response center at the Camping World Stadium. HFUW case managers and 2-1-1 staff were present during all hours of operation to provide crisis de-escalation, immediate financial assistance through existing HFUW programs, as well as greeting and support to other organizations participating. HFUW worked closely with the Victim Service Center, The LGBTQ Community Center, the Attorney General’s office, volunteer therapists, funeral homes, airlines and sister United Way’s to coordinate immediate and emergency services for victims and their families. One unique aspect of this tragedy was that many of those affected were from out of town and some of their families were unilingual Spanish speakers. 2-1-1 was able to ensure that a Spanish speaking individual was present at the Camping World Stadium during all hours of operation and through partnerships with sister United Way’s and airlines we were able to fly in several family members.”

RESEARCH FOR THE REST OF US



Sometimes important research is filled with jargon, is hard to understand, or doesn’t seem to make sense. We’ve tried to summarize research in common English language.

FSPC’s 2017 Florida Taking Action for Suicide Prevention 2nd Annual Mini-Conference was held April 4th and 5th at Florida’s Department of Children and Families in Tallahassee. We would like to extend a special thank you and recognize all the conference presenters. Thank you so much for contributing to an extremely educational meeting.

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|--------------------------------|---|
| Rachelle S. Burns, MA | Director, TRIO-Student Support Services/Crisis Referral, Pensacola State College |
| Frank Ball | Big Bend Hospice |
| Sheryl Beale | Alachua County Crisis Center |
| Mary Bowers | Big Bend Hospice, NAMI Tallahassee |
| Judy Broward | Vice-Chair, Florida Suicide Prevention Coalition; Board of Directors, NAMI; Board of Directors, Friends of the Alachua County Crisis Center |
| Sofia Castro, EdD | Suicide Prevention Specialist, Statewide Office of Suicide Prevention, Florida Department of Children and Families |
| Christina Colgary, MS | Doctoral student in the Combined Counseling Psychology and School Psychology program, Active Minds Vice President, FSU |
| Brandon T. Cooper ("Coop"), BA | Master's student in the Sport, Performance, and Exercise Psychology program, Active Minds, FSU |
| Jude Dugas | Big Bend Hospice |
| Anika C. Fields, PhD | Director, Office of Counseling Services, FAMU |
| Diana Gonzalez, MSW | Doctoral student in the Combined Counseling Psychology and School Psychology program, Active Minds, FSU |
| K.D. "Mo" Krausman | Loss & Healing Council, American Foundation for Suicide Prevention, Tampa Chapter Survivor Outreach Team |
| Ali Martinez, EdS | Director, Alachua County Crisis Center; Region 3 Director, FSPC |
| Pam Mezzina, LCSW | Bereavement Services Manager & Trauma, Grief, & Loss Coalition for Youth Coordinator, Big Bend Hospice; Region 2 Director, FSPC |
| Erin Morpeth, MS/EdS | Mental Health Counseling program student, Active Minds, FSU |
| Shanteria Owens, BA | Doctoral student, Combined Counseling Psychology and School Psychology program, Active Minds, FSU |
| Jaymee Spannring, MBA | Florida State University Suicide Prevention Coordinator & Active Minds Advisor |
| Marty Swanbrow Becker, PhD | Assistant Professor of Psychological and Counseling Services, Educational Psychology and Learning Systems Department, FSU |
| Stephen Roggenbaum | Vice-Chair, Florida Suicide Prevention Coalition Faculty, USF |
| Jill St. Angelo | Big Bend Hospice |
| Stevie VanAusdale | Alachua County Crisis Center |
| Betsey Westuba | Chair, Florida Suicide Prevention Coalition; Director, Suncoast Yellow Ribbon |
| David Wheeler, PhD | School Psychology Consultant, Student Support Services Project, USF/Florida Department of Education |

WHAT'S HAPPENING



May 14-20th 2017: *National Prevention Week*, "Making Each Day Count."

Prevention of Youth Tobacco Use (Monday, May 15)
Prevention of Underage Drinking & Alcohol Misuse (Tuesday, May 16)



Prevention of Prescription & Opioid Drug Misuse (Wednesday, May 17)
Prevention of Illicit Drug Use & Youth Marijuana Use (Thursday, May 18)
Prevention of Suicide (Friday, May 19)
Promotion of Mental Health & Wellness (Saturday, May 20)

August 16 – 18, 2017. *Florida Behavioral Health Conference* at the Hilton Orlando Bonnet Creek. For more information: <https://www.bhcon.org/>

February 21, 2018. *Suicide Prevention Day at the Capitol*. This advocacy event is in Tallahassee.

SAVE THE DATE: February 19 & 20, 2018. *FSPC 2018 Third Annual Florida Taking Action for Suicide Prevention Mini-Conference*. A two-half day mini-conference in Tallahassee.

RESOURCES



If you or someone you know is in crisis, please call **1-800-273- 8255** (*National Suicide Prevention Lifeline*)

Crisis Text Line – text “start” to **741-741**

Veteran’s Crisis Line **1-800-273- 8255, press 1 &**
<https://www.veteranscrisisline.net/>

Resources for Survivors of Suicide Loss. SAVE. Suicide Awareness Voices for Education maintains a resource list at: <http://suicidgrief.save.org/ResourceLibrary>

Suicide Loss Survivors. The American Association of Suicidology (AAS) hosts a webpage with listed resources for survivors of suicide loss at <http://www.suicidology.org/suicide-survivors/suicide-loss-survivors>

STOP Suicide Northeast Indiana. (2016). *Help & Hope: For Survivors of Suicide Loss*. Retrieved from <http://www.stopsuicidenow.org/toolkits-now-available/>

Project ChildSafe® is committed to promoting firearms safety among firearms owners through the distribution of safety education messages and free firearm [Safety Kits](#) [cable-style gun-locking device and an informational [brochure](#) (also in [Spanish](#))]. Find Florida Law Enforcement partners to inquire about a free Safety Kit from Project ChildSafe.
<http://www.projectchildsafe.org/safety/safety-kit/Florida>

Harvard’s Means Matter is part of the Harvard Injury Control Research Center (Harvard School of Public Health), dedicated to reducing injury through training, research, intervention, evaluation, and dissemination. The Center has published hundreds of studies on injury topics ranging from motor vehicle crashes to alcohol use to youth violence and suicide.
<https://www.hsph.harvard.edu/means-matter/means-matter/>

Florida’s Statewide Office of Suicide Prevention (DCF):
<http://www.myflfamilies.com/service-programs/mental-health/suicide-prevention>

National Action Alliance for Suicide Prevention: The Public-Private Partnership Advancing the National Strategy for Suicide Prevention:
<http://actionallianceforsuicideprevention.org/resources>

Is there a local NAMI Chapter in my area? <http://www.nami.org/Local-NAMI?state=FL>

Controlled Substance Public Disposal Locations. Proper disposal of expired drugs or unused medications can be an effective suicide prevention tool by eliminating access to lethal

means. Many community-based drug *take-back* programs offer the best option for disposal. For disposal locations

<https://www.deadiversion.usdoj.gov/pubdispsearch/spring/main?execution=e1s3>

NEW RESOURCE RELEASED

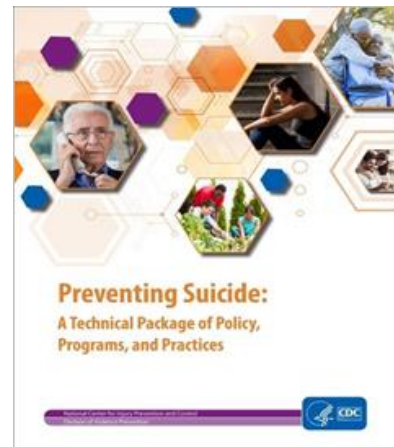
CDC Releases *Preventing Suicide: A Technical Package of Policy, Programs, and Practices* **Technical package helps states and communities prioritize strategies to prevent suicide.**

The CDC released *Preventing Suicide: A Technical Package of Policy, Programs, and Practices* to help states and communities prioritize efforts to prevent suicide.

A technical package is a collection of strategies that represents the best available evidence to prevent or reduce public health problems like suicide.

This package highlights 7 strategies to prevent suicide:

- Strengthen economic supports
- Strengthen access and delivery of suicide care
- Create protective environments
- Promote connectedness
- Teach coping and problem-solving skills
- Identify and support people at-risk
- Lessen harms and prevent future risk



| Preventing Suicide | |
|--|---|
| Strategy | Approach |
| Strengthen economic supports | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strengthen household financial security • Housing stabilization policies |
| Strengthen access and delivery of suicide care | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coverage of mental health conditions in health insurance policies • Reduce provider shortages in underserved areas • Safer suicide care through systems change |
| Create protective environments | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduce access to lethal means among persons at risk of suicide • Organizational policies and culture • Community-based policies to reduce excessive alcohol use |
| Promote connectedness | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Peer norm programs • Community engagement activities |
| Teach coping and problem-solving skills | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social-emotional learning programs • Parenting skill and family relationship programs |
| Identify and support people at risk | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gatekeeper training • Crisis intervention • Treatment for people at risk of suicide • Treatment to prevent re-attempts |
| Lessen harms and prevent future risk | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Postvention • Safe reporting and messaging about suicide |

The strategies are intended to work in combination and reinforce each other. Their implementation requires a collective effort across sectors. The technical package describes the approaches to advance each strategy and the evidence behind them.

The strategies in the technical package support the goals and objectives of the *National Strategy for Suicide Prevention* and the *National Action Alliance for Suicide Prevention* and *American Foundation for Suicide Prevention's* goal to reduce the annual rate of suicide by 20% by 2025.

How can the document be used?

The technical package is intended as a resource to guide and inform prevention decision-making in communities and states.

You can find the new resource version at

<https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/pdf/suicide-technicalpackage.pdf>

AN EXTRA HELPING . . .

Article from The Oakland Press By Monica Drake (monica.drake@oakpress.com) (5/4/17).

Oxford High School students begin project called '13 Reasons Why Not'

In the popular Netflix show "13 Reasons Why," the main character gives 13 reasons why she wants to die. But, for students at Oxford High School, they are giving 13 reasons to live.

Beginning this week and continuing for 13 days, a recording of a different student will play during the morning announcements. In the recording, played for the entire student body, the teens reveal a problem they're struggling with. At the end of the recording, instead of blaming someone, the students thank a classmate who has helped them.

This project was the brainchild of Dean of Oxford High School Pam Fine in memory of Megan Abbott, a freshman who completed suicide four years ago.

"I watched the series. I thought it accurately depicted the problems that teenagers in high school are facing now. But it was incredibly troubling to me that suicide was portrayed as being, almost, inevitable, like she had no other option," said Fine.

"The idea was to come up with 13 reasons why not, because that was not portrayed in the show. ... Even though it can get very dark, there is always hope. Our message is that there are no 13 reasons why. Suicide is not an option."

The project was kept secret. So, while students were expecting to hear the normal Monday morning announcements, they were surprised to hear the voice of senior Riley Juntti.

"Worthless. Self-centered. No morals. Easy. Grimy. Cake face. You would be better off dead. That's just the start of what you would label me as everyday for two years," Juntti said in her recording.

At the end of the recording, instead of naming the person she was talking about, she thanked a classmate. "This tape is for you Elise Godfrey. You saw me when no one else did and continued to listen, share and appreciate the small things with me. Thank you for your kindness I can not repay. You are one of my 13 reasons why not."

Afterward, Juntti's phone and social media accounts blew up with support from her classmates – some who she's never met. One tweet read, "Riley Juntti is braver than anyone for doing what she did."

Juntti said she knew she may receive backlash from what she said, but she didn't care. She wanted to help the girls she knows who have been victims of sexual, physical or emotional abuse.

"Standing up for what is right has always been more important to me than my peers' approval, and this project wasn't an exception," she said.

"Oxford has come together to create an environment this past week where talking about mental illness is socially acceptable. ... I've helped people come forward with their struggles and that's more than what I can ask for from this project."

Tuesday morning's announcement was by Jordan Jadan, the captain of the Oxford Wildcat's basketball team. Unbeknownst to his fellow classmates, Jadan has had a rough year. He moved in with his grandmother after his mom moved to Florida for her job. During this life change, he's been receiving several explicit and degrading text messages from a previously close family member.

"I've had no one to talk to, and it's been hard," he said. "I know I could have given up a long time ago. ... My reasons to live are my two little sisters and my mom."

"There's always someone who cares about you. You're never alone. There's always something to live for."

Since this started, Fine said an outpouring of students have been writing out their stories, wanting to be one of the 13 kids featured during the morning announcements. The remainder of the recordings, which will air everyday until May 17, will be selected from these submitted stories.



"It was a risk, and it's paid off. ... I'm incredibly thankful for the response," she said.

Oxford High School Principal Todd Dunckley is supportive of this project.

"I think it makes students realize that, everyday, they can affect someone with their words and actions," he said. "It's a nice way to start the day, to be quite honest."

Oxford High School students Jeam Linares (from left), Riley Juntti and Jordan Jadan were the first three of 13 students to be featured in the project "13 Reasons Why Not" this week. Photo by Pam Fine

In memory

Megan Abbott, 15, killed herself on May 31, 2013 in a wooded area behind Oxford High School. Fine said she wanted to do this project for her and for her sister Morgan, who is currently a junior at the school.

Morgan said she loves the idea and, in response to the project, she has seen positive messages written on the mirrors in the bathroom and notes in each stall saying, "You're beautiful."

Amy Hafeli, Megan and Morgan's mom, said, "I thought it was a wonderful idea. It brought a positive spin on something so negative."

Megan was diagnosed with depression, and Hafeli said she also showed signs of borderline personality disorder. Before Megan died, she was being enrolled into dialectical behavior therapy.

"I wish we could have gotten her in there, but she just couldn't wait for it," Hafeli said. "I understand that she was in pain. But I couldn't get her to understand that life can still be wonderful."

Hafeli and Morgan said they wish Megan was alive to hear these messages.

"I think if Megan had something like this going on in school when she was there, we would have had more time with her," said Morgan.

Hafeli added, "I'm proud of the school for getting involved and for putting that message out there - not just when it happens, but being proactive about it. Because, once it happens, what can you do? You can't bring the kid back."

Last year, in honor of what would have been Megan's graduation year, Hafeli and her husband Darrin started the "Pay It Forward" Scholarship Fund. They awarded three students \$1,000 and two students \$500 from the college savings that would have gone to Megan. This is their way to try and give students another "reason why not."

"If we can save another family from going through this, then we're all about it," said Hafeli.

Article link: <http://www.theoaklandpress.com/general-news/20170504/oxford-high-school-students-begin-project-called-13-reasons-why-not>

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