

Dear Friends,

It is that time of the year again and we are looking forward to seeing you, your families and friends at our 6th Annual Walk for Awareness of Suicide and Depression Sat. May 8, 2004. Not only is it our only fundraiser but it is a chance to remember those we lost and connect with other survivors who want to make a difference. We will have prizes that you can win with your tickets from each \$10.00 in donations you collect or donate.

This year we are starting something new that we do in Washington, DC at the National Awareness Event by SPAN. We are going to ask all the participants of the walk to bring a pair of new shoes representing the person that you have lost. We will have them on display and plan on having a group photograph with the shoes. We will donate them to a free clothing center.

The following letter is from a very special young lady that has participated in the Walks with her brother Brandon since the beginning. Her Grandmother, Pat Derer and her mother Tina Neupert were two of the original people at the kitchen table and in Washington, DC where the idea of HOPES of WI was born. The family business, Don's Oak has been one of our faithful contributors as is evident at the prize table at the Walk. Her Dad awards the prizes. Her great-grandmother and aunts arrive from all over the state to help set up and run the walk. It looks like their example of wanting to prevent suicides has trickled down to the next generation. This story and the others in this newsletter are fine examples of, "Together We Can and Will make a difference."

"Don't take your own life."

By Amanda M. Neupert

Editorial for a fifth grade writing competition

Suicide is not an illness but depression is.

Many people are killed each year from suicide. The amount of kids under the age of 14 that are taking their lives has almost tripled in the last 5 years or so.

It is a known fact that every 17 minutes another person in the U.S. alone commits suicide. After a year that is more than are killed by cars, planes, and train accidents.

Even if you add in the number of people murdered each year. People who do commit suicide don't want to die but they want all of their problems to go away.

Some people don't know what it feels like to loose someone because of suicide so they don't try to help.

Many people don't know that 80% of all committers have depression and haven't gone for help. I think that if more people knew there were medications and cures the number of deaths would lower once again. I have lost family because of suicide and I know that it is worse than a murder because you start to think differently about that person and all the good AND bad times you had together. Also I think that we need more help with communication for those who think this way. I don't want others to be in pain too.

“Success with the 5th Annual Walk for Awareness”

By Amy Schulz

Last May I participated in my 1st HOPES walk as a way to honor my brother, Rob Schulz, who had committed suicide the previous September. I felt strongly about being a part of this event but was unsure about the fundraising aspect. I remembered a friend telling me that when you're fundraising, it's not for yourself that you're asking for money, but rather for a cause that you really believe in. I knew that my friends and relatives were aware of what a painful experience my brother's death had been for me and my family. They wanted to help, show their support, and to also honor Rob.

About a week before the walk, I tentatively composed a letter and sent it to everyone on my Christmas card list and to some local friends. I also posted a request in my break room at work. By the next week when the walk was to take place, I had received over \$1,000 and the checks continued to come in over the next 6 months. At last count, I had received over \$3200 for HOPES! I was touched by everyone's generosity and the kind words of support that accompanied the checks. Everyone acknowledged how important the work of raising awareness about depression and suicide is. Many of them had been touched in their lives by mental illness or suicide and this gave them an opportunity to also work for prevention of suicide.

I believe that part of the healing for suicide survivors comes when we can have something positive happen as a result of our personal tragedies. For me, it's been empowering to publicly acknowledge that I have been affected by suicide in a very personal way. I feel so strongly about the need to say "Suicide is a huge problem. We must do more to prevent it!" Our participation in the walk while wearing our HOPES shirts reflected these feelings.

I have been struck by the lack of publicity and funding for suicide prevention and mental illness treatment when it is contrasted with numbers from other better publicized illnesses and deaths. I know that I felt good about participating in the Annual Walk for Awareness because it was a way to bring publicity to our cause of "Bringing Depression and Suicide to Light." We had a sunny day and good camaraderie as we walked through downtown Madison. The gatherings at the Capitol with the "Faces of Suicide" quilts and reading the names of our loved ones as well as the luncheon afterwards were uplifting experiences. They were a way to say that we have not forgotten our loved ones and we are trying to prevent similar fates for others. We are making progress in our efforts and we look forward to a day when people with mental illness get the support and treatment they need and when suicide is no longer considered an option. I'm looking forward to the "6th Annual Walk for Awareness" and to seeing even more participants than last year. Please join us!

Awards at our 1st Annual Suicide Prevention Conference

Linda Hale from the WI Department of Health and Family Services, Division of Public Health received an "Appreciation Award" from HOPES at the conference because of her dedication to suicide prevention and her support and encouragement of the efforts of our organization. She is the chairperson of the WI Suicide Prevention Initiative and has been instrumental in helping us to collaborate with other agencies.

The Goltz Seering Agency also received an "Appreciation Award" for its ongoing work in the public education and prevention of suicide. Since experience the loss of its found Bob Goltz to suicide as the result of a depression in 1997, they have donated strategic and creative services including updating the HOPES identity and developing print materials, creating public education campaign materials and providing ongoing marketing and publication relations consulting. Their expertise has been invaluable as we build our organization.

“Each one of us can play a part in suicide prevention” by Tina Neupert

In June of 1997 my family again experienced the devastation that suicide can bring to a family. Ten years before my father had taken his own life with a handgun at Christmas time. Father's Day was always a bittersweet time for our family. Now we had a wonderful stepfather but my brother missed our father horribly. He had also ended a relationship with his fiancée a few months before. The day after Father's Day started like all the rest but by midday had turned into my worst nightmare. We all worked together at our family business and my brother didn't come in for his shift on time. My mother went home to check on him and discovered him in his van in the garage. As you know the days after the suicide are a time of pain and heartbreak.

One of the most difficult things I had to do was to explain things to my daughter and son. My daughter who was five years old had experienced death before but not suicide. Her sadness showed itself in anger. My son was 3 and seemed okay when it all was explained to him. One night when I tucked him into bed he said, “Uncle Daryl is dead like the dinosaurs, he won't be coming back.” When I answered, “yes, that 's true” he burst into tears.

Since that time we have talked about suicide and depression many times in our house. We know depression is something we need to watch for like other medical conditions such as diabetes and heart disease. After my brother's suicide I experienced depression myself firsthand. My children have seen me go for help and seen what a difference finding help can bring. We have talked about what to do if we know others need help too.

This year my daughter, a fifth grader had a writing assignment for school for a writing competition. She chose to write an article about suicide and its impact on our society. A few days later a schoolmate pulled my daughter aside on the playground to tell her that she wanted to kill herself. When my daughter said, “ nothing can be that bad!” her classmate went on to explain about the divorce of her parents and the stress she was feeling in her life. My daughter went on to tell her that her parents loved her and would miss her. After that recess my daughter came in and told her teacher and the classmate's teacher. My daughter was afraid that her schoolmate would be angry and not talk to her anymore. I told my daughter that she had come to her because she knew she would find help. The next day when I picked up my daughter the first thing she told me was that her schoolmate was in school today.

We all can play a part in depression awareness and suicide prevention. When I read an article about depression or suicide I always write an editorial letter and thank the source for the article. If I see something that offended me I also voice my opinion to the editor. These things seem small but if we all take the time to voice our concerns and opinions we can play a part in suicide awareness and prevention.

1st Annual Suicide Prevention Conference **Changing Minds, Saving Lives**

Our first annual conference in Kimberly, WI October 31 and November 1, 2004 was a success! Our Keynote speakers Jerry and Elsie Weyrauch are warm and engaging and talked about the power of one to make a difference in the suicide prevention movement.

Friday we had 4 tracks with training for 100 professionals, community organizers, school personnel and public health personnel. The community organizers from Oshkosh joined us to share their successes with the Yellow Ribbon Program in their Community. Saturday was an extraordinary day with 50 participants and 42 of them were survivors. We had a full day of training from working with media to starting a support group.