

NH SURVIVORS OF SUICIDE LOSS REPORT

After More Than 20 Years of Innovative Work in Mental Health and Suicide Prevention at NAMI NH, Ken Norton Transition from Executive Director Role

BY NAMI NH AND STEVE BOCZENOWSKI

NAMI New Hampshire Executive Director Kenneth Norton, LICSW, has transitioned from his leadership role of the statewide nonprofit in early 2022. An internationally recognized suicide prevention expert, Norton began employment with NAMI NH in 2003 to help develop and implement the Connect Suicide Prevention Program. He became Executive Director in 2011 and has overseen a sustained period of growth that included a quadrupling of staff, budget, and numbers of individuals served, as well as the agency's recognition with the Nonprofit Impact Award from the NH Center for Nonprofits in 2019.

On his time with the organization, Ken noted, "It has been the honor of my lifetime to serve as Executive Director of NAMI NH. As a family member of people with mental illness, I have a longstanding and deep affinity for NAMI NH. I look forward to continuing to support the organization and its mission."

NAMI NH Board President Russell Conte remarked, "Past and present Board Members recognize the strength of Ken's leadership, advocacy and grassroots approach to NAMI NH's efforts. He has made it his life's work to provide a safe, stable and inclusive environment for hope, recovery and mental health for all." In sharing his plans with NAMI NH staff, Norton wrote, "As an organization, NAMI NH has never been stronger. Our passionate and dedicated volunteer base continues to expand our statewide reach, and our talented and hardworking staff further our mission through innovative and expanded program offerings and collaborations throughout the state."

During his tenure, Ken has received broad recognition for his work as an advocate including numerous awards such as the Wheelock-Nardi Advocacy Award from The Mental Health Center of Greater Manchester in 2018, the Richard and Betsy Greer Advocacy Award from NAMI National in 2021, and the Bernard Lown Humanitarian Award from the University of Maine – Orono in 2014.

Of special significance to New Hampshire's suicide prevention community, Ken helped to create the nationally-recognized Connect Program. Ken shared his story of joining the staff at NAMI NH and working on this innovative program:

"My first job out of college was working in a group home for teenagers. We had a part-time tutor from a prominent family in town. Her husband had a drinking problem and she gave him an ultimatum that he stop drinking or she would leave the marriage. He took his life that night...She was a rock, saying she knew he was sick but didn't realize how sick he was. His wake was held in their home, a large Victorian in Downtown Concord. It was my first up close experience with suicide and the only time I have ever been to a wake in someone's home.

"I went on to work for many years at a community mental health center with Elaine de Mello (who now serves as NAMI NH's Director of Suicide Prevention Services). During that time there were suicide deaths of clients as well as colleagues. I left to work at a child-serving organization, and Elaine came to work at NAMI NH. A few years later she contacted me saying there was a small grant to start a suicide prevention program and NAMI NH was going to apply – she thought I would be a great person to lead it.

"I felt quite confident about my clinical skills. However, I didn't know much about a public health approach to suicide prevention, and I had also struggled with my own thoughts of suicide, but I agreed to be part of the application process. It was an unusual approach as we applied as an organization and so the interview was with former NAMI NH Executive Director Mike Cohen, Elaine de Mello, and me. (continues on page 2 ...)



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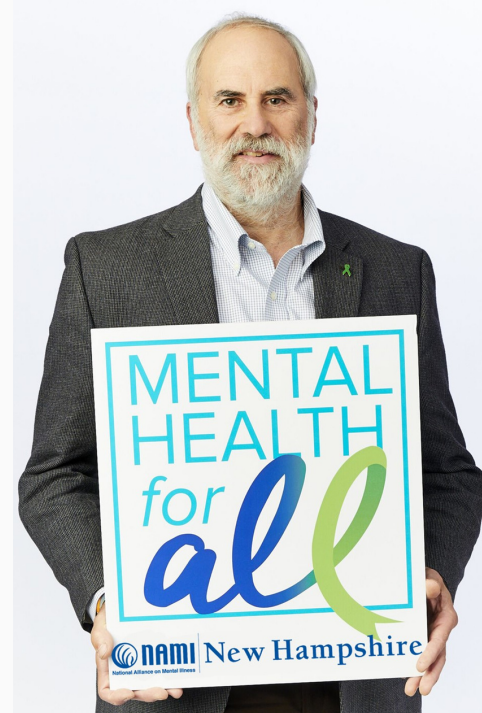
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Jennifer Sabin: New Hampshire's 1st Suicide Prevention Coordinator

BY STEVE BOCZENOWSKI

New Hampshire's Suicide Prevention Council was pleased that Jennifer Sabin was hired by NH Department of Health and Human Services as the state's first Suicide Prevention Coordinator in March of 2021. This is a major step forward for the Granite State's effort to reduce the rate of suicide. For many years, there has been a lot of great work being performed by several dedicated individuals representing a variety of

organizations. But now, all of these efforts will be better coordinated with the creation of this new position.

A lifelong Granite Stater, Sabin is a trained social worker who has had a keen interest in suicide prevention throughout her entire career. Not only is she a native, but she actually resides in the Barrington house in which she grew up. Her children Emmett, 3 ½, and Violet, 1 ½, share the same room that she shared with her sister.

Sabin earned a BSW from Gordon College in Wenham, Massachusetts and then did graduate work at UNH. While earning her MSW from UNH, Sabin completed her social work practicum studying community and administrative practice at Granite United Way. After graduation, she was hired to a full-time position at Granite United Way where she held a number of different roles over several years before eventually joining NH Department of Health and Human Services in her current position.

It was clear that Sabin hit the ground running as the state's Suicide Prevention Coordinator. Because of her previous work in the state, she was already familiar with the key players in suicide prevention here and has been active on a number of fronts. Sabin shared, "The most exciting part about my job is working alongside partners who truly care about the health and wellness of our community. We have a long history of advocacy that's already happening. The exciting part for me is that I get to stand on the shoulders of giants and continue to move the great work forward in new and exciting ways."

Sabin's goals for her new position are to prepare the state and stakeholders for the transition of a national suicide prevention lifeline number from the current 10-digit number (1-800-273-8255) to the 3-digit 988 (coming in July 2022); to continue to bolster the influence of the New Hampshire Suicide Prevention Council in reaching its strategic planning goals; and to strengthen suicide prevention services for NH DHHS employees, their families, and the people they serve.

Sabin adds, "A lot of my passion for the work comes directly from my experience as a loss survivor and connecting with other loss survivors in the state. I lost my friend and colleague, Sue, to suicide in the fall of 2014. I am committed to taking good care of loss survivors in our state as a main source of suicide prevention."

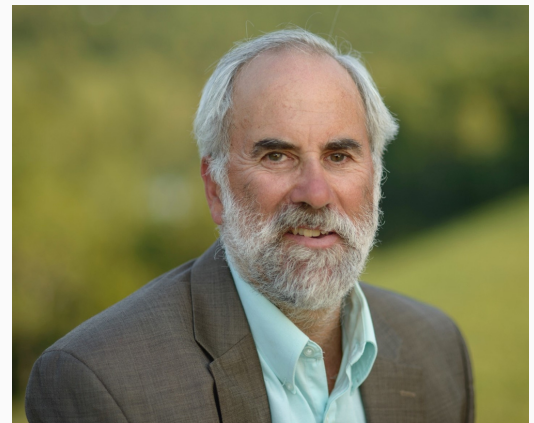
We are truly fortunate for the opportunity to work alongside such a qualified and passionate champion for suicide prevention in New Hampshire.



(continued ...) "We met at the NAMI NH office and drove to the interview at the NH Medical Society together. We were having an animated conversation about suicide prevention and I was still a little uncertain whether this was the right position for me. We continued the conversation as we parked the car and walked down the sidewalk 'til we were at the NH Medical Society. It was the same Victorian in which I attended the wake of my colleague's husband twenty years earlier! I was speechless... we did get the grant and that's how I came to NAMI NH to start the Connect Suicide Prevention work. It is a good example of how sometimes we don't choose this work, it chooses us.

"I share this story because I want survivors of suicide loss to know how much their courage and perseverance has inspired me and my work with NAMI NH."

Ken is certainly one of a kind. Please join us in offering him best wishes in his life's new chapter.



9-8-8 Making Help More Accessible

BY SHAMERA SIMPSON
AND JENNIFER O'HIGGINS



In July 2022, the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline will transform from a ten-digit number to an easy to remember three digits – 9-8-8.

This change is bigger than just a phone number. It will create phone, chat, and text access points for mental health, substance use, and suicidal urgent needs. Right here in New Hampshire, the change is part of a crisis system transformation that will allow the call center to dispatch mobile crisis response teams 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, in all regions of the state.

This service is sorely needed in New Hampshire. Did you know that:

- Suicide is the 2nd leading cause of death for youth and young adults in NH (ages 10-34)
- 98% of Lifeline calls do not require a first responder response
- Suicide death rates in New Hampshire are approximately 35% higher than the national rate

A 9-8-8 crisis line that is effectively resourced and promoted will be able to:

- Help a person experiencing a mental health crisis by connecting them to trained counselors (via phone, chat or text) who can address their immediate needs and connect them to ongoing care.
- Create an environment where callers feel safe, without prejudice or discrimination.
- Reduce healthcare spending with more cost-effective early intervention.
- Reduce use of law enforcement, public health, and other safety resources.
- Meet the growing need for crisis intervention at scale.
- Assess and assist with connecting with local resources as indicated.
- Help end stigma toward those seeking or accessing mental healthcare.

These changes are being worked on now and they will serve residents of all ages and provide help for mental health, suicidality, and substance misuse needs. Not only will New Hampshire residents have an easy number to remember, you will also have trained individuals to respond in-person when and where you need them. For more information about this new service, check out their web site - NH988.com.

To ensure the successful transition away from the current 10-digit (1-800-273-8255) crisis number towards the new three-digit number (9-8-8), NH was awarded funding from Vibrant Emotional Health ("Vibrant") to help meet certain standards of the planning process. NH developed a 9-8-8 Planning Coalition which is tasked to guide and inform the development of the NH Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) 9-8-8 statewide implementation plan. Priorities of the plan include:

- Develop clear roadmaps to address key coordination, capacity, funding, and communication strategies that are foundational to the launching of 9-8-8.
- Plan for the long-term improvement of in-state answer rates for 9-8-8 calls.

How can you support 9-8-8 and help NH residents in crisis?

- You can attend a public listening session to learn more and provide feedback to inform the changes.
- You can assist in the public messaging and communication about the changes as the rollout date approaches in July 2022.
- You can participate in advocacy efforts for robust and sustainable funding for mental health, substance use and suicidal crises response in NH.
- You can stay connected, ask & listen, know the signs and find help in NH for yourself and those around you. Visit www.dhhs.nh.gov/icare to learn more.

An Update from the Survivors of Suicide Loss Subcommittee

BY STEVE BOCZENOWSKI

The Survivors of Suicide Loss Subcommittee of New Hampshire's Suicide Prevention Council is a group of eight committed volunteers who meet monthly in pursuit of their goal of reducing suicides in New Hampshire and providing support and comfort for the Survivors of Suicide Loss in our state. The members of the SOSL Subcommittee are co-chairs Debbie Baird and Shamera Simpson, as well as Susan Morrison, Kimbly Wade, Megan Melanson, Carmen Trafton, Amy Oliva, and Steve Boczenowski. Jennifer Sabin, the state's Suicide Prevention Coordinator, is also very involved with this subcommittee and frequently attends the monthly meetings.

The primary focus of the SOSL Subcommittee is to aid Survivors of Suicide Loss, and the most effective way to accomplish that is to support the facilitators at the nine SOSL support groups around the state. As a committee, we support the facilitators as they help support loss survivors who attend monthly meetings and we strive to build capacity for more groups to include youth support groups and also the training and facilitating of their self-care. A list of the SOSL support groups in the state can be found at www.NAMINH.org/SOSLGroups.

(continues on page 4 ...)

Over the past year, the SOSL Subcommittee has been working to achieve two specific goals: 1) reduce the stigma associated with obtaining mental health, substance misuse, and suicide prevention services; and 2) promote awareness that suicide in NH is a public health problem that is generally preventable.

Some of the activities that our subcommittee has performed in pursuit of the goal to reduce stigma include:

- Monthly Friday morning Coffee Chats – an informal, virtual conversation for Survivors of Suicide Loss, hosted by members of the subcommittee.
- International Survivors of Suicide Loss Day – an annual event sponsored by the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention (AFSP), which is held on the Saturday before Thanksgiving. This event was held in five separate locations across New Hampshire in 2021 and were all hosted by members of the subcommittee.

To promote awareness, the subcommittee has been working to improve access to the NH Survivor Resource Packet. Currently, the

Office of the Chief Medical Examiner (OCME) sends out a packet of information to the next of kin for all individuals who have died by suicide. NAMI NH prepares this packet for the OCME and also has an online version of the packet on its website. The SOSL Subcommittee has been working with NAMI NH to update both the hardcopy and electronic versions of the packet, by reviewing individual documents and offering suggestions for improvement. The subcommittee is also making plans to have their own version of the packet posted to a website that will be made available to them from the state's Suicide Prevention Council.

It should be noted that the SOSL Subcommittee of the Suicide Prevention Council (SPC) stands ready to support other subcommittees within the SPC. As these opportunities arise, we benefit the council as a whole. All of the work of the subcommittees of the SPC are woven together and our combined efforts form a quilt which we use to wrap around our ultimate goal of reducing the rate of suicide in the Granite State!

John Broderick, Former Chief Justice of the NH Supreme Court, Recognized with 2021 Kathleen Sherman Award

BY DEB BAIRD AND STEVE BOCZENOWSKI



On Thursday, November 4, 2021, during the state's Annual Suicide Prevention Conference, Debbie Baird and Susan Morrison announced that Chief Justice John T. Broderick, Jr. (Ret.) was the 2021 winner of the prestigious Kathleen Sherman Memorial Award.

Justice Broderick is certainly a well-deserving recipient of this award. Over the last 3½ years, he has spoken to more than 100,000 high school and college students, business leaders and their employees, senior citizens, and veterans – sharing his family's experience with the devastating impacts of mental illness. He has driven more than 80,000 miles—crisscrossing New Hampshire, Vermont, Maine and Massachusetts—on a mission to improve understanding and awareness of mental illness, to eliminate its stigma, and to encourage discussion.

In his remarks following the award presentation, the former Chief Justice of the New Hampshire Supreme Court said, "This is the most important and meaningful work of my career."

The Kathleen Sherman Memorial Award was established in 2017, so named in honor of an amazing woman, caring mother, dedicated nurse, Navy Veteran, and active volunteer. The Kathleen Sherman Memorial Award is awarded annually to a Survivor of Suicide Loss Speaker or a Suicide Prevention Champion at the NH Suicide Prevention Conference. Kathleen's daughter, Erica, was the first recipient of the award – not just in honor of her mom, but also for all the suicide prevention work Erica has dedicated herself to since she lost her dad to suicide. Erica is a compassionate leader just like her mom! Other award recipients have been Carolyn Greenleaf, Penny King, and Mike Mariani & Devin McLaughlin.





48 in 84

Connor Haas's Personal Challenge Raises Awareness and Benefits NAMI NH

BY KRISTEN WELCH



Last summer, Connor Haas embarked on the “48 in 84” Project - his personal journey to climb New Hampshire’s 48 4,000 footers within 84 days. Connor not only succeeded in his goal to meet this grueling physical challenge, he also was able to bring awareness of mental health and suicide prevention and raised over \$6,000 for NAMI New Hampshire while doing it.

By the numbers, Connor climbed 48 mountains in 78 days (beating his personal goal), and logged over 300 miles with 95,000 feet of elevation gain. But for Connor, all it took was 1 giant leap of faith.

In Connor's own words:

“To those that have followed the journey that are on the fence about trying something new or making that change that there just never seems to be the ‘right time for’, DO IT. The reward that lies on the other side of your challenge is something that is of greater scale than you can begin to imagine.

“I started planning this project over a year ago. I had zero idea how I was going to do it, but I took the first step and that’s what it takes. TAKE THE STEP. And then, take the next one after that. The leap of faith will lead you where you need to be.

“Over the last 78 days, I’ve pushed myself beyond what I ever thought possible. I spent so much time being uncomfortable in environments that I had never experienced. I was cold, hot, wet, alone in the woods, had painful muscles but found that the only way out is truly to keep stepping forward and go through. That place where you ‘don’t think you can’ is where you find this immense growth you didn’t know was possible. The human body and mind are capable of impressive things. All you have to do is tell yourself ‘I can do it’ and keep stepping forward.”

Thank you, Connor, for your incredible and inspiring efforts. We, and all Granite Staters affected by mental illness and suicide, are grateful to you for bringing these important conversations to light. Hope starts with you!

SurvivorVoices: Sharing the Story of Suicide Loss

BY STEVE BOCZENOWSKI

SurvivorVoices: Sharing the Story of Suicide Loss, is a National Best Practice program that teaches those bereaved by suicide how to speak safely and effectively about their loss. Survivors of Suicide Loss are key partners in suicide prevention and postvention. No one is more passionate about preventing further suicides and letting other survivors know they are not alone.

Stories of suicide loss told from the heart are powerful. They promote healing for those who are newly bereaved, educate the public about how to support Survivors of Suicide Loss, and increase awareness of suicide risk factors and warning signs.

While some individuals who take SurvivorVoices speaker training may never share their story publicly, participating helps them with their own grief process and connects them with other survivors. For those who go on to share their stories publicly, they often use this new connectedness to energize suicide prevention and bereavement support efforts (e.g. starting a survivor of suicide loss support group, hosting a teleconference site, starting a Life Keeper quilt project, initiating a suicide awareness event).

During the past year, NAMI NH ran two SurvivorVoices speaker training sessions; one was held in May and the other was held in November (pictured here). If you are a Survivor of Suicide Loss and are interested in participating in a SurvivorVoices virtual training, or you would like to schedule a SurvivorVoices speaker presentation, contact Steve Boczenowski at NAMI NH: sboczenowski@NAMINH.org.



On a beautiful September afternoon, Kristin Joslin completed her day at work, got into her car, and took a 20-minute ride to a new adventure. Kristin would be joining her co-workers from the Barrington School District to participate in 46Climbs, a fundraiser for the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention.

Founded by Kolby and Catherine Ziemendorf in 2014, the mission of 46Climbs is: "Taking positive action to overcome suicide and mental illness by challenging individuals across the country to set both physical and fundraising goals during an annual week climb event." The couple was motivated to organize this fundraiser because of their love of the outdoors and in response to Kolby's high school experience of losing a friend to suicide.

When Kristin arrived at the base of Parker Mountain in Strafford, she found her fellow educators decked out in 46Climb hiking gear and ready for action. Although Kristin's colleagues have been participating in 46Climbs for a few years, this was Kristin's first time. Kristin climbed in honor of her brother, Jeffrey, who died by suicide in 2018. And as an active member of the Durham Survivors of Suicide Loss support group, she also climbed in memory of the loved ones of her fellow group members – she carried their names written on a special bandana.

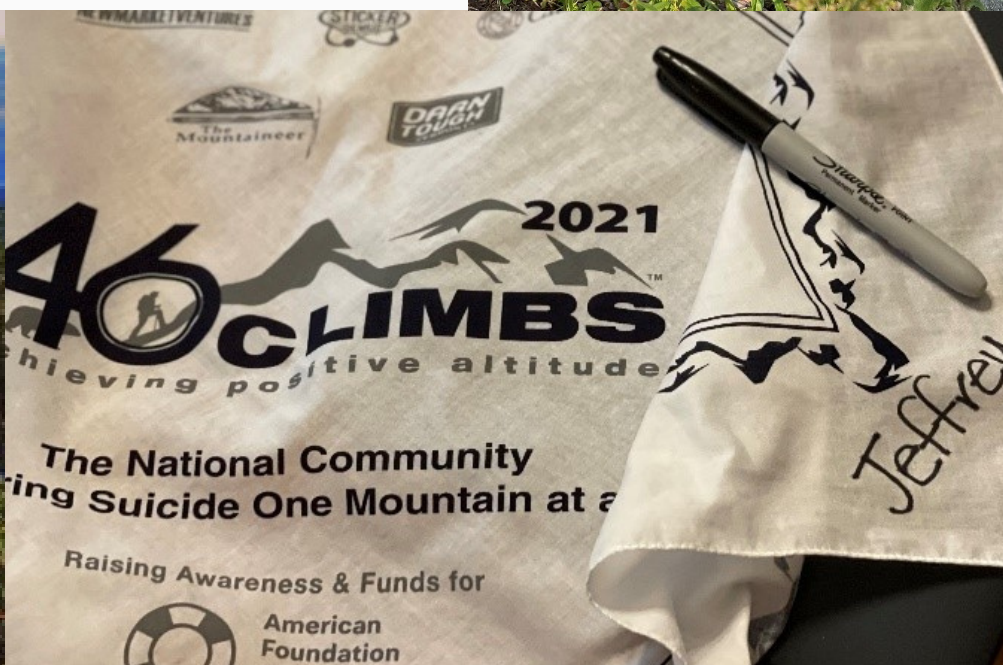
Although she keeps herself in good shape by running, Kristin found that climbing to the summit of this 1,300 foot mountain was out of her comfort zone. Although it was a challenging climb, Kristin found that her spirit was buoyed by the support and compassion of her colleagues as they alternately provided companionship by walking alongside of her and let her walk alone when she needed time and space to contemplate.

And speaking of taking on new challenges, Kristin recently agreed to step up to co-facilitate her Durham support group. In this new role, she will be joining forces with the current Durham facilitator, Amy Oliva.

46Climbs is an amazing financial success, this year alone the program has raised over \$278,000! But it is also a success in bringing comfort to each individual who participates in the event, as Kristin would attest. Kristin summed up her experience by saying, "The ever-changing journey through grief is different for everyone. I was reminded during the 46Climbs hike with my friends and colleagues that no one is alone in that journey. There are many on the same path, supporting, encouraging and guiding each other toward peace, love and a life lived with gratitude. The 46Climbs organizers share this sentiment, as they express: "Achieving positive altitude in the fight against suicide one step at a time."

46Climbs

BY STEVE BOCZENOWSKI



2021 New Hampshire Suicide Prevention Conference

BY ELAINE DEMELLO



The 18th Annual NH Suicide Prevention Conference focused on a theme of Growth and Renewal. This conference took place on November 3rd and 4th, 2021. A decision was made early in the year to have the conference be totally virtual, and to offer a cross section of specialized, 3-hour advanced workshops on Wednesday, November 3rd, to include CEUs (continuing education credits for professionals). Workshop options focused on Ethics; Young Adults; Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACES) and Healing Arts. On Thursday, a full day of opening sessions, plenaries, and afternoon workshops offered a variety of experiences that started with overviews of state and national initiatives.

Following introductory sessions on November 4th, a virtual panel presentation opened up the voices of young people struggling with mental health issues, from struggles during the pandemic to longer term experiences with mental illness, trauma and suicidal thinking and behavior. Titled Honesty With Safety, this powerful session gave the audience a chance to

understand the depth of both the despair as well as the hope that young people have in surviving adverse experiences, and how adults can be part of their recovery and growth.

The opening plenary: Breaking Silences and Living Out Loud: The Healing Journey of an Asian American Woman, shared the life of the speaker (Pata Suyemoto) whose family experienced isolation, historical trauma and a journey through mental illness. Her story offered insights into cultural stigma as well as the importance of cultural humility.

Among the many highlights of the conference was a video of Justice John Broderick receiving the Kathleen Sherman Award, and a video updating the audience about Pedaling for Prevention, the cross-country bicycle journey of two young men, Mike Mariani and Devin McLaughlin, whose goal has been to raise awareness about suicide prevention after losing a friend and brother to suicide.

Afternoon workshops offered live/virtual on Thursday afternoon provided a self-care workshop followed by a workshop on peer support for first responders. Two pre-recorded workshops included one that focused on suicide prevention for specialized groups including Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) youth and one that brought insight into individuals affected by developmental disabilities and mental health needs.

Included in the virtual access to these workshops and sessions were electronic links to program handouts, resources, exhibitors and sponsors.

On the first day, approximately 110 individuals registered and attended; on the second day, just under 90 people registered and 55 turned in evaluations, reflecting their participation in all or part of the day. As is typical of attendees in past conferences, on both days, participants who identified as mental health providers comprised over 50% of attendees, but the audience was very diverse regarding the community sectors represented. Evaluations were overall positive, with many noting the benefit of a virtual platform, along with hopes expressed to have a future conference in person.

International Survivors of Suicide Loss Day BY STEVE BOCZENOWSKI

International Survivors of Suicide Loss Day is an event, sponsored by the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention, in which survivors of suicide loss come together to find connection, understanding, and hope through their shared experience. This year, International Survivors of Suicide Loss Day was held on Saturday, November 20, 2021.

Also known as Survivor Day, this event was first held in 1999 when Senator Harry Reid, who lost his father to suicide, introduced a resolution to the United States Senate which led to its creation. As a result, the day was designated by the United States Congress as a day on which those affected by suicide can join together for healing and support. It was determined that Survivor Day would always fall on the Saturday before American Thanksgiving, as the holidays are often a difficult time for suicide loss survivors.

Due to the efforts of AFSP, hundreds of these events are hosted all around the world each year, including in five locations around New Hampshire this year: Concord, Dover, Keene, Manchester, and Nashua. Nearly 100 people throughout New Hampshire participated in these events.

Deb Baird was one of the facilitators at the Concord event and here's how she described the event: "It was an inspiring and hopeful day of peace, kindness, camaraderie, and blessings! We started with the slideshow of our beautiful loved ones (with music, put together by the lovely Shamera Simpson of AFSP) and then a candle lighting and an ice breaker with introductions, the passing out of colored beads representing our loved ones we've lost to suicide, showed the film of Family Journeys, took a break, had a wonderful

(continues on p.8 ...)



group discussion, with lunch to follow with sharing more stories and getting to know each other. We had some newly bereaved loss survivors and some later out in their grief, but we had a beautiful connection of healing and hope, to end with the reading of a poem and taking home a grief heart with a message of what we would take from this day. Throughout the day we wrote memories of our loved ones (or anything really) on colored paper or wooden leaves and hung them on a beautiful memory tree made by one of our volunteers. This memory tree stayed in front of the room for us to hang these memories on. It was an emotional day that left all of us full of great hope and healing.”

In Dover, Amy Oliva was one of the facilitators and here’s what she reported: “We held our event at Dover High School. In addition to AFSP NH, our event partners and supporters were the Dover School District, Dover Mental Health Alliance (DMHA), and the Durham SOSL Support Group. Working with our partners and supporters was a very positive experience and we hope to do it again next year, as well as stay connected on suicide prevention and postvention efforts.

“Losses ranged from as recently as 6 months ago to more than 10 years. For half of those who attended, this was their first ISOSLD event. For close to a third, it was the first time they had been in a space with other loss survivors at all. For a few people, it was the first time they shared about their loss by suicide.

“We started with welcomes and brief remarks. We emphasized self-care throughout the event (we also had a clinician present in case anyone needed additional support), and talked about ways to care for ourselves in the hours and days following the event. Refreshments were provided (including yummy baked goods from local businesses). We showed the film *The Journey: A Story of Healing & Hope*, followed by a break before moving into group discussion. It was a day of community, connection, and support. People present had lost siblings, children, parents, friends, spouses and uncles. Emotions were raw, as they are at these events, and people cared for each other throughout the event. I saw people gently gather around the parents in pain and the person who had just lost their spouse. It was beautiful to witness a group of people, most of whom have never met before, hold each other up, share deeply, cry, and yes, even laugh together. This is what makes these events so meaningful and the words ‘You Are Not Alone,’ so true.”

In Keene, the event was hosted by The Samaritans NH. Here’s what The Samaritans NH Executive Director, Carmen Trafton, told us about the event: “We had a good group in Keene. The day was very well received by everyone. We started with an optional lunch and craft activity to help people get comfortable and then following introductions, our facilitator led the group with a breathing exercise. It was a very nice way to start. We took a break immediately following the film to allow people to collect themselves. After the break, we held a workshop on stress and grief during the holidays. We closed the day by going around the room and saying the name of our loved ones. Everyone had brought a framed picture of their loved one for our remembrance table. I think it was a beautiful way to include them in our event. Although we provided the opportunity for people to leave after the video, everyone stayed until the end of our program. We always feel like this is one of the most important events that we host each year.”

Allison Sharpe, a psychotherapist from Nashua, was the facilitator for the event in Nashua. Here’s how Allison described that event: “Nashua had a good turnout. Despite some technical difficulties with the audio set up in the hotel conference room, we persevered. We had a wide range of survivors in terms of the relationship to their loved ones and in the timing of the loss. We had losses as recent as one month and others whose loved ones died years ago. The emotion was raw and high, but everyone was so compassionate, present, and kind with themselves and each other.

“We had a discussion following the film, a short break, and a journaling activity. After the journaling activity, some shared their thoughts and then there was a craft which tied into the journal assignment. The group decorated a small wooden house ornament to symbolize the foundation, structure and supports we have as survivors.



Megan Melanson

“We ended with a delicious lunch, some closing words and lots of hugs.

“It was a powerful and exhausting day, and I felt truly honored to be a part of it and hold space for so many amazing people.”

As you can see, these were very powerful events for the participants all throughout the state. This comment from Megan Melanson, one of the facilitators in Concord, sums up the experience that many of us had: “I have attended several survivor day events in the past, but have never walked away with such a sense of peace and healing as I did from this group.

Our time showed the true power of connection and shared experience in allowing a group of strangers to be so vulnerable with one another. Although it was heavy and emotional at times, I feel that everyone walked out of this event feeling lighter and supported.”