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Katherine Cox: New Hampshire's Suicide Prevention Coordinator

In December 2022, Katherine Cox, MSW, became the State of New Hampshire Suicide Prevention Coordinator for the Department of Health and Human Services, Division of Behavioral Health. We are so fortunate to have Katherine in this role!

Katherine has over 15 years of experience in direct human service roles, project management, quality improvement, and consultation. She spent six years with the Institute for Health Policy and Practice at the University of New Hampshire, serving as a Project Director. She was part of the Delivery System and Payment Reform focal area with the NH Citizens Health Initiative. The primary focus of her work at UNH was on improving access to whole-person care and implementing system-wide change initiatives.

Katherine's goals as the Suicide Prevention Coordinator include working "to ensure suicide prevention is woven into the fabric across the continuum of care." As she says, she is "in the business of trying to change the trajectory of some people's lives ... supporting people in all aspects of their lives," and stresses the importance of community connectedness and building empathy. In her words, "Everyday helpers are the key to our success as suicide prevention advocates."

Katherine spent her youth on the stage and has traveled nationally and abroad with choirs. She understands the healing effect that art and



performance can have on one's health. Also, she has firsthand experience in seeing the power that art, music, dance, and theater has to convey the human experience. Katherine believes it is imperative to tap into our collective empathy to promote connectedness, resiliency, and wellbeing.

She has an advocate heart with lived experience roots – and "will spend the rest of my life working on our systems to improve the health and wellness for individuals."

Article by Amy Oliva, NAMI New Hampshire

NAMI New Hampshire SurvivorVoices Speakers Making an Impact Around the State

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.

During 2022, SurvivorVoices speakers shared their stories at many events both in person and virtual, highlights which you will learn more about in the following pages.

If you are a survivor of suicide loss and are interested in participating in a SurvivorVoices training, or if you would like to schedule a SurvivorVoices speaker, please contact Amy Oliva at aoliva@naminh.org.

Article by Amy Oliva, NAMI New Hampshire



Survivor Stories Event – May 23, 2022

In May 2022, NH Suicide Prevention Council Survivor of Suicide Loss (SPC SOSL) Subcommittee hosted a first-time event called *Survivor Stories* which was a wonderful success.

The event featured four SurvivorVoices speakers – Alexa Felix, Debbie Baird, Janyce Demers, and Dawn Johnson – who thoughtfully and beautifully shared their stories of loss, healing, and hope. A panel discussion moderated by Steve Boczenowski followed the speakers' stories.

The event was open to the public with close to 40 people in attendance, many of whom were loss survivors. At the reception which closed the event, people stayed to connect, share with one another, and learn more about survivor resources.

Because of how well received the event was, the SOSL Subcommittee will be holding two Survivor Stories events for 2023 – Wednesday May 3, in Concord and Tuesday May 23, in Portsmouth. If you are interested in learning more about these Survivor Stories events, please contact Steve Boczenowski (boczeno@gmail.com) or Debbie Baird (dbaird@afsp.org).

Article by Amy Oliva, NAMI New Hampshire

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International Survivors of Suicide Loss Day (ISOSLD) November 19, 2022

International Survivors of Suicide Loss Day is an annual event, sponsored by the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention (AFSP), where survivors of suicide loss come together to find connection, understanding, and hope through their shared experience. AFSP supports and promotes hundreds of these events all around the world each year. In November 2022, there were five events in New Hampshire: Concord, Dover, Keene, Manchester, and Nashua, and nearly 100 people attended these events.

This year, all New Hampshire sites and the New England Region Virtual Survivor Day event featured SurvivorVoices speakers! The response to having speakers share their stories of loss, healing, and hope in-person was very positive with people saying how meaningful it was to hear the speakers' personal stories of loss, and that it gave them hope that healing is possible.

As one site facilitator said, “We had a wonderful day filled with *gratitude, connection, love, and hope*. We spent some time getting to know one another by sharing our stories. We felt some small comfort knowing that we are not alone with our grief. Our loved ones who passed will always be in our hearts and minds.”

Article by Amy Oliva, NAMI New Hampshire



At the state's annual Suicide Prevention Conference, "Refueling Hope" in November 2022, the Survivors of Suicide Loss (SOSL) Subcommittee of the state's Suicide Prevention Council, hosted the session "Survivors of Suicide Loss: Finding Our Voices." This session was presented by the co-chairs of the SOSL Subcommittee, Debbie Baird and Steve Boczenowski.

Debbie began the session by providing an overview of the work of the SOSL Subcommittee. The focus of this work is to support survivors of suicide loss throughout the state. These efforts are both direct, e.g. providing online monthly support groups for survivors, and indirect, e.g. by providing support for facilitators of support groups for loss survivors. Next, Steve moved to the SurvivorVoices speakers portion of the session. Before the speakers were introduced, Steve provided some basic information about suicide loss and general guidelines for speaking safely about suicide.

The heart of this session was the survivor speakers: Jace Troie, Billy Stouges, and Megan Melanson. Each of the speakers completed the SurvivorVoices program, which is offered by NAMI New Hampshire and they all shared compelling stories which described their loved ones who were lost to suicide, how this loss has affected them, and how they have been able to manage their grief and move forward with their healing.

Following the three stories, a brief Q&A was held to allow the speakers – Jace, Billy, and Megan – to informally discuss their experience of relating their heartfelt stories. Approximately 80 people attended the workshop, and the feedback was overwhelmingly positive, with many people commenting how important it was to them to know they are not alone in their suicide loss and healing journeys.

Steve Boczenowski, Co-Chair, Survivors of Suicide Loss Subcommittee, NH Suicide Prevention Council

Winner of the Kathleen Sherman Award

Al Carbonneau

At the state's annual suicide prevention conference in November 2022, Debbie Baird and Susan Morrison announced that Al Carbonneau was the 2022 winner of the prestigious Kathleen Sherman Memorial Award.

Al is certainly a well-deserving recipient of this award! Al is the Hotline Manager at Headrest and is NAMI New Hampshire's partner through the Garrett Lee Smith (GLS) Grant in preventing suicide among youth and young adults in NH. Al has tirelessly worked to help save lives and support those who are in crisis through the Headrest hotline out of the Lebanon NH office. In 2020 he officially became the Hotline Manager, where he supervises staff, helps to collect data, manages the shift schedule, and fills in on the call line when needed. He mentors others and helps new hires and co-workers to work the hotline.

Al Carbonneau is also a survivor of suicide loss, losing his brother, Jimmy, to suicide in October 2009. Al is a member of the Survivor of Suicide Loss (SOSL) Subcommittee for the NH Suicide Prevention Council and regularly participates in the monthly SOSL Coffee Chats and Tuesday Teas, virtual support groups for loss survivors started by the SOSL Subcommittee in 2020. Al has been trained as an SOSL Support Group Facilitator and has started a support group in Lebanon for loss survivors in the Upper Valley region. Al is also a steady supporter of Team SOS (Survivors of Suicide) at NAMI Walks New Hampshire each year, the state's largest mental health awareness and suicide prevention event.

Al Carbonneau is a shining example of a suicide prevention champion and attributes this to honoring his late brother, Jimmy.

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 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, Mike Mariani and Devin McLaughlin, and Chief Justice John T. Broderick, Jr.



Article by Amy Oliva, NAMI New Hampshire



Remembering Cameron Ford

2022 New Hampshire Suicide Prevention Conference



The 19th NH Suicide Prevention Conference focused on the theme Refueling Hope. The conference was virtual again and took place on November 3, 2022. A cross section of workshops was offered including three-hour advanced workshops to include CEUs (continuing education credits) for professionals.

The conference was dedicated to the late Cameron Ford, a tireless advocate for mental health and crisis services needs throughout the Granite State. His non-profit career spanned more than 30 years and supported efforts to build workforce development opportunities for youth and adults with disabilities and engage youth in enriching programming in and out of school. In his final years, Cameron’s work as the Executive Director of Headrest highlighted his deep commitment to the belief in the potential of all people. Under his leadership, Headrest continues to serve as a leader in providing crisis services for those in immediate need of mental health and substance use supports, as well as expanded services in building employment opportunities across communities. His voice was critical to the planning and subsequent implementation of 988 in New Hampshire.

“Cameron’s lifelong commitment to serving others was tremendously apparent both personally and professionally. Early on he served as a volunteer on the Hopkinton, New Hampshire Rescue Squad and was a visible and well-trained First Responder. His ability to connect with those suffering injury and medical crisis was equaled by his reputation among public safety professionals. In recent years, he was always the first to identify the need for emotional care and support for these critical positions. Cameron never lost touch with frontline workers, using his experience and relationships built over many years to influence mental health and recovery for all.” – Ret. Major Russell S. Conte, Chair, NH Suicide Prevention Council

A total of 205 people attended the conference, with 75 receiving CEUs and 13 receiving scholarships for the conference. Of the 205 attendees, 33% were attending for the first time. The three highest attendee groups were Mental Health Practitioners, Social Service Providers, and Educators, but the overall audience was very diverse regarding the community sectors represented. Evaluations were positive, with many noting the benefit of the virtual platform. 94% of attendees utilized the Whova App throughout the day, including over 350 messages sent between attendees to continue conversations and network. Community board engagement was 150% of what is typical for a Whova event of this size. A strong desire to return to an in-person experience

for the conference in the future was expressed and the hope is this will be the case for the 2023 conference.

Conference feedback was positive with overall ratings for the conference high (4.5 on a 5-point scale), though ease of technology use and audio/visual quality ratings were slightly lower (3.9 and 4.2, respectively). Attendees indicated improved knowledge, with more than 40% indicating a significant increase in knowledge of suicide and suicide prevention. There was strong positive feedback about the opening plenary session, *Answering the Call: 988 and NH Rapid Response* (Sam Captain, James Wright, Jennifer O’Higgins, and Jonathan Routhier), the integration of local efforts in the closing gallery, and the closing plenary, *Ripples of Hope* with speaker Martha Dickey.

There were seven workshops offered including: *Considering the Ethical Implications of 988 and NH Rapid Response* (Kristen Kraunelis and Jessica Lachance); *We Asked the Question: Meeting the Mental Health Needs of Military Members, Veterans, and their Families* (Amy Cook); *Schools and Mental Health Wellbeing* (Barbara Slayton); *Survivors of Suicide Loss: Finding Our Voices* (Debbie Baird and Steve Boczenowski); *Refueling for the Journey: Mindful Planning and Prevention for Good Mental Health in Older Adults* (Ann Duckless); *Navigating Clinical, Legal, Ethical & Personal Issues in Addressing Suicide Risk with Individuals with Substance Use & Mental Health Disorders* (Jacqui Abikoff); and *LGBTQIA+ Risk and Resiliency* (Jace Troie, JoAnne Coles, Jessica Goff). The feedback on the workshops was very positive with attendees commenting the content was relevant, informative and useful in professional and personal spaces. Attendees commented that they wished the workshop sessions had been longer to allow for more content, conversation, and questions. Among the many highlights of the conference was Al Carbonneau of Headrest receiving the Kathleen Sherman Award!

by Amy Oliva and Elaine de Mello, Connect Program, NAMI NH

