

HOPES NEWSLETTER MARCH 2006

FROM THE DESK OF THE SUSAN CONLIN OPHEIM

It's been another busy and exciting year for HOPES. I hope you know that it is through your efforts and your encouragement that we continue to collaborate with other agencies and make sure that the voices of survivors are heard. We do have a voice and we need to make sure that it is heard. Many people are in denial about this subject and you and I know that it is a reality. We can make a difference and I say that if all of our efforts save just one person it is worth it. We know the value of life.

I am so excited about our Walk for Awareness May 6th. We are moving back to the Capitol area where we can walk near the lake and beautiful Monona Terrace. Olin Park is centrally located on Lake Monona and easily accessible off John Nolen Drive just past the Alliant Energy Center. As you arrive and get registered you will be serenaded by a band. The quilts will be on display. The prizes are looking better than ever with an overnight stay from the Great Wolf Lodge, the Lighthouse from Don's Oak, the bicycles from Pacific Cycle just to name a few. And Lunch is Back!!!!!!!!!!!!!! We have prided ourselves on having an opportunity to be together for a time so people can feel a sense of community. This year the fabulous Walk Committee has figured out all the details and the permits so we can have lunch together.

We are looking forward to seeing all of you again and dream of having all the people that have joined *us* in the past and new people joining us for a record breaking turnout. So when you finish this newsletter take time to register today and make a few copies of the poster and post them at your work, church and local grocery store. A survivor may make their first contact with our group from your efforts!

Susan Conlin Opheim

A Report on the 2005 HOPES Walk for Awareness

The 7th annual HOPES Walk for Awareness was held on May 14th, a sunny and cool Saturday. This year's walk had been a challenge to organize. St. Raphael's Cathedral home to the previous walks had been destroyed by fire. A new site was needed and needed quickly. The people we contacted about our walk were very concerned and helpful but we were either too large a group or there facilities were already booked. Luckily, the Madison Park's Department had the morning of May 14th open at the Warner Park Shelter. They helped us get the paperwork filled out correctly and in on time so that we could obtain our permit. The shelter is large and open. The location next to a lagoon is beautiful. The walk took us around the park – past scenic Lake Mendota at Warner Beach and back to the shelter. The bright yellow t-shirts coming through the vibrant green trees was a really an awesome sight! We had water, coffee, orange slices and snacks for refreshments. The door prizes were given out, always a fun part of the event. People talked and shared their experiences. The survivor's quilts were on display and information on suicide prevention was available.

Thank you to those of you who joined us to walk. Thank you for your contributions and fund raising efforts. The money raised this year will allow HOPES to continue our mission of suicide prevention through the coming year. Planning for next year's walk begins in October. We are looking forward to seeing old friends and meeting new ones at the HOPES Walk for Awareness in May of 2006.

Susan Howell, Board member for HOPES

HOPES Walk by Aaron LaVoy

Every year I look forward to the H.O.P.E.S. - Walk for Awareness. I lost my uncle Mark to suicide over four years ago. As is the case with so many others, I never got to say goodbye. I never knew that he was battling depression and because of that I never had the chance to help. I've sometimes wondered "what if." What if I would have run into him the day before...could I have helped? Would I have recognized the warning signs? The truth is--no. Unfortunately, this is a reality for most of us--we didn't learn anything about suicide until it was too late.

I decided that this year for the walk I wanted to do everything possible to raise awareness about H.O.P.E.S. I brought the donation form into work and wrote an email to my entire company about how I was looking for donations to raise awareness about depression and suicide. At first I wasn't sure if I should send it, but I'm glad I did. The response was overwhelming. Not only did I receive a number of donations but people also wanted to talk about it. Many of those same people wanted to know how to join the walk in upcoming years. I even had one person ask for the web site because they have a loved one they were concerned about and wanted an outlet for help. They didn't know what to do and had no clue that there was help available for them. That gave me a feeling that was indescribable because I may have helped someone by writing one simple email. I may have helped save someone's life because that family was now aware of what I didn't know four years ago.

After the amazing response I received at work, I decided to raise awareness with my friends as well. I set up a fundraiser in Madison where all of the donations would go directly to H.O.P.E.S. I asked a local band to perform for free at an area establishment and they eagerly accepted. Admission was free and we included open bar and live music. We simply left a donation box out for the public. Over 250 people showed up and had a great night of dancing and good conversation. Plus, everyone that attended was informed about H.O.P.E.S and how special and critical it is to so many people.

None of this would happen without H.O.P.E.S raising money through events like the walk. Moreover, through these events, they are able to get the word out about H.O.P.E.S., which is priceless. The money the organization receives is used to pay for travel expenses and literature that is distributed to cities throughout the state detailing ways to prevent suicide in the community. H.O.P.E.S was the first thing that helped me deal with Mark's death. Raising money to support a group that might save one family from experiencing a suicide is reason enough for me to raise money and continue dialoguing about H.O.P.E.S. for the rest of my life.

Aaron LaVoy

Spreading the word via Billboards

We received a generous grant from the Charles E.Kubly Foundation for \$15,000.00 to post billboards and distribute radio PSA's throughout the State of Wisconsin. They will have the face of a white male and a heart beat. They will say, "Prevent suicide. Treat Depression. See your Doctor." The Charles E. Kubly Foundation whose mission is to improve the lives of those affected by depression was started by the family of Charlie Kubly who took his own life at the age of 28 after a long and gallant battle against the disease of depression. They host a wonderful event called "Beyond the Blues" which will be at the Milwaukee Zoo on September 16, 2006. For ticket information and more information about this foundation go to www.charlesekublyfoundation.org

You can see the billboards on our website at www.hopes-wi.org and where they will be located as that information becomes available. The campaign was developed by SAVE of MN and Infusion Inc, the public relations firm from Green Bay that assists us with our suicide prevention work in WI.

Survivor's Guide

We are proud to announce the second printing of our "Survivor's Guide". It is a collection of information that we have found helpful to us as we have moved through this journey of grief after suicide. We have it on our website under "Survivor Guide" at the top of the home page. We wanted to have hard copies that we could use at support groups, with coroners, funeral directors, clergy and when we attend conferences.

WI Suicide Prevention Initiative

We continue to work with our partners that have come together with the State of Wisconsin to form the Suicide Prevention Initiative workgroup (SPI). I attended a conference with 10 other representatives sponsored by the SPRC (Suicide Prevention Resource Center) in May in Pittsburgh. It was an opportunity to learn, to collaborate with other WI partners and to begin to set priorities so that we could all work collectively towards the same goals. We wrote (mostly Shel Gross from the MHA in Milwaukee County doing the writing) 3 grants this year. One was for the Garrett Lee Smith Grant that we have encouraged our Senators and Representatives to vote for with our advocacy letters you have all signed. We did not get the grant this time but UW Oshkosh did get one of the grants. We are awaiting news from the Wisconsin Partnership for a Health Future Grant from the Medical College of Milwaukee on a grant that would allow us to build some infrastructure into suicide prevention in WI.

HOPES Hosts a Strategic Planning Event

On July 28th HOPES hosted a strategic planning event in collaboration with the WI SPI group in Verona at St. James Church. We had over 45 people representing government, mental health, tribal organizations, non-profit organizations, police personnel, coroner, school personnel and survivors. The purpose of this meeting was to bring all of these people together to: 1) create a stronger community of those interested in being part of the suicide prevention initiative; 2) increase awareness about this effort; and begin to develop specific steps to move suicide prevention forward in Wisconsin.

HOPES hired Carol Roth as our facilitator. Susan Howell, Jill Collins, Mary Binkley, Tina Werres, Susan Opheim, Mary Doemel and Mary Van Haute were there as our, "survivor voices." Marcia Nechtvatal volunteered to serve our lunch and breaks which made it possible for everyone to participate in the program. Committees have been formed and we are still working on the project.

Conferences

In August we had a display and quilts at the State Prevention Conference in WI Rapids. In September Tina Werres, Sara Leikness Susan Opheim and Mary Doemel attended the 9th Annual Crisis Conference in Madison and helped with the information and the quilt display. Mary Moldenhauer and Susan Opheim attended State of WI Mental Health and Substance Abuse conference in Eau Claire in October and displayed our quilts and our information.

Pat Derer, Susan Ophem and Carmen Cerna from the Grassroots Empowerment Project attended the very first Suicide Attempters conference in Memphis, Tennessee. We went to get ideas how we can include survivors at attempts in our organization.

Washington D.C.

Jill Collins of Waukesha, Mary Doemel of Green Bay, Don Merz of Oshkosh, Denise Pazur editor of Advancing Suicide Prevention Magazine (www.advancingosp.com) Sheboygan, Adel Levy and Susan Ophem of Madison attended the SPANUSA's National Awareness Event. It is a great opportunity to network with other advocates around the country. We learn what is happening in suicide prevention through the training provided. We also meet with our WI Senators and Representatives and remind them that suicide prevention and mental health are important issues that their constituents care about. To learn more about our trip and to see what the issues are go to the SPAN website www.spanusa.org. I also encourage you to join SPAN so when they go to "The Hill" they will be representing a large group of constituents. This is a way to have your voice heard also.

National Survivors Suicide Day November 19, 2005

The following sites hosted Survivor days in their communities with the support of the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention which hosted over 100 sites around the country:

In Wisconsin we had:

Madison - Pat Derer, Mary Moldenhauer, Susan Howell, Dennis Gates, Sara Leikness and Jill Collins collaborated with the Mental Health Center of Dane County at St. Mary's Hospital.

Green Bay – Mary Doemel hosted their event at Bellin Hospital and Jeri Montour from Shawano was their survivor speaker.

Sturgeon Bay - hosted their event at a later date and Mary Doemel was their survivor speaker.

Rhineland – Tina Werres and Susan Mackowski from Northwoods HOPES Support group and Sacred Heart Hospital hosted their event with Susan Ophem as a survivor speaker.

Events included introductions, the panel presentation of survivors from AFSP, a local survivor speaker, lunch and discussion. **National Survivor of Suicide Day is November 18, 2006.** We are working with the Mental Health Association to have a site in Milwaukee this year.

Dates to remember

April 28-May 1, 2006 American Association of Suicide Conference – Science and Practice in Suicidology: Promoting Collaboration, Integration and Understanding of Suicide. Seattle, WA

April 29, 2006 AAS Healing after Suicide Conference, In the Spirit of Hope. Seattle WA

For More information go to www.suicidology.org

May 6, 2006 Walk for Awareness of Depression and Suicide. Olin Park, Madison, WI.

AFSP Out of the Darkness Walk www.afsp.org

July 22-23 San Francisco, CA

August 12-13 Chicago, IL

National Suicide Prevention Week September 10-17, 2006

Details for WI soon to come on our website www.hopes-wi.org.

SPAN National Awareness Event September 7-9, 2006. Washington, DC