A Preventable Heartbreak

There is not a parent out there that would deny worrying about the well-being of their teenager. Most parents would admit to worrying about their teenager’s diet, sleep habits, and grades. Some would even admit to anxiety around their child being abducted, or developing a rare and fatal physical illness. Most parents, however, don’t ever give a thought to their teenager’s risk of dying by suicide.

Suicide is the third leading cause of death for young Americans between the ages of 15 and 24; only accidents and homicides occur more frequently. These statistics are alarming for most people, and should be. A shocking 12% of all deaths for young people between the ages of 15 and 24 are as a result of suicide. For every youth that completes suicide, it is estimated that another 100-200 attempts are made. According to a 2003 Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance Survey, 16.9% of students seriously considered attempting suicide in the previous twelve months and 16.5% of students made plans for an attempt.

Recent events in the Western New York area have brought the issue of suicide into slightly clearer focus in our community. However, there is still much work to be done, including education around the warning signs of suicide and when and how to reach out for help. Warning signs include depression, isolation, increased alcohol or drug use, impulsive behavior, and talking about suicide or death. Red flags include giving away possessions, writing a note, and making a suicide plan.

The good news about teen suicide is that it is preventable. Help is available. Crisis Services 24-hour hotline provides immediate crisis intervention, and supportive counseling to anyone in Erie County that is experiencing an emotional crisis or mental health emergency. Our trained staff and volunteers are here to help and have access to community wide resources. The hotline can be reached by calling 834-3131. Crisis Services also has a hotline dedicated to helping kids and teens cope with the many changes, frustrations, pressures and decisions they face. The Kids Helpline is available 24 hours a day and can be reached by calling 834-1144 or 1-877-KIDS-400. And when a suicide does occur in a family or a school, help is available for those left behind by contacting Crisis Services’ Trauma Response Program. Crisis Services remains committed to the prevention of teen suicide and to educating the community about proper intervention. If you would like to show your support for the mission of Crisis Services, please consider sending in a donation today.
A MESSAGE FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

During periods of fiscal austerity, when the needs of a community suggest otherwise, difficult decisions must be made regarding how to allocate scarce resources between support personnel and programs we are able to offer.

Case in point involves the agency’s Kids Website. Six years ago, we launched the website after having been conceived approximately 4 years prior. With the Columbine disaster of the late 1990's serving as their point of reference, a small group at Crisis Services attempted to combat the growing stress levels present in high school teens.

Like today, funding sources were scarce and very few benefactors were willing to invest in a service considered at that time to be “cutting edge”. It took the progressive attitude of the John R. Oishei Foundation to provide the essential seed money to build the website exclusively for kids/teens incorporating a unique “chat” counseling component.

Time moved quickly and the supportive funding for the Kids Website ran its course. The Board of Directors at Crisis Services determined that such a unique enterprise should continue even without dedicated funds to support its purpose. (In relatively good financial times these are the type of decisions that come easy.) The Board unanimously approved to extend the Website’s existence recognizing its unique potential, a future path for additional electronic driven programs and the urgent need in the community for kids growing more and more restless with life’s issues.

With the onset of the current recession and growing fiscal pressures upon the agency, the Board of Directors challenged me to uncover other cost saving ventures or programs that were not fully supported by a dedicated funding source. The Kids Website proved to be an immediate and obvious target.

No sooner had I informed our Internet Service Provider to take down the Website, a Health Teacher from the Town of Clarence called Crisis Services to voice his frustration and displeasure with our decision. See his story on the next page.

The Clarence teacher immediately offered to find ways to pay for the hosting service. Unfortunately, I had to inform him that the cost to host the Website was minor in comparison to the cost of employing staff to ensure that the Website was properly monitored. In the business of crisis intervention, legal liability becomes a frequent cry from the Board Room especially in times of austerity!

The agency, its Board, its managers and its staff are all living and experiencing a frustrating paradox. At a time when our services have never been as needed, our staff never as well trained, and our methods to help people never more willing and battle tested, our financial coffers remain wanting.

Hopefully, when the veil of financial austerity is lifted slightly, we can once again plan for those in need without being thwarted due to issues of money and the legal liabilities of meeting people during their time of greatest need.

Douglas B. Fabian, Executive Director

OISHEI FOUNDATION AWARDS GRANT TO CRISIS SERVICES

The John R. Oishei Foundation strives to be a catalyst for change to enhance economic vitality and the quality of life for the Buffalo Niagara region. The Foundation further recognizes the importance of organizations that provide invaluable “safety-net” services during this period of economic downturn. Although there are signs of an improving economy, the Foundation appreciates the 24 hour availability of an agency such as Crisis Services of Buffalo and all of Erie County. The John R. Oishei Foundation has awarded Crisis Services a consecutive two year grant of $60,000 per year totaling $120,000. The money will be used to bolster the necessary resources to respond to increased requests for assistance due to the lack luster economy in the Western New York area. The Foundation was established in 1940 by John R. Oishei, founder of Trico Products Corporation.
As an educator and member of a community that has recently been impacted by multiple suicides, I have been reflecting on many moments in life. Suicide first impacted my life when I was in high school. After a classmate took his life, all my peers were taught how to recognize warning signs and help our friends in need. Twenty-five years later, one fact still remains the same: it was too late for our friend Kurt. Nobody was able to recognize suicide warning signs ahead of time and nobody knew how to help Kurt. If only we had known before it was too late!

In recent weeks there have been many community and school-sponsored events in the wake of our teen suicides. People have gathered and shared thoughts and emotions, Crisis Services has offered their support in any possible way, school resources have been utilized, and faith-based groups have offered assistance when needed. It is great to see so many people responding to crisis, but once again I feel as if it is too little, too late.

Responding to a suicide after it has happened is the least desirable way to deal with this problem. Being proactive and educating our youth about stress management, coping skills, utilization of support networks, and suicide prevention is a much more desirable way to deal with this issue.

For the past ten years, I have been utilizing www.kidscrisis.com when teaching lessons related to stress management and suicide prevention. This site was a vital part of a child’s support network. The site was extremely well organized, and it focused on the most common problems that teens face. Students could enter the site and discover endless resources for any possible problem they might have. Teens are more comfortable accessing such assistance via the Internet rather than a telephone or face-to-face conversation. Such websites require fewer human resources to give people the help they need.

When preparing for this year’s lesson on stress management, I discovered that kidscrisis.com has been taken away from our children. After putting in a call to Crisis Services, I was told that this invaluable website had been taken down due to funding cuts. After searching for endless alternatives, I continue to come back to the same thought: kidscrisis.com must return in as close to original form as possible. The return of kidscrisis.com will help put the “safety” back on the “net!”

In January 2010, Crisis Service embarked on a quality improvement plan examining four areas of improvement to our agency operations. One of the areas we are assessing is the agency’s overall Cultural Competency. Cultural competence is defined as a set of compatible attitudes and policies that come together to enable effective work in cross-cultural situations.

A taskforce of volunteers, staff, managers and board members was developed. With the assistance of consultant Pamela Kefi of Kefi Consulting, this group began an assessment process to help identify the areas of need and growth for Crisis Services. Since our agency touches many lives and cultures in our community, we are always evaluating our services to ensure we are meeting the needs of those coming to us to the best of our abilities.

This committee is wrapping up the development of a Cultural Competency Plan that will serve as a guide for Crisis Services, at all levels of the organization, to ensure that we are using a culturally and linguistically competent lens when providing services to Buffalo and Erie County.

For updates on our plan implementation visit our agency website.
RUTH PLANT RETIRES...AND RETURNS!

An incredible record...a remarkable woman!

The agency came together for a party on St. Patrick’s Day, but we were celebrating something much bigger than the patron saint of Ireland! Ruth Plant, our cherished morning receptionist of 17 years, announced her retirement in February. Although her last official day was March 24th, the party was scheduled for March 17th, which happened to be Ruth’s 84th birthday, yes you read that right! The surprise party was attended by many former Crisis Services staff including Dennis Walzack, former Executive Director of Crisis Services, Kathy Lwebuga-Mukasa, former Associate Director, Mary Healy, former Police Mental Health Coordination Project Coordinator, Joan Gruszeczki, former Administrative Assistant, and Pat Kaleta, former Fiscal Manager, in addition to dozens of current staffers.

The real surprise, however, was not the party or the fact that Ruth continued working here until her 84th birthday. Worried that she would have too much time on her hands, Ruth became one of the remarkable Crisis Services volunteers and continues to man her post at the phones 3 mornings a week.

COUNCILMEMBER BONNIE RUSSELL COMES TO CRISIS SERVICES AID!

In April, Crisis Services Homeless Program was notified of a 25% cut to their program funding by the City of Buffalo Emergency Shelter Grant, a program of HUD.

Ironically, at the same time that our funding was cut, requests for our homeless services have skyrocketed, with an over 150% increase in the number of calls from last year.

We contacted Councilmember Bonnie Russell who took our call quickly and arranged a meeting to review this cut. Understanding the value of our services and the impact to our community, Councilmember Russell graciously provided $30,000 to help address this cut and ensure no lay-off of staff at a time when we are helping so many others impacted by the economy.

We are extremely thankful to Bonnie Russell for her support of Crisis Services and her willingness to hear our story and support the Homeless Program. As a result of her contribution, Crisis Services continues without missing a beat, helping with the thousands of calls we’re receiving on a monthly basis from those facing housing or homeless issues.

BOARD MEMBER RUBS ELBOWS (& WINGS) WITH OBAMA

During his brief stop in Buffalo in May, President Obama ran into Crisis Services Board member Robert Zielinski at Duffs. The President was gracious enough to pose for a picture while waiting for his order of extra crispy medium wings.
From the beginning, Crisis Services has relied heavily on volunteers. The original hotline was staffed entirely by volunteers, but as the agency has evolved, so has the role of its volunteers. Today, 41 years later, volunteers are utilized in 4 different areas of the agency. Without them, it would be impossible to provide the depth of services that we offer on a 24-hour/day, 7 day/week basis.

Our volunteers are dedicated and committed individuals who add an impressive fusion of experience, compassion and diversity to our agency. They represent a perfect mix of university students working on internship credits, seasoned life veterans including many recent retirees, homemakers, and many part and full time employees who manage to add these hours to their already busy lives. Their reasons for giving of their time so generously vary greatly, but they share a common thread – the desire to give of themselves to those that are in immediate need of a human connection.

Here is a list of our currently active volunteers. The management and staff of Crisis Services extend our deepest gratitude for all that you provide for the agency. Thank you for making a difference!

Nabil Abousaid
Amanda Ackerson
Linda Akbar
Patricia Allen
Kyle Anderson
Qalam A.
Sara Balbuena
Ashley Bennett
Amanda Blando
Amanda Rose Blando
Shannon Bloomquist
Rosemary Boctor
Susan Bodkin
Suzanne Bognar
Deborah Browning
Scotty Burt
Barbara C.
Latasha Camm

Shana Carr
Jamelah Charteron-Lester
Deborah Clark
Meridith Cohen
Patrick Conway
Diane Cortese
Leslie Cyman
Joe Dabkowski
Kimberly Damian
Melissa Dotzler
Melinda Douangratdy
Carolyn Drury
Amber Dunn
Aubrey Finegan
Amy Galloway
Leisha Gray
Debi Handley

London Harris
Mary Heick
Erin Hershey
Tamara Ingram
Maria Jaramillo
Sarah Jones
Amba Khushbakhaat
Robert Kochanski
Doug Kroll
Jessica Lawrence
Kalei Logue
Amanda MacAlpine
Tony Misita
Bernie Misita
Geoffrey Mohr
Julie Mulero
Yvonne Niesen
Michelle Nola

Amber O’Daniels
Amy Panczakiewicz
Jamiese Parker
Gregory Patterson
Ruth Plant
Lovell Pompey
Christina Potempa
Ryota Sakurai
Fallon Schultz
W. Chris Scibilia
Miranda Shelanskey
Melanie Siegel
Sarah Skelton
Debi Smith
Stephanie Snyder
Linda Sommers
Lacreasha Stephens
Ron Stock

Jon T.
Jennifer Taber
Kellie Tingley
Stephen Ungvary
Jennifer Valenti
Raddleys Ventura
Nico Volo
Sherry Wagner
Wendy Walker
Anne Walterich
Kelly Warren
Joe Wawrzyniak
Jennifer Willard
Rachel Wilson
Dennis Zakrzewski
Amanda Zepeda

If you are looking for a meaningful volunteer experience, please consider joining either our Crisis Counseling Program or our Advocate Program. Both programs require completion of a 40 hour training session and a minimum six month commitment.

**Crisis Counseling Program (Hotline)** - help others during times of crisis, when they need someone the most. The Crisis Counseling Program responds to calls 24 hours a day on a wide variety of issues such as suicide, homelessness, addiction, domestic violence, etc. Computer skills are required.

**The Advocate Program** is the Rape Crisis Center for Erie County and a NYS Non-Residential Domestic Violence Service provider. We provide 24-hour crisis intervention to victims of domestic violence, family violence, rape, sexual assault and elder abuse at all 11 emergency departments in Erie County.
OUR MISSION

Crisis Services is dedicated to promoting the health, safety, and well being of the community through prevention, education, immediate intervention and access to community wide resources 24 hours a day.

TRIBUTE GIFTS TO CRISIS SERVICES

Make a donation today in support of Crisis Services and those who depend on our critical services.

Remember a friend, loved one or family member for a birthday, anniversary or special celebration or to offer a meaningful expression of one’s sympathy, love and respect at the time of death with a gift to the Crisis Services Foundation. Your gift today can help Crisis Services continue to provide its excellent services and programs to individuals in need in our community, as it has since 1968. Treating and assisting people in emotional crisis through a variety of therapeutic services (24 hour hotline, suicide prevention, homelessness, rape and domestic violence, and mental health and trauma) need your ongoing generous support. Enclosed in this newsletter is a convenient envelope for your use, or make a donation online by visiting our secure website at:

www.crisisservices.org

and charge your gift to MasterCard, Visa, or American Express.

PLEASE CONSIDER DONATING YOUR OLD CELL PHONE(S)

to Crisis Services to help survivors of domestic violence and sexual assault.

Call 834-2310 ext. 146 for more info.

DONATE ONLINE

www.crisisservices.org
(Secure Website)

You can charge your tax-deductible gift to:
MasterCard, Visa, or American Express

MAKE A DONATION TODAY!