

Auburn Journal

Another View: Suicide: A problem we can actually do something about

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By Maureen Bauman

Auburn didn't choose to be a poster city for suicide prevention. But several tragedies in recent years have given us an opportunity to make a difference on this important public health issue — and our community has responded.

Surviving family members and friends in our community have stepped forward to help raise awareness about preventing suicide. On Oct. 10, the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention will host an Out of the Shadows Walk to empower our community with the knowledge to save lives, starting at Railhead Park. The group now hosts more than 300 of these walks around the country each year.

Bringing the issue out of the shadows is vital. That's why National Suicide Prevention Week was created. From Sept. 7 to 13, groups around the country work to educate people on a problem that most people don't want to talk about. Placer County will join the nationwide movement to teach people that suicide is preventable.

We know a great deal about suicide, but it is community involvement that turns knowledge into power. That's because the very factors that make a person likely to think about taking their own life can also make it difficult to help them.

Those at highest risk of suicide are often socially isolated and also rural, both factors that make it less likely that someone will intervene. Men are also four times more likely to die from suicide than women, partly due to the fact that men are less likely to talk to someone about suicidal thoughts.

Luckily, we can all be trained to watch for warning signs. Many of us know of cases where someone spoke openly about suicide, but those around them didn't recognize the less obvious warning signs or know how to help.

The "Know the Signs" campaign urges people to be aware of changes in behavior and how to take action when they recognize warning signs including:

- Increasing drug and alcohol use

- Withdrawing from social contact

- Increasing social contact—for a person who has been withdrawn, a sudden urge to see many people can be a sign the person is saying goodbye

- Putting affairs in order—making a will is a good idea, but for a depressed person, it can be a bad sign

- Giving away possessions

- Behaving recklessly—this can be anything from a teen driving too fast to an older person not taking needed medication

- Frequently expressing feelings of hopelessness or purposelessness

If you or someone you know is having thoughts of suicide, call our local suicide prevention line, 530-885-2300. You can connect to a trained crisis counselor, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

Placer County offers a number of free services to help those who are struggling, and their families. Early intervention — solving smaller problems before they become overwhelming — is critical to helping prevent suicide. Increased counseling programs are now available to address depression, substance abuse, stress, anxiety or other feelings affecting mental health and wellbeing. Resources and help can be found by calling toll free 888-886-5401. We are here and eager to help.

Responding to demand from voters who passed Proposition 63 in 2004, Placer and other California counties have worked together through the California Mental Health Services Authority to put life-saving information in the hands of every Californian. Surveys show half of all Californians have been exposed to "Know the Signs" resources that help them be confident they can intervene to stop suicide.

For more information on the suicide prevention efforts underway in California and to get involved, visit www.suicideispreventable.org.

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