New Suicide Prevention Center director wants to reach all cultural communities

Didi Hirsch’s Suicide Prevention Center welcomes Patricia Speelman, LMFT, as its new Division Director. Patricia, who was with Pacific Hospital of Long Beach for 13 years as the Program Director of Outpatient Psychiatric Services, has extensive personal and professional experience in suicide prevention and says she is honored to serve in her new role with Didi Hirsch.

Patricia was a child when her grandfather died, but she didn’t learn he had taken his own life until she was 29 years old. Surprised by the silence and the stigma of suicide, her family never spoke openly about her grandfather’s death.

That personal experience resonated when the Surgeon General in 1999 issued a call to action for suicide prevention. Later, when the Center for Medicare and Medicaid made suicide assessment a National Patient Safety goal, Patricia responded by developing Pacific Hospital’s first complete suicide risk assessment and prevention program. She also trained hospital staff and Long Beach agencies through an extensive outreach program to educate people about suicide’s warning signs.

“I feel as though I’ve been preparing for this new role with Didi Hirsch personally and professionally my whole life,” Patricia says.

Born in Athens but raised in the United States, Patricia grew up immersed in Greek culture and was deeply affected by Greece’s financial collapse, which led to austerity measures that many blame for an unprecedented rise in suicide throughout the country.

“Before the austerity measures, suicide was virtually unheard of in Greece,” Patricia says. “But today nearly every Greek-American knows someone in Greece who has died by suicide.”

Over the past five years, there have been more than 10,000 reported deaths by suicide in Greece. Experts believe the number is likely much higher since the Greek Orthodox Church considers suicide a sin and may refuse to do burial rites for people who have died by suicide.

While Patricia has done extensive outreach in the Greek community to educate people about suicide and to encourage families to reach out for help, her goal is to expand suicide prevention outreach to all of the cultural communities within Los Angeles.

“Building awareness of our support groups and the help and tools that are available to families and individuals is my primary goal as director,” Patricia says. “And making sure high school students get the message that help is available is a top priority.”

Caring for people, one person at a time

I recently ran into an old acquaintance I had not seen for a couple of years. He was with his six-year-old son, and as we parted and exchanged hugs, he threw his arms around me again, grabbed his son and said, “Without you, this (his son) would not have happened.”

Sixteen years earlier, I had first met “John” at a support group for people who had lost someone to suicide. I was leading the group, and did not have a clue what I was doing. I had been on the Suicide Prevention Crisis Line for 10 years and made the decision that I wanted to do more. I had met some wonderful people who were survivors and wanted to co-facilitate groups. Several people helped me in that journey. Carole Chasin, Jay Nagdixon and Norman Farberow. Dr. Farberow took me under his wing and let me sit in on one of his eight-week groups. He was wonderful to watch. He just sat there and listened to stories. He did not tell the group members that he was a world famous expert in suicidology. They knew him as ‘Norm.’ He taught me so much. How to listen, accept, and not judge.

And so, I started doing monthly drop-in groups, which people come to after completing an eight-week group. They had already done a lot of work in their grief process, but needed to keep going. And I wanted to help them with their journey.

For the most part, all I did was open the door and provide a safe place for them to explore their feelings and emotions.

Four years ago, I lost a dear friend to suicide, and for the first time I went to an eight-week group as a participant. I was used to being the one in charge, the one that listened. And it was hard for me to talk and share. But with help from some wonderful people, Susan Celentano and Mariette Hartley, I learned to open up about my experience and feelings.

And now I co-facilitate drop-in groups in Culver City and the San Gabriel Valley and occasionally eight-week groups. I also help out with Alive and Running; this year I will be at the Memory Tree Booth, where survivors can write their loved ones’ names or a message on a leaf and hang it on the tree’s branches.

I have been privileged to hear people’s stories. I have sat in that dark place with them while they talk about what they have been through. I feel so honored that people have trusted me enough to share their heartbreak, sadness or anger with me. And it’s great to see them years later doing so much better and getting on with their lives. I am glad to be a part of an amazing organization that cares for people, one person at a time.

Mary has been with the Suicide Prevention Center since 1989. She started as a volunteer crisis counselor and now works as a Shift Supervisor and On-Call Supervisor for the Suicide Prevention Crisis Line.
Surviving or Thriving.

When someone we know dies by suicide, we are called survivors. Webster’s definition of survive is “to continue to exist”.

Is that what we do?

Continue to exist?

What kind of existence is this to survive the suicide of a loved one? Sidebar: I don’t like this term, ‘loved one’. There are some survivors who did not love the person who has died. It is reminiscent of the 1965 movie, The Loved One, based on Evelyn Waugh’s satirical novel on the funeral industry. (sorry, just an interesting factoid). If you have any suggestions on other terms to use, please let me know at rmogil@didihirsch.org.

As survivors, sometimes it feels as though all we are doing is existing, especially if we aren’t in the habit of sharing our feelings.

Holding the pain inside makes us feel alone, as if no one knows what we are going through. That aloneness makes us feel separate from others who have not experienced the trauma and devastation of a death by suicide.

Of course, if you spend any time around us, you know you are not alone. Our groups provide a safe environment for survivors to express their feelings and tell their story. A place to develop connections to other survivors, and, through the drop-in groups, potlucks and newsletters, find a path to thriving.

Thriving requires nurturing from within and allowing others to provide.

If you have a story about thriving, please send it to me for use in future newsletters.

Peace and Love,

Rick Mogil has been program director of Didi Hirsch’s Suicide Bereavement Services since 2007.

Resources for Survivors and Suicide Prevention

HELP LINES

Didi Hirsch Suicide Crisis Line
Los Angeles and Orange Counties:
877) 7-CRISIS or (877) 727-4747
Chat 12:30 pm – 9:30 pm daily at www.didihirsch.org/chat
Text services also available

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline:
(800) 273-TALK or (800) 273-8255
Lifeline Crisis Chat available 24/7 at www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org

TEEN LINE:
(800) TLC-TEEN or (800) 852-8336
Teen hotline staffed by teens 6-10 pm
All other hours covered by the Suicide Prevention Center Crisis Line
(877) 727-4747

Trevor Helpline:
(800) 850-8078
Hotline for gay, lesbian, bisexual transgender or questioning youth

RESOURCES

American Association of Suicidology (AAS) (202) 237-2280
www.suicidology.org

American Foundation for Suicide Prevention (AFSP)
(888) 333-2280 • www.afsp.org

Didi Hirsch Mental Health Services:
Eleven sites in LA and Orange Counties
(888) 807-7250 • www.didihirsch.org

National Alliance for the Mentally Ill
for family of people with mental illness
National: (800) 950-6264
www.nami.org

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA)
www.samhsa.gov

Suicide Prevention Resource Center
(877) GET-SPRC or (877) 438-7772
www.sprc.org or www.sprc.org/thespark

NEWSLETTER

Survivors After Suicide Newsletter is a publication of Didi Hirsch’s Suicide Prevention Center. Survivors After Suicide provides support to those who have lost loved ones to suicide.

SAS Program Numbers:
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Reprint Policy:
Nonprofit support organizations may reprint material from our newsletter.

More resources at www.didihirsch.org
Nuevo en esta edición – ¡El rincón de español!

Bienvenido a nuestra esquina, aquí encontrará información actualizada sobre nuestros servicios para los sobrevivientes que hablan español en el Condado de Orange.

Escrito por Lucia Jarrell, MFT

En Mayo de 2016 completamos nuestro primer Grupo de Apoyo para Sobrevivientes después del suicidio. El grupo duro 8 semanas y la cohesión de los miembros fue evidente en la conexión que formaron. La participante Julieta regalo una hermosa estrella decorada por mano a los miembros y facilitadores del grupo. Ella compartió que el grupo le ayudó en tener un espacio para procesar el duelo sobre la pérdida de su hija. En la estrella ella incluyó un citar que representaba su aspecto del su luto siguiendo la muerte por sucedido de su hija en 201… Todo los individuos presentes en la última junta estuvieron sorprendidos a descubrir que el citar escrito en la estrella fue el mismo citar de un poema compartido por otro miembro del grupo.

La esperanza para nuestra oficina en el Condado de Orange es que podemos seguir satisfaciendo la necesidad de nuestros sobrevivientes en la comunidad hispana como hacemos para nuestros sobrevivientes que hablan inglés. Los siguientes servicios están disponibles en español para aquellos que necesitan asistencia:

• Consejería individual para sobrevivientes del suicidio
• Consejería familiar para sobrevivientes del suicidio
• Grupo de Apoyo para sobrevivientes del suicidio
• Juntas mensual para sobrevivientes del suicidio
• Cursos de prevención de suicidio

UPCOMING EVENTS

World Suicide Prevention Day
September 10, 2016
The International Association for Suicide Prevention invites everyone to light a candle near a window at 8pm on Saturday, September 10th, to show your support for suicide prevention, to remember a lost loved one and to send support for the survivors of suicide around the world.

International Survivors of Suicide Loss Day
November 19, 2016
Survivors After Suicide Holiday Potluck
Saturday, December 3, 2016, 6–8:30pm
Veterans Memorial Park – Rotunda Room
4117 Overland Ave., Culver City

Do not be sad for my absence, I have not left your side, just that now you cannot hear my voice, but I'm with you all the time, in every beat of your heart... “When you feel alone, raise your eyes to heaven, no matter whether it is day or night, there I will be watching you always.”

No te pongas triste por mi ausencia, no me he ido de tu lado, simple mente ahora no me puedes ver como antes, ni puedes oir mi voz, pero estoy contigo a toda hora, en cada latido de tu corazón... Cuando te sientis solo alga tu mirada al cielo ne importa si es de día o de noche, allí estare’ viendoio siempre... “la muerte no existe la gente solo muere cuado la olvidan. Si puedes recordarme siempre estare contigo.”

New in each issue – The Spanish Corner!

Welcome to our Spanish Corner, here you will find updates on our Spanish speaking services for our survivors in Orange County.

By Lucia Jarrell, MFT

As of May 2016 we have completed our first Survivors After Suicide Spanish eight-week support group. The member’s cohesion was evident through the bonds they developed over the eight weeks. Participant Julieta gave the members and facilitators a beautifully hand-decorated memorial star at the final meeting, and shared how the group has helped her find a space to grieve her daughter. On the star she included a quote which represented her perspective on grief following the suicide death of her daughter in 2010. The individuals present for the final session were amazed to discover that the quote shared on the star was the same quote from a poem another member brought in to share in the meeting.

The Orange County Office is committed to meeting the needs of our Spanish-speaking survivors as we have for our English-speaking survivors. The following services are available in Spanish:

• Individual counseling for survivors of suicide
• Family counseling for survivors of suicide
• Support group for survivors of suicide
• Monthly Drop in for survivors of suicide
• Suicide prevention training
“Picking Up The Pieces” at the SAS Summer Potluck

“Picking Up The Pieces” was the theme of the SAS Summer Potluck held on June 4th. It was a befitting theme for a potluck dinner as potlucks take dishes of all shapes, sizes and cuisines and piece them together to make a whole satisfying meal.

But it was working with grief puzzles that helped survivors piece their lives back together. Each person was given pieces of a puzzle, a reflection of what life often feels like to survivors of suicide. When we lose someone we love, it can feel like our lives are broken into a million pieces, as if someone emptied out a box of puzzle pieces and left behind a scene of chaos. Putting these pieces back together can seem overwhelming and impossible. The pieces just don’t seem to fit. But piece by piece, we find the corners and maybe a few edges, and eventually build a frame to support the whole picture. Along the way, we may put a piece or two in the wrong place but, through discovery, we find the right spot.

The journey through grief is a process of taking the pieces of our past and putting them together with new pieces from our present. It’s a complicated and often frustrating process but, in time with helpful support, the broken pieces mend into a renewed whole.

Everyone was given a blank puzzle onto which they drew a picture representing their life as a survivor. They broke the puzzles and then worked to put the pieces back together.

When you donate to the Didi Hirsch Suicide Prevention Center, you are helping people affected by suicide get the support they need to recover from their devastating pain and loss. Here are some of the ways your donations help:

- **$50** – supplies one support group with handouts and brochures about suicide
- **$100** – prints 1,000 suicide prevention cards for community distribution
- **$200** – provides a support group to one suicide attempt or loss survivor without financial means
- **$300** – sends a staffer to the scene of a suicide to provide comfort and resources
- **$350** – supplies a month of drop-in groups to survivors needing ongoing support
- **$500** – produces 2,000 bracelets with the crisis line phone number
- **$1,000** – trains one volunteer crisis counselor
- **$1,500** – hosts one two-day ASIST training
- **$5,000** – produces a short video about how to help someone in suicidal crisis
- **$10,000** – pays annual salary of one chat counselor working 8 hours/week
- **$12,000-15,000** – cost of training one agency to start suicide attempt survivor group
Olympian Suzy Favor Hamilton to speak at Alive & Running 5K Walk/Run for Suicide Prevention

Three-time Olympic runner Suzy Favor Hamilton, who lost her brother to suicide and considered taking her own life, will speak at this year’s Alive & Running 5K Walk/Run for Suicide Prevention on Sunday, September 25, 2016. The family-oriented event celebrates life and honors loved ones while raising funds and awareness for the Suicide Prevention Center and our Survivors After Suicide programs.

Memorial banners, memory quilts, memorial runner bibs, a memory tree and encouraging handmade signs urging participants across the finish line are some of the ways survivors remember and honor loved ones lost to suicide while experiencing community support in the company of others who have also grieved a death by suicide.

The course begins at West 88th Street and La Tijera Boulevard just north of the Los Angeles International Airport. A Health & Wellness Expo with snow cones, balloon animals, free massages and other giveaways begins at 7:00 am; the race starts at 8 am. Live music, moving stories, an exciting raffle and an award presentation are all part of the festivities, which end by 9:45 am.

Last year, over 2,000 runners, walkers, spectators and volunteers came together to raise more than $325,000 for the Suicide Prevention Center. Organizers expect this to be their most successful year yet. Kids, parents, grandparents and even dogs are all invited!

To donate, please go to www.aliveandrunning.org.
Suicide prevention training and seminars at outreach venues

Suicide Prevention Services offers an extensive variety of training seminars and presentations. These seminars are designed for the age group and professions they target and include programs for adolescents, adults, clinicians and first responders such as law enforcement agencies. Important to these seminars are the resources available through our Survivor After Suicide services, broadening our reach into the community that needs us.

Recently, Rick Mogil was invited to present a suicide prevention seminar to the teachers at an area high school. The school had experienced two deaths by suicide in recent months and the staff was keen to learn how they could assist in preventing suicide.

Rick was originally scheduled for 30 minutes. He began the seminar with a powerful video of stories from families and survivors. “There was a deep emotional response from teachers,” he recalls. In the end, he spent over an hour with the group helping them learn the signs and behaviors to look for and giving them the tools they need to respond.

It was a well-spent hour, according to a note that the principal of the high school sent to Rick:

Dear Rick,

Due to your presentation March 4 here at our high school, a teacher was able to clearly identify the signs in a student and we were able to get her help last week. Just today, due to the efforts of students reporting their concerns, another student was referred for help based on what the teacher found out.

We are definitely seeing the effect of your presentation on our campus. I can’t thank you enough for your time, energy, efforts, and compassion in providing resources and help to our campus as countless lives will ultimately be saved.

Below is a list of the locations where outreach seminars were held within the last few months. The Suicide Prevention Center is dedicated to outreach throughout the community regardless of religion, culture, or age.

CSU Dominguez Hills Psychology
College of the Canyons
Santa Monica High School
Harbor Regional Center
Peace Over Violence Crisis Line
NAMI California
FBI
El Camino College
Cerritos College
Polytechnic High School
LAPD 911 Dispatchers
Viewpoint School
El Camino High School
Boys and Girls Clubs of LA
CSU Long Beach School of Social Work
USC MSW program
St. Peters Episcopal Church
Ventura County Sheriff’s Academy
Volunteers of America
Long Beach City College
Garden Grove Unified School District
Islamic Society of Orange County
LGBT Embrace
Irvine Unified School District
Orangewood Foundation
Masjid Al Shareef Mosque
Reach Community Church
Islamic Institute of Orange County
Gilbert High School
Chapman University
Cypress College
Orange Korean Church
Sarang Community Church
Council on Aging

March 1, 2016 through August 25, 2016
20th Anniversary Erasing the Stigma Leadership Awards honors Melissa Rivers

Fashion Police producer and co-host Melissa Rivers, who has been a passionate advocate for suicide prevention for nearly three decades, received the Beatrice Stern Media Award at Didi Hirsch’s 20th Anniversary Erasing the Stigma Leadership Awards on April 28.

Melissa was a teenager when her father, Edgar Rosenberg, died by suicide in 1987. “When my father killed himself…suicide was one of those words that everybody whispered,” she said. “I don’t know if it was because of the anger that a suicide survivor feels or the fact that I was still a teenager and angry and defiant, but my defiance gave me a voice.”

Melissa, who was joined at the event by family members and several college friends, described Didi Hirsch’s Survivors of Suicide Attempt support groups as remarkable for providing people a safe place to discuss their feelings without shame. “We have to talk about mental health,” she said. “We have to talk about suicide. We have to be there for the survivors. I stand here as a proud suicide survivor who wants all mental health to come out of the shadows.”

Bea Stern’s granddaughter, Andrea Stern, who once worked as an intern on Fashion Police, presented Melissa with the award.

Also honored that evening were writer/director Maya Forbes and White House Office of National Drug Control Policy Director Michael Botticelli, who both received Leadership Awards for helping to erase the stigma of mental illness and substance use disorders.

Didi Hirsch’s Survivors of Suicide Attempt Groups

Tanya Waldon was desperate with worry when her son, Devin, was discharged from the hospital after a near fatal suicide attempt. She knew she couldn’t keep him safe and no one knew where he could go for help.

Then she found out about Didi Hirsch’s support groups for people who have attempted suicide. Far from wealthy, they scraped up enough money to fly from Atlanta to Los Angeles so he could participate in an eight-week group.

“Didi Hirsch saved his life,” she now says. Thanks to her efforts and a training program run by Didi Hirsch, the Georgia Department of Behavioral Health will offer their first group for people who have attempted suicide in September. Didi Hirsch also has trained agencies in Buffalo, New York, Chicago and Los Angeles.

Didi Hirsch’s groups have become the treatment model for people who have attempted suicide. Our innovative curriculum was listed on the Suicide Prevention Resource Center’s national registry for best practices in 2014 and we have had more than 550 requests for our training manual from 49 states and 18 countries.

Partial-hospitalization programs are also expressing interest in learning how to host their own suicide attempt support groups, says Suicide Prevention Center Director Patricia Speelman, LMFT. People recently discharged from a psychiatric hospital after a suicide attempt are three times more likely to die by suicide in their first week after discharge and remain at a higher risk of suicide for up to four years, according to a Joint Commission alert issued in March.

“These groups provide a service that is extremely needed,” Speelman says. “Partial-hospitalization programs talk a lot about how to cope with depression but don’t say anything about what led to the suicide attempt and how it affected them and their families. It’s really important that people leaving the hospital after a suicide attempt are in a setting that gives them the support, education and training they need to keep them at a lower risk.”

Attempt support groups as remarkable for providing people a safe place to discuss their feelings without shame. “We have to talk about mental health,” she said. “We have to talk about suicide. We have to be there for the survivors. I stand here as a proud suicide survivor who wants all mental health to come out of the shadows.”

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SAS Group Meetings

Everyone who has completed an eight-week Survivors After Suicide Support Group is invited to attend scheduled monthly meetings at any of the locations listed below. There is no charge.

**Drop-In Groups**

- **San Gabriel Valley**
  Meets the 4th Wednesday of each month, 7:30 – 9:00 p.m.
- **San Fernando Valley**
  Meets the 2nd Saturday of each month, 11:30 a.m. – 1:00 p.m.

**Santa Ana**

Meets the 1st Wednesday of each month, 6:30 – 8:00 p.m.

**South Bay**

Meets the 2nd Sunday of each month, 11:30 am – 12:30 p.m.
Meeting dates: Sept 11, Oct 9, Nov 13, Dec 11.

**West Los Angeles**

Meets every Tuesday night, 7:30 - 9:00 p.m.

**Eight-Week Groups**

Our eight-week support groups for those who have lost loved ones to suicide take place on the following schedule:
- **Group 3: Mid August**
- **Group 4: Mid October**

Groups meet once a week for an hour and a half for eight consecutive weeks, with locations in Sherman Oaks, Culver City, Redondo Beach, San Marino, Santa Ana and Newbury Park.

Please call to be placed in a group. Los Angeles/Ventura counties: (310) 895-2326 or Orange County: (714) 547-0885