

# Survivors After Suicide

Your Path Toward Healing  
Erasing the Stigma – Suicide is Preventable

A Program of Didi Hirsch Mental Health Services November 2014

## Robin Williams' Suicide Triggers Survivors and Calls to Crisis Line

By Robert Stohr

Robin Williams' sudden tragic death this summer shocked the world and caused many people to ask how a man with so much talent, popularity and money could take his own life. But those of us who have lost a loved one to suicide know intimately that no amount of wealth or fame can beat back the monster of clinical depression.

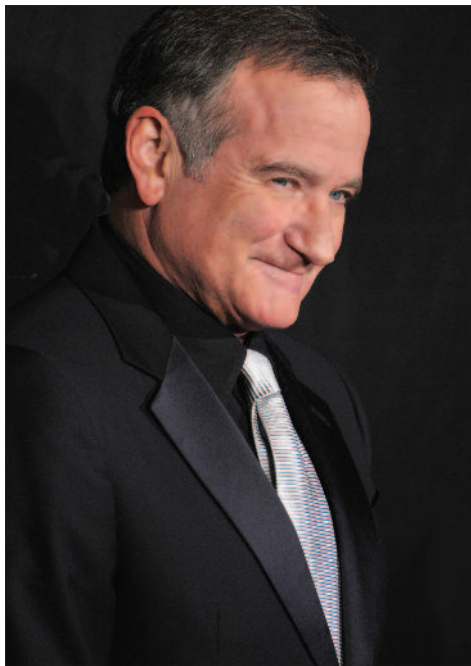
Mental illness, often combined with substance use disorder, is present in 90 percent of Americans who die by suicide. And it can strike anyone regardless of socio-economic status, ethnicity, gender or sexual preference.

If your reaction to his suicide was deeper and more painful than you expected, you weren't alone. Many of our survivors reported that Robin Williams' suicide triggered painful feelings of helplessness and sadness stemming from their own losses, as well as empathy and compassion for the private mourning suffered by the icon's closest family members and friends.

The suicide of a public figure tends to heighten awareness around mental health issues and suicide – and Robin Williams' death was no exception. In fact, an unprecedented number of callers reached out to our Crisis Line for help in the days and months since he died.

In the first two days following Robin Williams' suicide on Aug. 11, more than 550 Crisis Line calls poured in, more than doubling our usual volume. Our crisis counselors worked overtime, took extra shifts, and sacrificed meals and sleep to meet this call to action. By the end of the month, they had handled 6,120 calls, a 77% increase in calls over those in August 2013. While call volume has dropped significantly since then, it remains above previous levels.

Our Suicide Prevention Center has risen to the challenge of meeting the new normal. Our crisis counselors continue to de-escalate crisis calls, rescue those in need, and share resources with hundreds of concerned families.



Robin Williams

As survivors know all too well, suicide is not always preventable. But we can make significant inroads in ending this particular cause of death by spreading the word that help is available.

As we continue to support people in need during the holidays, we want to remind our family of loss survivors that we are always here for you. Please join us on December 6th for our holiday potluck, where we come together to remember and to heal. As a fellow survivor, I wish you health, hope and peace.

If you or someone you know is feeling suicidal, call our 24/7 English/Spanish Suicide Prevention Crisis Line at (877) 727-4747.

*Robert Stohr is the Director of Didi Hirsch's Suicide Prevention Center.*

## Beyond Surviving: 25 Suggestions to Help You Cope With Loss

By Iris M. Bolton

1. Know you can survive; you may not think so, but you can.
2. Struggle with "why" it happened until you no longer need to know "why" or until YOU are satisfied with partial answers.
3. Know you may feel overwhelmed by the intensity of your feelings, but that all your feelings are normal.
4. Anger, guilt, confusion and forgetfulness are common responses. You are not crazy, you are in mourning.
5. Be aware you may feel appropriate anger at the person, at the world, at God, at yourself. It's okay to express it.
6. You may feel guilty for what you think you did or did not do. Guilt can turn into regret, through forgiveness.
7. Having suicidal thoughts is common. It does not mean that you will act on those thoughts.
8. Remember to take one moment or one day at a time.
9. Find a good listener with whom to share. Call someone if you need to talk.
10. Don't be afraid to cry. Tears are healing.
11. Give yourself time to heal.
12. Remember, the choice was not yours. No one is the sole influence on another's life.
13. Expect setbacks. If emotions return like a tidal wave, you may only be experiencing a remnant of grief, an unfinished piece.
14. Try to put off major decisions.
15. Give yourself permission to get professional help.

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## Rick's Corner

We are rapidly approaching the Deepening Gloom – a time of year many of us dread. I'm talking about the holidays, especially the first one since a loved one has died. Where are the light and glory, the joy and cheer? The season feels especially cruel without our loved one. It doesn't seem possible to include ourselves in the festivities when our inner world is steeped in darkness.

Our loss can create barriers to hope and healing, not allowing us to be in the moment and causing us to withdraw from family and friends. The deep sadness can prevent us from remembering holidays shared as if all connection with our loved one has been severed. Their physical presence may be gone but their essences live within us and those who also knew them.

Grief may diminish the flame of happiness but it doesn't have to take up permanent residence in our minds. Happiness and hope can provide flickering moments of meaning and, with a little encouragement, become a warming hearth of comfort.

If this is your first holiday without your loved one or your tenth, you may find comfort in knowing that you can create moments of meaning for yourself during the holiday season.

Light a memory candle near a photo of your loved one at each holiday. Seek the comfort and glory of your religious affiliation. Sit on the beach and count the number of waves that reach the shore in twenty minutes. Seek spirituality or enlightenment. For joy and cheer, Talenti Sea Salt and Caramel gelato works for me. Whatever you do, remember this is for you. Be selfish and loving to yourself because you deserve it.

Peace and Love,

*Rick*

*Rick Mogil has been program director of Didi Hirsch's Suicide Prevention and Bereavement Services since 2007.*

## Resources for Survivors and Suicide Prevention

### HELP LINES

**Didi Hirsch Mental Health Services  
Suicide Prevention Crisis Line  
Los Angeles and Orange Counties:**  
(877) 7-CRISIS or (877) 727-4747  
Chat available 4:30 pm-12:30 am  
daily at [www.didihirsch.org/chat](http://www.didihirsch.org/chat)  
Text services also available

**National Suicide Prevention  
Lifeline:**  
(800) 273-TALK or (800) 273-8255

**TEEN LINE:**  
Teen hotline staffed by teens 6-10 pm  
(800) TLC-TEEN or (900) 852-8336

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

### RESOURCES

**American Association of Suicidology  
(AAS)** (202) 237-2280  
[www.suicidology.org](http://www.suicidology.org)

**American Foundation for Suicide  
Prevention (AFSP)**  
(888) 333-2280 • [www.afsp.org](http://www.afsp.org)

**Didi Hirsch Mental Health Services:**  
Eleven sites in LA and Orange Counties  
(310) 390-8896 • [www.didihirsch.org](http://www.didihirsch.org)

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

**Substance Abuse and Mental Health  
Services Administration (SAMHSA)**  
[www.samhsa.gov](http://www.samhsa.gov)

**Suicide Prevention Resource Center**  
(877) GET-SPRC or (877) 438-7772  
[www.sprc.org](http://www.sprc.org) or [www.sprc.org/thespark](http://www.sprc.org/thespark)

### NEWSLETTER

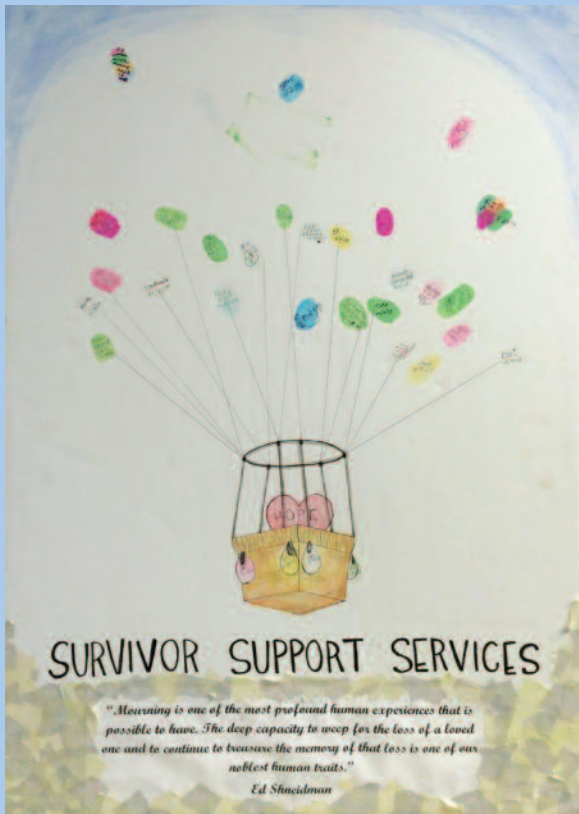
*Survivors After Suicide* Newsletter is a publication of Didi Hirsch's Suicide Prevention Center. Survivors After Suicide provides support to those who have lost loved ones to suicide.

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**Reprint Policy:**  
Nonprofit support organizations may  
reprint material from our newsletter.

More resources at [www.didihirsch.org](http://www.didihirsch.org)



## Survivors Leave Thumbprints of Hope

By Sandra Yi, MFTI

At the end of each Survivor Support Services group in Orange County, we pass out ceramic hearts during a closing ceremony to give survivors a token reminder of their journey with us. The tradition, started by the Survivors After Suicide groups in Los Angeles, provides survivors with something tangible with which they can remember us.

We also want a memento of our survivor groups. We are honored every time a survivor walks through our doors and want our survivors to know they have made a difference with their presence. We want to recognize their bravery in facing their grief and acknowledging their loss. We also want to share the hope they spread that laughter and life are possible after loss.

That's why we created a collaborative artwork where survivors who have completed any of our support services can leave a thumbprint along with a small personal message. Fittingly, each thumbprint on the canvas serves as a balloon that holds Hope aloft. Survivors have responded well to this closing activity, which allows them to leave their mark at our office in a way that inspires new survivors who are just beginning their journeys toward healing.

## Upcoming Events

### AFSP's International Survivors of Suicide Loss Day

Saturday, November 22, 2014  
Didi Hirsch's Sepulveda Center  
4760 S. Sepulveda Blvd., Culver City

### Survivors After Suicide Holiday Potluck

Saturday, December 6, 2014, 6–8pm  
Veterans Memorial Park – Teen Center  
4117 Overland Ave., Culver City

### American Association of Suicidology 48th Annual Conference

April 15-18, 2015  
Atlanta, Georgia

### Erasing the Stigma Leadership Awards

April 23, 2015

## Beyond Surviving – continued from page 1

16. Be aware of the pain in your family and friends.
17. Be patient with yourself and others who may not understand.
18. Set your own limits and learn to say no.
19. Steer clear of people who want to tell you what or how to feel.
20. Know that there are support groups that can be helpful, such as Compassionate Friends or Survivors of Suicide groups. If not, ask a professional to start one.
21. Call on your personal faith to help you through.
22. It is common to experience physical reaction to your grief, e.g. headaches, loss of appetite, inability to sleep.
23. The willingness to laugh with others and at yourself is healing.
24. Wear out your questions, anger, guilt, or other feelings until you can let them go. Letting go doesn't mean forgetting.
25. Know that you will never be the same, but you can survive and even go beyond just surviving.

Reprinted from *Suicide and its Aftermath*  
(Dunne, McIntosh, Dunn-Maxim, Norton et al., 1987)



# Alive & Running Has Record Year for Fundraising and Memories

By Kim Kowsky

With the help of our survivors, the Suicide Prevention Center's 16th annual Alive & Running Walk/Run had a record year – raising more than \$274,000 for suicide prevention.

The Sept. 28 event – which drew about 2,000 runners, walkers and volunteers – provided survivors with several poignant but life-affirming opportunities to remember and celebrate loved ones lost to suicide.

A memorial banner and several quilts with the names and faces of people who died by suicide decorated the Expo grounds, which also included a large message board for survivors who wanted to express themselves. Many runners wore memorial bibs with the names of loved ones on their backs. And volunteers passed out hundreds of white carnations, a symbol of hope, to runners and walkers as they crossed the finish line.

The family-friendly event featured live music and an appearance by Tom Kenny, the voice of SpongeBob SquarePants, who emceed the Kiddie-K. After several moving presentations by suicide survivors, the following teams and participants won awards: the Suicide Prevention Center received the Top Fundraising Team Award; Team Limelight, headed by survivor Kristine Barry-Olsen, won the Outstanding Team Award; and the Chikara Daiko drummers, who perform at the event each year in memory of survivor Marilyn Nobori's daughter, Aiko, won the Inspiration Award.



Volunteers with handmade signs encouraged runners and walkers to finish strong.



Several memorial quilts showing the Faces of Suicide were on display at the run.



SPC Program Coordinator Rebecca Stock and Director Robert Stohr accept Top Fundraising Team award.



Kiddie-K emcee Tom Kenny, voice of SpongeBob SquarePants, with race announcer Julianne Grossman.





Volunteers passed out white carnations, a symbol of hope, at the finish line.



Team Limelight Captain Kristine Barry-Olsen accepts Outstanding Team award.



Didi Hirsch Medical Director Curley Bonds, MD in clown suit delighted children at the Kiddie-K.



The early morning race began under a balloon arch at La Tijera Parkway near LAX.



Survivors wrote on a memorial board to remember loved ones lost to suicide.



The Chikara Daiko drummers, who set the pace of the race each year, won the Inspiration Award.



Singer/songwriter Randy Coleman performed "Here Comes the Sun" before the Kiddie-K.



Runners wrote the names of people they wanted to remember and honor on memorial bibs they wore on their backs during the race.

## IN MEMORY OF

Jed Abrams  
Santos Aguilar, Jr.  
Jay Akerstein  
Larry Ames  
Carole Anne  
Christopher P. Argerich  
Don Barry  
Rob Beach  
Ryan Benavedis  
"Mohawk Matt" Berman  
Harold D. Blankenship  
Marc Block  
Sammy Bloom  
Barbara Blum  
Aaron J. Brookhart  
Robbie Broom  
Erik Brown  
Mason Bryant  
Anne Burns  
Trevor Buth  
Misty Butler  
Charlie Cantoni  
Henri Cao  
Sgt. Jason Crawford  
Terry Curtis  
Brian Dalton  
Matthew Dawson  
Donnie Dearingier  
Roberto Di Carlo  
Trevor Dodes  
Alan Dunn  
Natalie Ann Dunn  
Sean Eddington  
Robert Edmonds  
Andrew Estrada  
Jordan Mark Farkas  
Juan Carlos Flores  
Gregory Louis Garzon  
David Gonzalez  
Hailey Nicole González  
Michael A. Gutierrez  
Jeffrey Allen Gutin  
Ernie Haro  
Vanessa Haros  
Marty Trent Harris  
Clara Hassler  
Rolando Hernandez  
Sergio Hernandez, Jr.  
Beth Hess  
Clare "Mumzie" Holcombe  
Galen Hundley  
Brandon Jabbari  
Mr. Aaron Jacob Ferreira  
Sean Jacques  
Jodi Jawitz  
Sonja Anne Johnson

David Kamerschen  
Jeremy King  
Tim Kleingartner  
Elliot Kolesnik  
Elliot Kolesnik  
Joel Lamb  
Noah Langholz  
William Leavitt  
Jacqueline LeBlanc  
Seung Cheol Lee  
Stanley Lelewer  
Jennifer Lenihan  
Alexander Lewis  
Dr. Lee Liebman  
Jeffrey S. Lind  
George L. Little  
Dr. Joel David Locketz  
Carlos Lopez  
Patrick Wayne Lynch  
Bill MacArthur  
Daniel Mardahl  
Dana Markusen  
Miguel Angel Martinez  
Rick McClung  
Jay McCreary  
Jaime Medina  
Joyce Jane Medlin  
Tim Miller  
Ruth Mishler  
David Modjallal  
Kenny Mowry  
Michelle Ng  
Aiko Nobori  
Craig Nockels  
Jacob Nockels  
Sam Noorbakhsh  
Aimee Oki  
Carlos Neftali Ontiveros  
Samuel Pastorello  
Nick Pathi  
Floyd Patterson  
Lauren Rose Pearson  
Jane Powers  
Ceasar Quintero  
Hallie Rabin  
Danny Ramirez  
Douglas Ravenscroft  
Emmett Richardson  
Martin Robinson  
Tyler Robinson  
Leon Mark Rofe  
David Rubinowitz  
Betty Celeste Ruiz  
Bryan Rutledge  
Gregory Keith Ryon  
Jose Sandoval

Lynn Schibik  
Derek Schraeder  
Becky Schrag  
Ken Seals  
Estuardo Serrano B.  
Mark Shindo  
Chris Shutter  
Dan Slocum  
Luis Soto  
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Cathy Stevens  
Kyle Sullivan  
Robert Swafford  
Evan Reeve Szollosi  
Brandon Toh  
Marcello Trejo  
Elaine Uy  
Barbara Valk  
Cathy Vallejos  
Andrew Varnes  
Eddie Villaneda  
Ron Wasserman  
Justin Weirauch  
James White  
Carol Wichman  
Gabe Williams  
Robin Williams  
Paul Woodrow  
Qing Xu

## IN HONOR OF

Kita Curry  
Roberto Di Carlo  
Charlotte and Jeremy Fletcher  
Richard and Sally Greenberg  
Dr. Vera Jashni  
Kim Kowsky  
Pamela Kluff  
Dr. Lee Leibman  
Janine and Henry Lichstein  
Stanley Lelewer  
Alice Mui  
Laura Ornest  
Andrew Rubin  
Jesse Sanderson  
Lisa Schumacher  
Emanuel and Lorraine Stolaroff  
Douglas H. Vought  
Laurie Woodrow

Jan. 1, 2014 to Oct. 28, 2014





## Didi Hirsch to Host AFSP's 2014 International Survivors of Suicide Loss Day on November 22

This year's Miss California, Brandy Fisher, who was orphaned at age 11 when her father murdered her mother and then killed himself, will speak about her experience as a suicide survivor at International Survivors of Suicide Loss Day at Didi Hirsch's Sepulveda Center on November 22.

Didi Hirsch, which is hosting the event for the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention's Los Angeles chapter for the first time, will also screen AFSP's *The Journey*, a documentary that tells how a diverse group of suicide loss survivors found their way back to a life rich in meaning and joy.

Described as a day that "can change your life," Survivors of Suicide Loss Day gives people affected by suicide loss a chance to gather in their local communities to find comfort and gain understanding as they share stories of healing and hope. The annual event began in 1999, when U.S. Senator Harry Reid, whose father died by suicide in 1972, introduced the resolution that designated the Saturday before Thanksgiving "National Survivors of Suicide Day."

There is no charge to attend the event, which also includes food and refreshments, presentations by mental health professionals and local suicide loss survivors such as actress Mariette Hartley, and small group discussions for people who have experienced similar types of loss.

To register, email Traute Winters, head of the AFSP's Los Angeles chapter, at [twinters@afsp.org](mailto:twinters@afsp.org). Those who cannot attend in person can join "Survivor Day Live," a virtual event at Google Hangout that will include an online screening of *The Journey* and a Q & A with fellow survivors and experts on coping with a suicide loss. To access the online event, go to [www.survivorday.org/survivor-day-live/](http://www.survivorday.org/survivor-day-live/).



**WHAT:** 2014 International Survivors of Suicide Loss Day  
**WHEN:** Saturday, November 22, 2014  
1 pm – 5 pm  
**WHERE:** Didi Hirsch Mental Health Services – Sepulveda  
4760 S. Sepulveda Blvd.  
Culver City, CA 90230  
**RSVP:** Traute Winters, [twinters@afsp.org](mailto:twinters@afsp.org), (424) 327-7101

### The Program:

1 pm Welcome with food and refreshments  
2 pm Screening of *The Journey*  
3 pm Presentations by local suicide loss survivors and mental health professionals  
4 pm Small group discussions



4760 South Sepulveda Boulevard  
Culver City, California 90230

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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.  
Meeting dates: Nov. 26, Dec. 24 (no meeting), Jan. 28,  
Feb. 25, Mar. 25.

#### Santa Ana

Meets the 1st Wednesday of each month, 6:30 – 8:00 p.m.  
Meeting dates: Dec. 3, Jan. 7, Feb. 4, Mar. 4.

#### San Fernando Valley

Meets the 2nd Saturday of each month, 11:30 a.m. – 1:00 p.m.  
Meeting dates: Dec. 13, Jan. 10, Feb. 14, Mar. 14.

#### South Bay

Meets the 2nd Sunday of each month, 11:00 am – 12:30 p.m.  
Meeting dates: Dec. 14, Jan. 11, Feb. 8, Mar. 8.

#### 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 1: Late February   Group 2: Late May   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 and Santa Ana.

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