

Survivors After Suicide

Your Path Toward Healing

A Program of Didi Hirsch Mental Health Services September 2013

SPC Director Promoted to DHMHS Vice President

By Rick Mogil

It is with great sadness, tremendous pride and a sense of accomplishment that we bid au revoir to Lyn Morris, our esteemed Division Director for the Suicide Prevention Center (SPC), which includes the Suicide Crisis Line, Survivors After Suicide and Survivors Of a Suicide Attempt programs.



Lyn Morris

Her assistant division director, Robert Stohr, MFT, who recently joined our team and has already won our hearts, will take over as Division Director.

Lyn is leaving the post after eight years to become Vice President for Clinical Operations for Didi Hirsch Mental Health Services, a promotion that makes her responsible for all of the agency's clinical operations.

Lyn, who described her time as SPC Division Director as "life changing in the most wonderful way," was instrumental in the growth of SPC, expanding suicide services to more

people over a larger geographical area than ever before in its history.

"I have had the pleasure of working with incredibly passionate, dedicated and caring people who make a difference in the life of someone every day," says Lyn, who now leads statewide efforts to build our Suicide Prevention Network. "I have such great respect for all the staff and

volunteers of the Suicide Prevention Center and would like to thank all of them for making my time at SPC memorable and invaluable."

We share the sentiment about Lyn and wish her well in her new endeavors.

The following quotes from staff, volunteers and survivors from the Suicide Prevention Center express our thoughts and feelings about the tremendous leadership, nurturance and support she provided us over the years:

"Lyn has a wonderful way of nurturing survivors. She would encourage me to speak and write of my journey through grief. I felt protected and came to trust Lyn."

"Lyn is very supportive of her staff and allows us to grow professionally."

"She is a perfect example of what a leader should be. She sets the bar and leads by example."

"Lyn is very professional and down to Earth. She has remained true to her values and has been an effective advocate for all of us at the Suicide Prevention Center."

"It has been Lyn's strength as a leader and her empathy as an advisor that has helped us through our growing pains and coping with our losses."

"I am very grateful for Lyn, and cherish her deeply as a mentor and friend."

Congratulations, Lyn.



Am I a Survivor of Suicide?

By Mary Gryman

For a long time I did not identify myself as a "survivor" of suicide. I thought a "survivor" is someone who has lost a son or a daughter, a husband or wife, or someone close to suicide. Since my losses were all a step a way from an immediate family member, I didn't think survivors included people like me.

I did, however, know people who had killed themselves. When I was in my teens, my mother's best friend sat in her MG with the motor running until she died of asphyxiation. I did not find out it was a suicide for 10 years because nobody talked about it. When I was in my 20s, my great-uncle and father-in-law, who both were diagnosed with throat cancer, shot themselves. A few years later, a close cousin killed himself by putting a shot gun to his head, which local authorities somehow described as an accident. In 2000, while I was working on the planning committee for my high school reunion, I learned from a website that my high school sweetheart had shot himself just before his 40th birthday.

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Rick's Corner

Some of you have heard the story of how I came to create a "spirit plate" for my brother Ed, but it bears repeating here to preface a story from one of our Orange County survivors.

Nine years ago, at a San Fernando Valley drop-in group, the discussion centered on how to cope with the rapidly approaching holidays. One survivor spoke about having a "spirit plate" for her mother, who had died by suicide, at family gatherings during the holiday season.

I said to myself, "Hey, I can do that!" and proceeded to plan my plate for Ed, who also died by suicide. I thought about some of the cool things he enjoyed, such as Bluegrass music, iguanas and his two favorite Bobs: Marley and Sponge.

I glued photos of Ed, the Bobs and some Bluegrass groups to a plate. I found small rubber iguanas and glued them around the rim. But I still felt I needed something to finish the plate.

I collect "Homies," small figurines representing Chicano characters in the life of artist David Gonzales. The figurines, which are based on a comic strip Gonzales created, were initially sold in supermarket vending machines.

One day, while looking for new additions for my collection, I stumbled upon a Homie I had not seen before. He was a little over an inch tall, and on his shoulder was an iguana.

Eureka! I had found the centerpiece for Ed's plate!

I took a photograph of the finished plate and showed it to the survivor who inspired me to create it. She looked at the photo, gave me a "whoa, dude" look and told me the spirit plate for her mother was simply a place setting at the family's holiday table!

Alright, different strokes for different whatever's!

The holidays are hard enough, whether it is the first, the tenth or the fortieth holiday following a loved one's suicide. Nothing can replace our loved ones, but we can embrace and share the best of our memories with one another.

The important message is that survivors need to do whatever comforts them, whether that means putting down an extra place setting, creating a spirit plate, looking at photographs, lighting candles or quietly contemplating memories of loved ones. As long as we remember them, our loved ones will always be here.

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**
(877) 7-CRISIS or (877) 727-4747

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

TEEN LINE:
Hotline for teens staffed by trained
teens 6-10 p.m.
(800) TLC-TEEN

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

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

Didi Hirsch Mental Health Services:
Eleven sites in Los Angeles and Orange
County provide mental health care for
those with severe mental illness and little
money
(310) 390-6612 • www.didihirsch.org

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

For a full resource list go to
www.didihirsch.org

NEWSLETTER

A publication of Survivors After Suicide,
which provides support groups for those
who have lost a loved one to suicide.
SAS is a program of Didi Hirsch Mental
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SAS Program Numbers:
LA: (310) 895-2326
OC: (714) 547-0885

Survivors of a Suicide Attempt:
(310) 895-2319

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Robert Stohr, MFT

Reprint Policy:
You are welcome to reprint material from
our newsletter if you are a nonprofit support
organization that produces periodicals.

Lace up your sneakers!

It's time for Didi Hirsch's 15th Annual
Alive & Running 5K Run/Walk
SPC's only dedicated fundraiser

Join a team. Start your own.

Sunday, September 22, 2013
La Tijera Parkway, North of LAX

Race begins 8 a.m.
Come early, stay late.

Activities include:

- Heath & Wellness Expo
- Pre-race stretch and warm-up
- Kiddie K
- Awards Presentation

For more information and registration,
go to
aliveandrunning.org

Upcoming Events

Alive & Running 5K Run/Walk for Suicide Prevention

September 22, 2013

AFSP International Survivors of Suicide Day

November 23, 2013

Survivors After Suicide Holiday Potluck

December 7, 2013

6 to 8 PM

OC Team Helps Child/Adolescent Survivors

By Jacquelyn Rivera, LCSW, PPSC

In early 2013, a bright, spirited, five-year-old boy and his mother, both survivors of suicide, walked through our Orange County doors. The boy's sibling and mother's eldest child was fourteen when he took his own life. The five-year-old boy had not only lost his brother to suicide but also witnessed his parents' unsuccessful attempt to save his brother's life. The boy's older brother was his rock and served not only as a sibling and prominent role model but also as another father figure. Soon after his brother's suicide, the boy became angry and began avoiding the room where his brother died. The child's parents quickly recognized their surviving son's need for support and reached out to our Orange County Suicide Survivor Support Services Program. The boy became our youngest survivor to receive services.

Also this year, an adored teenage boy died by suicide in Orange County. Among the many survivors were his high school sweetheart and her entire family, with whom the boy had become close. The parents of the surviving girlfriend sought out support for their daughter and other children, understanding that they too needed a safe space to begin to process their loss. Soon the family of the teen who had killed himself also became connected to our Orange County services, further increasing the number of teen survivors in our program.

These stories are just two of the many child and adolescent Orange County residents who enter our OC survivor support program. We offer bereavement counseling and support groups to survivors under the age of eighteen. Although the services have been in place since the program launched, we initially struggled with referrals. To make sure the community was aware of the full age range of children served by the program, our Orange County staff members focused on increasing their outreach efforts. Staff members participated by personally handing out fliers in the community, attending school and staff meetings, and designing a child and family friendly flier for distribution at community events and agencies. We were surprised to see a large increase in interest and referrals from school staff and community organizations, such as after school programs. The referrals we received reinforced our position that child and adolescent survivors need support, too.

Many times, we forget the importance of bereavement counseling and support groups for our child and adolescent survivors. We also tend to overlook the trauma they experience as a result of a loved one's suicide. Our program recognizes that they have their own unique needs which our therapeutic staff and community partners address with services such as family support and individual sessions.

We applaud the caregivers and parents of these young survivors who advocated for their children to link them to counseling. Our hope is that more and more residents of Orange County will learn of our child and adolescent suicide bereavement services and that many more parents, caregivers and family members will seek needed support for the child or adolescent survivor in their lives.

For more information on enrolling an Orange County child or adolescent survivor in our program, please contact us at 714-547-0885. Adult and family suicide bereavement services are also available. Please note that the survivor must be an Orange County resident.

Funded by the County of Orange Health Care Agency, Behavioral Health Services, Prevention and Intervention Division, Mental Health Services Act /Prop. 63.

I Felt Helpless, But this I Could Do

By Marilyn Nobori

This year is the ten-year memorial for my 14-year-old daughter, Aiko, who died by suicide. It is hard to believe it has been that long, and that there have been 10 teams at the Alive and Running for Suicide Prevention.



I remember feeling fractured. I would move through the day disjointed and aimless then I would bounce between foggy awareness to pure despair. There was a hole in my heart that would never heal. I felt if I died, it would be okay because there was no reason to go on. I wanted the world to stop. I wanted to know "why?" As I searched, I realized that no amount of information would satisfy me. Nothing I learned was going to make this event alright. What I was really wanted was a different time line, a different story line. As I realized this and that nothing was going to change this event, I began to make peace with it. But more than that, I realized Aiko's life was worth celebrating. She was a gift. Her death was horrific, but how I responded to it would give meaning and honor to her life.

That first year, a flier came for the Suicide Prevention Center's Alive and Running event. I wasn't sure I could walk, but some friends said they would walk with me and at the last minute we called ourselves "Aiko's Team." Six of us walked and we raised \$2,000, most of the donations collected by a friend at church. As I thanked her for her effort she said, "I wanted to do something. I felt helpless. This I could do!"

Each year, as I organize Aiko's Team, I remember my friend's words: "I felt helpless, but this I can do!" The team has grown each year. Each time Aiko's Team participates in the event, we raise awareness about this deadly problem. We are also raising money to support the Suicide Prevention Center at Didi Hirsch. SPC has a 24/7 crisis line in English and Spanish and offers several hours in Korean and Vietnamese. It covers most of Southern California and, as part of the national Lifeline, handles calls both nationally and internationally. The center's speakers go into schools, churches and workplaces to make presentations on suicide awareness and prevention. They conduct ASIST trainings, which are similar to CPR in that they provide lay training to create a community-wide safety net. The center is also one of only a few in the nation that provides support groups to people who have attempted suicide, called Survivors of A Suicide Attempt. And when the horrible happens, there is Survivors After Suicide, a bereavement program.

Molly Fumia wrote, "If you mention my loved one's name, I may cry. But if you don't mention it, you will break my heart." I thank each member of Aiko's Team for remembering and honoring my daughter each year.

You Are Not Alone

By Linda Torres

In honor of my loved one – Andria Andrade

If I could give my loved one
A final glimpse of hope,
I'd say, "You are not alone"
And pray that she could cope

Cope with any problems
That life can sometimes bring
Some problems small, some problems large
Some mean nothing, some mean everything

A long list of friends and family
She had by her side
Through all the good times, laughing and loving
All of us along for the ride

Then a time came, I guess, when my loved one felt alone
When times got rough, she turned away
Trying to handle things on her own

A tough fight she gave, with such strong will,
A battle she almost won
But at the end was such a shock
Her precious life was gone

So now where is 'our' glimpse of hope
Family and friends trying to cope
Questions unanswered, a different pain
I've felt grief before, but this is not the same

So now begins the healing
Can anyone lend a hand?
Only those who've been there too
Can truly understand

So I find a group of others
With stories just like mine
And even though we're all in pain
I know we'll be just fine

Fine because we have each other
To talk and cry and share
Our loved ones life goes on and on
Through those that listen, those that care

So I guess a glimpse of hope I've found
So I can say in a positive tone
If you have lost a love one
"You are not alone"

Spirit Plates are Good Therapy, Even for Artistically Challenged

By Rosemary Van der Laan

When I first heard about "spirit plates," I could not understand what they were. I also hate gluing things and am hopeless with artistic design. To my surprise, when I actually saw a spirit plate, I thought that it was a neat idea to have one at a family gathering, wherever it might be placed. But I didn't think it was for me or for my family.

I could not imagine what photos I might choose, and how I could possibly decorate it. So, I dismissed the tentative idea. When friends and counselors in my Survivors After Suicide group decided to devote one of our sessions to making spirit plates, I hated the idea, but decided to go along with the project in support of the other members.



I sought out a few photos of my son, who had taken his own life, and with the encouragement and aid of our counselors, began to cut and arrange a few photos on a plate. I took the plate, the photos and a few decorations home with me. Then, my grandson and I looked at the photos and chose some that depicted his father's life, family, hobbies and sports. Unbelievably, one photo actually made me smile!

I came to the next group session armed with my photos, budding ideas, a colored pen and a twig from my funeral bouquet and then persuaded one of my counselors to help me glue my choices in a pattern on the plate. When we finished, I smilingly showed the plate to my grandson, his mother, everyone. And now, it has a permanent home in my dining room.

For my grandson's birthday, I made another spirit plate with pictures that my grandson and I chose together. It now has a place of honor in his room. I am still surprised I actually made something with glue. What wonderful therapy it was.

IN MEMORY OF

Henri Cao

Neil Currie and Peggy Palmer

Alexander B. Fiederer

Paul Greenberg

Jeanine Hodges

Barbara Hornichter

Noah Langholz

Laura Leiberman

David Modjallal

Amit Yaakov Nishli

Aiko Nobori

Jerry Panzer

Josh Rittenberg

Jacob Silver

Brandon Toh

IN HONOR OF

David's Birthday

Janine and Henry's 45th Anniversary

Stan Lelewer's Birthday

Janine and Henry Lichstein

SPC Volunteer Ester Ygarra-Bryant Honored

By Kim Kowsky

Suicide Prevention Center volunteer Ester Ybarra-Bryant was honored as an "Unsung Heroine" at the "2013 Women of the Year" Awards, which were presented by U.S. Representative Grace F. Napolitano (32nd District) in El Monte on May 10.

Sixteen years ago, Ester lost her 13-year-old son, Nathan, to suicide. Unable to face the unbearable loss, she attempted to end her own life before a hotline counselor helped her through her crisis.



Ester Ybarra-Bryant received the Women of the Year 2013 "Unsung Heroines" award on May 10, 2013. Ester Ybarra-Bryant (second on left) with U.S. Congresswoman Grace Napolitano (center) and Ester's family members: sister Queta Morales (left), mother Elena Ybarra (second on right) and sister Teresa Ybarra (right).

Ester joined a bereavement support group at the Didi Hirsch Mental Health Services' Suicide Prevention Center and found new purpose in her life. In 1998, a year after Nathan's death, she became a volunteer with the agency and is now an extraordinarily active advocate for suicide prevention.

In addition to her work with the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors, she co-facilitates survivor groups and presents to community groups. As a member of the Suicide Response Team, an arm of the Los Angeles Mayor's Crisis Response Team, she is on call twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, rushing to the scene of a suicide to comfort

grief-stricken family members. She is also a dedicated volunteer with Pugs and Pals of Southern California.

Ester has inspired hundreds of people with her story, serving as a public face and advocate for suicide prevention on KPCC and The E! Channel. In gratitude for her many contributions Didi Hirsch Mental Health Services salutes Ester as a 2013 Woman of the Year.

HOLIDAY POTLUCK

Saturday, December 7 • 6 to 8 p.m.

Veterans Memorial Park • Rotunda Banquet Room
4117 Overland Ave. • Culver City, CA 90232

SAS Leaders Sam and Lois Bloom Donate \$10,000 Grant to DHMHS

By Kim Kowsky

Lois and Sam Bloom were devastated when their only son, Sammy, 23, took his own life in 1982. At a time when many bereaved survivors suffered in silence, the Blooms used their overwhelming grief to help other families who have lost loved ones to suicide.

They joined Survivors After Suicide, became respected political advocates for suicide prevention at local, regional and national levels and helped pioneer the small-group grief therapy now used worldwide to help survivors heal.

At its 50th Anniversary Celebration in Las Vegas in April, the National Council for Community Behavioral Healthcare honored the Blooms for their extraordinary efforts on behalf of suicide survivors over the past 30 years. A nonprofit group that advances the work of community mental health and addiction organizations, the Council granted the Blooms \$10,000, which they donated to Didi Hirsch Mental Health Services.

"It all started out because we wanted to honor Sammy," says Lois, who served as this newsletter's founder and first editor. "But it's more than that now. We want to save lives."

Lois and Sam, who live in Rancho Palos Verdes, attended their first Survivors After Suicide meeting in 1983, when bereavement therapy was in its early development, and began facilitating groups the following year. Since then, they have helped thousands of people who have survived a loved one's suicide.

Champions for suicide prevention awareness, they helped found the Suicide Prevention Advocacy Network-California, which lobbies



legislators on suicide prevention and mental health reform. They also volunteer as facilitators for the Good Grief Group, a bereavement group formed by the Neighborhood Church, where they are members.

The Blooms often tell grieving families how their decision to be open and honest about their son's suicide helped ease some of their pain.

"We weren't held back by the stigma," Sam says. "We didn't cover it up. We gave people permission to talk about it... You open yourself to all kinds of support that way."

Am I a Survivor, *continued from page 1*

I wasn't really thinking about these losses when I decided to become a crisis counselor on the suicide hotline in 1989. I wanted to volunteer somewhere and had seen an ad in the newspaper for the hotline. I did not know much about suicide, but I felt that I could talk to anybody on the phone and make a connection.

I had worked on the crisis line for about 10 years and had made friends with a wonderful woman who had lost her son to suicide when I realized that I wanted to work with survivors. When I described my interest, I was told I couldn't work with survivor groups because I didn't have personal experience living with the loss of a loved one to suicide. Luckily for me, three heroes came to my rescue: former Suicide Prevention Center (SPC) Director Jay Nagdimon, therapist Carole Chasin and SPC

Co-founder Norman Farberow. They understood the impact suicide has on friends, distant family members and even acquaintances. By broadening the definition of suicide survivors, they ensured that a wider circle of people could receive the help they needed. They took me under their wings and mentored me through the training to become a Survivor After Suicide co-facilitator. In October 1999, I facilitated my first Monthly Drop-In Group for Didi Hirsch in Culver City. Today, I co-facilitate two groups, one in Culver City and another in Glendale.

My work as a co-facilitator with survivor groups has been gratifying, but it hasn't made me immune to additional losses. Unfortunately, one of my best friends died by suicide in March 2012. If I had any doubts

about whether my past losses made me a "survivor," the suicide of my friend made the question moot. I knew my friend had been suicidal in the past, and even asked him if he would tell me when he started feeling that way again. He said, "No." He knew that all he had to do was reach out and that there were many friends and family members who would have helped him. He didn't and, as someone recently said, he fought the good fight and now is out of his pain.

I miss him, but feel lucky that I get to talk about him all the time. Three times a year, I describe my loss to trainees for the suicide prevention crisis line and teach them how to talk to survivors when they call the line. It has been quite a journey, but I know I am supposed to be here and I thank God everyday for letting me do this work.



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: Sept 25, Oct 23, Nov 27.

Santa Ana

Meets the 1st Wednesday of each month, 6:30 – 8:00 p.m.
Meeting dates: Sept 4, Oct 2, Nov 6, Dec 4.

San Fernando Valley

Meets the 2nd Saturday of each month, 11:30 a.m. – 1:00 p.m.
Meeting dates: Sept 14, Oct 12, Nov 9, Dec 14.

South Bay

Meets the 2nd Sunday of each month, 11:00 am – 12:30 p.m.
Meeting dates: Sept 8, Oct 13, Nov 10, Dec 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: Late 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 Gabriel and Santa Ana.

To be placed into a group, please call: Los Angeles: (310) 895-2326; Orange County: (714) 547-0885