
Opinion

Opinion: Documentary on suicide next step in Stark County's recovery

By John Aller, Special to The Canton Repository

Posted Mar 1, 2020 at 6:31 AM

Next weekend — 1 p.m. Sunday, March 8 be exact — the community is invited to take a significant step in the healing process, as the Stark County Suicide Prevention Coalition brings a documentary called “The S Word” to the Canton Palace Theatre.

The “S” stands for suicide, and the film aims to destigmatize that word through several stories of real people who have lived through suicidal thoughts and attempts.

Why is showing a documentary so significant? Over the past few years, as the youth suicide cluster was unfolding, we heard from folks yearning for these types of gatherings. When we are in crisis mode, it can seem appropriate and appealing to congregate around meaningful symbols, events or people. In working through the crisis – the “postvention” phase as we call it – we know it is, in fact, more beneficial to maintain routine structure, ensuring additional supports are in place for people in need, while constantly connecting anyone affected to resources.

Special events, memorials and the like are actually discouraged during postvention, because they can create intense and unpredictable emotions that can be difficult to manage in group settings.

While postvention strategies are, of course, still taking place, I am happy to relay that our community is also actively re-engaged in prevention efforts. Work being done around prevention is what prompted discussion of “The S Word.”

After careful consideration, members of the Stark County Suicide Prevention Coalition determined this could be a beneficial outlet where residents can gather, watch and support one another in a healthy way. We will build on this in the months and years to come, through ideas generated by those affected, as well as resources we provide to ensure our county is as safe as it can be for our young people.

No matter your connection to suicide, you are invited to join us for this free film, which is suitable for ages 18 and older. In order to truly engage in stigma reduction, people from every part of our county and from many different experiences will need to commit to talking about suicide, even though it likely will be uncomfortable at times.

We hope this is only the start of some of those conversations. At the conclusion, all attendees will have the opportunity to write a “caring contact” card to someone who might need a show of support in a difficult time.

It has been shown that a small gesture like a handwritten note to someone at high risk can reduce suicidal thoughts. While these types of strategies don't replace treatment, it is an example of something anyone in the community can do to help prevent suicide.

While suicide is, of course, always a difficult subject, it is important we recognize our progress and take time to embrace the ongoing opportunities we have to overcome the stigma that surrounds it.

On behalf of many working in this field every day, we thank you for your partnership in promoting wellness, and we hope to see you at the Palace next Sunday.

John Aller is the executive director of Stark County Mental Health and Addiction Recovery (StarkMHAR).