
In Waterloo Region : It Takes A Village

Suicide Information & Awareness is Important – You're not Alone

Waterloo Region Suicide Prevention Council

Issue 7 May 2004

Bringing Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transsexual and Queer Youth Suicide “Out of the Closet “

Karl Torbicki

It is tragic to think that suicide is the third leading cause of death in youth, after car fatalities and murder. One group in particular, the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transsexual, queer and questioning young people known as LGBTQ youth, are especially at risk of suicide. Research estimates that LGBTQ youth are over 5 times more likely to attempt suicide compared to their heterosexual peers. Such drastically high rates of suicide attempts in LGBTQ youth are likely a result of the unique stresses they face, such as verbal abuse in school, the coming out process, isolation and the process of coming to terms with their own sexuality.

The primary factor that creates stress for LGBTQ youth is verbal abuse. According to Human Rights Watch researchers, nearly every one of 140 LGBTQ students they interviewed had been targeted by verbal assault because of their sexual orientation. Fellow students would shout words like

“faggot,” “queer,” “dyke” or other demeaning terms at them in the hallways, in classes and in the cafeteria. While constant verbal attacks are stressful and wearying in themselves, further problems like skipping school or changing schools to avoid bullying often result. Verbal abuse is by far the most common form of violence faced by LGBTQ youth, but they may also face physical and sexual abuse at home or at school, which further increase their risk of suicide.

A further factor that may increase the risk of LGBTQ youth suicide is the isolation and lack of emotional support. Many gay teens are still ‘in the closet’ and have not disclosed their sexuality to their parents, siblings or friends. These teenagers are probably the most at risk because they have no one to turn to about the doubts and fears they’re tackling since they cannot take the risk of telling anyone the truth. Stronger support for LGBTQ youth is needed to reverse this trend, especially in the form of high school support groups and greater awareness of LGBTQ support lines.

“Coming out of the closet” is the major crisis gay youth face when coming to terms with their sexuality.

They must choose between taking the risk of “coming out” to parents and friends, or to remain “in the closet” keeping their orientation a secret for fear of the consequences. Their parents and friends may have religious disagreements, conservative views or negative stereotypes of what it means to be gay, making it extremely stressful to reveal their homosexuality. These young men and women need the support of their family and friends to be able to face harassment and stigmatization and to be able to come to terms with their sexuality. They need to hear from their parents that it’s perfectly acceptable to be queer, that they love them just as they are gay or straight.



Waterloo Region Suicide Prevention Council Newsletter is published for the prevention of suicide through education, networking and resources.

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CONTENTS

Bringing Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transsexual and Queer Youth Suicide Out of the Closet	1/2
Self Help Alliance	3
Upcoming Events	4

This simple message from parents to all children would make coming out much less stressful, which could help reduce LGBTQ suicide attempts.

LGBTQ youth go through several stages in the coming out process that can each be extremely stressful. Identity confusion is the first stage, when feelings and thoughts build up to the inevitable question “Could I be different?” Next is identity comparison, when the person starts to accept the possibility that they might be gay, and begins to come to terms with the loss of their expectations for a typical straight lifestyle. During these first stages, denial and inner conflict can put a lot of pressure on a person, especially when they have little knowledge of the LGBTQ community resources, negative ideas of what it means to be gay, and few gay role models. Eventually, identity tolerance is achieved once something or someone brings an end to any feelings of doubt or denial. The key stage in coming out and coming to terms with being gay is identity acceptance, when the person increases their contact with the LGBTQ community, reveals their sexual orientation to close friends or family, and continues to explore their own sexual identity. LGBTQ youth need support to be able to work through each stage, and they need to be aware that they are not alone, and that there is support available. A list of relevant websites and support

lines is included at the end of this article.

An important step that high schools can take to prevent LGBTQ youth suicide is to establish support groups for queer and questioning students. It takes incredible self-confidence, self-knowledge and strength to be able to be openly gay in high school and many gay youth keep their sexuality hidden to avoid the taunts, slurs and scorn of their peers. Creating ‘coming out’ support groups allows LGBTQ students to meet others dealing with the same situation and breaks the illusion that they are alone in their struggle. They can learn from the experiences of those who have gone through the process of coming out to parents and friends, thus reducing the anxiety and doubt they feel when dealing with the same thing. Support groups also provide desperately needed LGBTQ role models, and foster an accepting atmosphere that can start to reverse internalized homophobia and provide a safe haven from outside stress.

Fortunately, there is reason to expect that LGBTQ youth suicide risk may decrease in the future as a result of the gradual destigmatization of the queer community. In the last two decades, there has been a huge transformation in the perception and acceptance of gay people in Canada. However, at the high school level, guidance councillors, teachers, staff and students must act as leaders and role

models to fight verbal abuse, reduce isolation and ease the stress of coming out for LGBTQ youth.

Support Numbers

OUTline (519) 836-4550

Lesbian Gay Bi Youth Line 1-800-268-9688 (4-9pm)

Kid’s Help Phone 1-800-668-6868

<http://www.pflag.ca/>

GLOW (Gays and Lesbians of Waterloo- UW) (519) 884-4569

GLOBAL (Gay, Lesbian or Bisexual at Laurier)

<http://www.wlu.ca/global/>

Rainbow Youth Line (519) 570-3687

Planned Parenthood LGBTQ Youth Line (519) 743-6461

Or, speak with a guidance councillor, teacher or professor at your school.

“ Special thanks to **Joy Haffner** for her generous contribution to WRSPC”

Special thanks to the Region of Waterloo Health Unit for their support in the printing and distribution of this newsletter.

**WE NEED YOUR SUPPORT
YOUR DONATIONS ARE NEEDED!**

**SUPPORT THE WORK OF WRSPC
BOTH INDIVIDUAL AND
ORGANIZATIONAL DONATIONS
ARE WELCOME.**

**PLEASE FORWARD YOUR
DONATION TO:**

Waterloo Region Suicide Prevention Council
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Kitchener ON N2G 2K4

Self Help Alliance

As you are likely aware, there have been a number of changes to self help organizations in Waterloo Region over the past few years. The most recent change was the development of the Self Help Alliance. In an attempt to optimize limited resources, the Boards of Directors for Waterloo Region Self Help (Kitchener), Cambridge Active Self Help (Cambridge), Wellington-Dufferin Self Help (Guelph and Orangeville) and Mood Disorders Association of Waterloo Region (Kitchener) entered into a formalized agreement with one another in 2003, to share both staff and resources.

This partnership arrangement ensures that each of these corporations remain separate and distinct entities with their own individual Board of Directors and their own unique activities. However, together they share a management component, administrative functions and several common staff positions that will carry out work on behalf of all four organizations. The numerous benefits to this partnership include: the opportunity to create a stronger and more cohesive network for consumer/survivors in our communities, staff are able to focus on specific areas of expertise (self help development and advocacy), and administrative efficiencies

which will result in the ability to apply more resources toward direct support activities. It is our belief that together we will be able to rekindle and strengthen the consumer/survivor movement in our communities and focus our energies on ensuring that consumer/survivors continue to have a strong voice within the mental health system.

This is a very exciting time in the development of these organizations as this is a significant step toward being able to address the shared goals outlined in the respective strategic plans. The shared staff positions are held by; Lisa Gammage, Executive Director; Kathy Briggs, Self Help Development Coordinator; Paul Reeve, Advocacy Coordinator; and Allan Strong, Self Help Resource Centre Coordinator. In addition, there continues to be staff who work solely from each location on behalf of one particular organization.

The shared goals of these organizations include: promotion and education regarding the value of peer support, support to develop new or existing self help groups, advocacy both systemic and individual, personal development, community development and mental health education and training from a consumer's perspective.

Cambridge Active Self Help (C.A.S.H.) and Waterloo Region Self Help (W.R.S.H.)

both host a Self Help Resource Centre which provides support and resources to individuals or existing groups who are looking for information related to self help and the formation or development of self help support groups. The Self Help Resource Centre can connect people to existing groups, provide information and support regarding facilitating and developing groups, provide assistance with securing a meeting space in the community and provide administrative support for the group.

*Lisa Cousineau, who works for Waterloo Region Self Help, is the representative for the Waterloo Region Suicide Prevention Council

If you would like more information about the opportunities available at any of the partnering organizations, please call:

Cambridge Active
Self Help 519-623-6024
Waterloo Region Self
Help 519-
570-4595
Wellington-Dufferin
Self Help
(Guelph)
519-763-4014
(Orangeville)
519-940-4811
Mood Disorders
Association 519-
884-5455

Sincerely,
Lisa Gammage
Executive Director
Self Help Alliance

UPCOMING EVENTS

Mental Health Week – May 3-9, 2004

Theme: “Emerging Into Light...Making Your Connection”

Mental Health Week Events:

WORKSHOP

Tuesday, May 4, 2004 9:00
a.m.-4:00 p.m.
Holiday Inn Drive, Cambridge
Patricia Deegan PH.D, Speaks
out on “Recovery: the
experience, the evidence and
the practice”
Cost \$85.00 to C.M.H.A., info:
1-866-448-1603 ext. 371

WELLNESS FAIR

Wednesday May 5, 2004,
1:00-4:00 p.m.
Cambridge Centre for Mental
Health,
3-9 Wellington St., Cambridge
Ont.
No Cost, Info: 519-740-7782

OPEN HOUSE

Wednesday May 5, 2004 2:00-
4:00 p.m.
Kitchener Centre for Mental
Health
67 King St. E. Kitchener, Ont.
No Cost, Info: 519-744-7645

ART GALA

Thursday, May 6, 2004 4:30-
9:00 p.m.
River Run Centre 35
Woolwich St., Guelph, Ont.
No Cost Info: 519-766-4450
ext. 231

Talking Through the Tough Stuff: How to Talk to Your Teen About Tough Issues

Presentation and Information
Fair that talks about: Teen
Relationships, Emotions and
Moods, Teen Suicide
Prevention, Leave with Your
Own Personal Survival Kit!
Monday May 3, 2004 7:00-
9:00 p.m.
William G. Davis School
Library 530 Langs Drive,
Cambridge, Ont.
Contact LeeAnne at Langs
Farm Village Association to
Register
653-1470 ext 347 Spaces Ltd.

**WALK OF HOPE-
Schizophrenia Society ON
Waterloo Region Chapter-
Saturday, May 29, 2004
Kitchener City Hall Rotunda
Call Pauline Potzold 749-4300
ext 2333 or SSO at 744-9522
To donate, sponsor or get
pledge forms.**

FREE COMMUNITY FORUM-Presented by Marianne Farkas “Issues in Psychosocial Rehabilitation in an Era of Recovery”

Friday, May 28, 2004 7:00-
8:30 p.m., Registration at 6:30
p.m.
Four Points Sheraton Hotel-
Viking Suite, 105 King St.
East, Kitchener
Contact Info: Pauline Potzold
749-4300 ext. 2333

**“INTEGRATING
RECOVERY INTO
EXISTING MENTAL
HEALTH PROGRAMS”
WORKSHOP –Presented by
Marianne Farkas**

Friday May 28, 2004 10:30
a.m. – 3:30 p.m.
Four Points Sheraton Hotel –
Viking Suite, 105 King St.
East, Kitchener
Contact Pauline Potzold for
Info. And Registration – 749-
4300 ext. 2333

WATERLOO REGION SUICIDE PREVENTION COUNCIL Presents:

“DIMENSIONS OF SUICIDE – Creating Common Understanding”

**Free Community Forum-
Wednesday, November 3,
2004 5:30 – 9:00 p.m.**

Guest Speaker: Dr. Gustavo
Turecki Topic: **SUICIDE:
From Biological
Predisposition to Social
Liability. A
Multidimensional
Assessment of a Complex
Problem**
Featuring Music by the
“Elderly Brothers” and the
KW Philharmonic choir, Book
Fair and Sales

Full Day Conference on the “Dimensions of Suicide - Creating Common Understanding”

Thursday, November 4, 2004
8:30 – 4:30 p.m., Waterloo Inn
and Conference Centre,
475 King St. North, Waterloo
Guest Speakers include: Dr.
Gustavo Turecki, Psychiatric
Geneticist, Dr. Margaret
Steele, Child Psychiatrist,
Al Copland, Clinical Educator,
Maureen Garner, B.ScN. and
Subaida Hanifa RN.
Registration Cost \$125
Contact Pauline Potzold 749-
4300 ext 2333