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Community Remembrance Walk Raises Awareness About Suicide

Seventh annual walk offers support to those who have lost loved ones to suicide.

Kansas City, MO (Aug. 2, 2010)—When Overland Park residents Mickey and Bonnie Swade lost their 31-year-old son Brett to suicide in December 2004, they became members of a rapidly growing group in the United States. Suicide, which according to Suicide.org, a 501c3 non-profit organization and Web site, claims a life every 16 minutes in the United States and leaves behind a community of survivors—spouses, children, friends and loved ones. The Swades decided a year after their son’s tragic and untimely death to form a survivor’s support group, Suicide Awareness Survivor Support (SASS), which today is the largest survivor support group in the Kansas City area.

SASS, a non-profit group that serves the Mokan area, holds its seventh annual Remembrance Walk in Kansas City’s Loose Park at 51st and Wornall on Sunday, September 12, 2010. The walk raises awareness and support for those who have lost loved ones to a traumatic death including suicide, homicide, fire and accident.

“Kids as young as eight and nine years old can have suicidal ideation and take their own lives,” says Bonnie Swade.

“SASS offers support to those in Kansas City who have gone through the unspeakable tragedy of losing a loved one to suicide. When we started the group in 2005 our average attendance was six people per session.”

The bi-weekly SASS meetings, which are held the second and fourth Tuesday of the month at Life Dynamics on the campus of Shawnee Mission Medical Center, now draw 18 to 25 people.

The annual walk, which last year drew more than 300 participants and is SASS’s major fundraiser, was organized as a way to show public support for survivors who have lost loved ones to suicide. The walk funds SASS’s ongoing efforts with education, public awareness, networking, uniting survivors and initiatives designed to reduce the loss of life from suicide, in addition to providing crucial support for survivors.

The registration fee for the Remembrance Walk is \$25; walkers can check in beginning at 8 a.m. on Sunday, September 12; the event will begin at 9 a.m. with a Motorcycle Remembrance Ride following the dove release at 10 a.m. This year’s host is KCTV’s weekend anchor Matt Stewart. Participants can register online at <http://www.sass-mokan.com/Sass-walk/>.

Bonnie says that SASS has helped her heal and understand she is not alone. “People who lose loved ones to suicide often feel ostracized,” says Bonnie. “Society tends to judge suicidal deaths. Our organization not only helps people, it also raises awareness that it is a health problem affecting people of all walks of life.”

Suicide takes an enormous toll on family, friends, co-workers and the entire community. With more than 1,000 lives lost and suicides at nearly double that of homicides in both Missouri and Kansas each year, the importance of SASS’s mission is more significant than ever. According to the Harvard School of Public Health, suicide ranks as one of the leading causes of death in the U.S; among persons under 30 years old, it is one of the top three causes of death.

Ninety percent of the people who die by suicide have a diagnosable psychiatric disorder, most often depression, at the time of their death. In the U.S. alone, approximately 20 million people suffer from serious depression. The lingering stigma attached to seeking help for mental health issues may be a contributing factor to undiagnosed depression.

“Suicide is everyone’s business,” says Bonnie, a member of SASS’s Board of Directors and Speaker’s Bureau. “We support community initiatives by working with other non-profit organizations in an effort to increase school outreach programs to decrease teen suicide.”

For more information, visit <http://www.sass-mokan.com>. Coordinating agencies D.W. Newcomers & Sons, NAMI of Greater Kansas City and New Directions Behavioral Health