

Support available for suicide survivors

By Lorraine Sips

September is Suicide Prevention Awareness Month. This first of a two-part series will discuss who is at risk for suicide, warning signs, how to help and the services Medina County agencies provide to prevent suicides and support survivors.

Medina County has an array of programs designed to prevent suicide. Now it also has a program to help bereaved family and friends when a suicide could not be prevented.

The LOSS (Local Outreach to Suicide Survivors) Team provides crisis response outreach when a suicide occurs in Medina County. The program began on July 19 and is managed by Alternative Paths, a non-profit agency which serves adults living with mental illness. It also runs Medina County's 24/7 Crisis and Behavior Health Hotline, assisting individuals in psychiatric emergency situations.

Law enforcement will dispatch the LOSS team to respond and provide support to loved ones in the immediate hours after they have lost someone to suicide. The team consists of 13 trained clinicians who establish a human

connection in a nonintrusive, compassionate manner at a time when survivors are overwhelmed. They provide physical and emotional comfort and, when the time is appropriate, refer them for additional services.

Research indicates many individuals experience fear, anxiety, a need to connect with others, a sense of being overwhelmed and hopelessness immediately after a suicide. Their bereavement is also impacted by the stigma of suicide and feelings of guilt for not recognizing suicide warning signs.

People with a history of suicide in their families also have a higher risk of suicide. Addressing these issues early on helps to prevent long-term mental health effects and reduce the risk of additional deaths by suicide.

Funding for the LOSS Team is provided by the Medina County Alcohol, Drug Addiction and Mental Health (ADAMH) Board. It is a public body made up of 14 county citizens appointed by the Ohio Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services and the County Commissioners.

The ADAMH Board

works to assure the availability of high-quality alcohol, drug addiction and mental health service for all residents through planning, purchasing cost effective services, coordinating services, and evaluating these services.

"The LOSS Team is the latest addition in our ongoing suicide prevention efforts in Medina County,"

said Phillip Titterington, ADAMH Executive Director. "Cost for the initial encounter and referral is covered by the ADAMH Board. Depending on the type of services they receive, we could potentially help pay for those as well."

Titterington added: "We want to thank the voters who passed the Human Services Levy. This is one of the services that is the direct result of that levy."

Medina County passed the Human Services Levy in November 2020. The 1-mil levy is expected to generate about \$5 million annually for the next five years to fund programs like this. Medina is one of fewer than 20 counties in Ohio to offer a LOSS service.

Tiffany Shelton, ADAMH Planning and Program Direc-



File

Medina County has a new resource to help bereaved family and friends when a suicide could not be prevented.

tor, discussed some of the other suicide prevention services they help fund. One is QPR training for community members.

"It stands for question, persuade and refer," she said. "It teaches what to look for, what warning signs are there and next steps."

It also provides funding for CIT, an intensive week-long crisis intervention training for county law enforcement officers and emergency responders. The training includes ways to identify suicide warning signs, de-escalation techniques

and how to work with individuals in a crisis situation, when they are called out to a scene for mental health and substance abuse.

If you have lost a loved one to suicide, you can contact Alternative Paths, Inc. at 330-725-9195 for help. It is part of the Medina County Coalition for Suicide Prevention, which works to increase public awareness that suicide is a public health problem and to change attitudes regarding the stigma attached to suicide. Or visit their website at www.alternativepaths.org.