



CARDINALS BEAT UP BROWNS

Kyler Murray threw four touchdown passes as the Arizona Cardinals defeated the Browns 37-14 to remain the NFL's only unbeaten team. The Browns fell to 3-3 and have lost two straight in the same season for the first time in Kevin Stefanski's two years as coach. **DETAILS IN SPORTS, B1**

Today's weather



HIGH: 61
LOW: 43

Sunrise: 7:42
Sunset: 6:43

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SUICIDE PREVENTION WALK AT MEDINA PUBLIC SQUARE

Community asked to 'be bold'

Jonathan DeLozier
The Gazette

MEDINA — Willingness to start difficult conversations was urged Sunday during the area's eighth annual Step Up to Prevent Suicide Community Walk, which brought more than 200 residents to Public Square.

Images and messages dedicated to departed loved ones who dealt with depression and mental health issues lined the square's gazebo as speakers detailed local progress made in getting help to those who need it.

"I remember back to middle school and just feeling overwhelmed and hearing about so much struggle and confusion," Medina High School senior Morgan Metz told the crowd. "A girl who sat across from me at lunch back then sometimes talked about self-harm and her experiences with that. It wasn't something I really knew about and, of course, I'd ask if she needed a teacher or counselor."

"I'd hear things about how she couldn't afford that or that she didn't want to bring that kind of attention on herself," she added. "She said she didn't want to make it a big deal. At that time, I didn't have the skills or resources to help her navigate that, but I still wanted to be there for her."

Metz is a member of Medina Schools' Hope Squad peer-to-peer youth suicide prevention program. The initiative was established in 2019 in Medina and now is available in more than 1,100 buildings across 35 states. Metz is one of 30,000-plus students nationwide who've been nominated to their positions as trustworthy peers and received professional crisis intervention training.

"As we all move on to high school, the issues and struggles don't leave us," she said.

See WALK, A2

The National Suicide Prevention Lifeline is available 24 hours a day at (800) 273-8255. The Medina County Alcohol, Drug Addiction, and Mental Health Board's all-hours crisis line can be reached at (330) 725-9195.



JONATHAN DELOZIER / GAZETTE PHOTOS

ABOVE: Medina High School senior Morgan Metz speaks Sunday during the area's eighth annual Step Up to Prevent Suicide Community Walk. **BELOW:** More than 200 residents gathered at Medina Square for Sunday's walk and speeches.





JONATHAN DELOZIER / GAZETTE

Members of Medina High School's and Buckeye High School's Hope Squad youth suicide prevention program gather after Sunday's walk.

COVID

From A1

"Those issues follow us. But the difference between middle school and high school has been Hope Squad. I was able to learn how to handle those situations, the warning signs and the risk factors.

"I learned ways to talk to my peers in a way that makes them feel safe in talking to me. Hope Squad is really one of the best things we have in the middle school and in the high school where we can break down that fear that surrounds getting help."

Hope Squad students led Sunday's attendees on a one-mile walk through downtown Medina.

The Medina County Alcohol, Drug Addiction and Mental Health Board provides funding for Hope Squad as well as LOSS Team, which was started locally in July and provides immediate on-scene assistance in the aftermath of an individual taking their own life. LOSS stands for local outreach for suicide survivors.

"What we realized is when there's a suicide in our county, the officers and coroners will go to the scene and, typically, the family is still on the scene," said Devan Althen, a community prevention specialist with Alternative Paths.

"It usually happened in a place where the individual or the family frequented. While the police officers are there, they're doing the job they were taught to do but they don't exactly know how to help the family in the way they want to help."

According to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, suicide is the second leading cause of death in Americans ages 10 to 34 and the top cause in 13-year-olds.

"We started looking around a few years ago and saw what different counties cre-

"Asking about this isn't going to plant a bad idea in their head. ... If your loved one begins to open up and talks about all these things in their life then the next step is to ask them, 'Are you thinking about ending your life to stop the pain?'" Don't be afraid to be bold enough to ask this question.

Pete Bliss, a crisis intervention specialist with the Cuyahoga County Medical Examiner's Office

ated," Althen said. "We now have 13 clinicians in Medina County who are on-call 24/7. These clinicians are dispatched to every scene when we have a suicide in our county. They're not there to provide therapy. They're there to say, 'We understand this is a very difficult time and that there are probably resources you don't know about.' The clinician meets with the family and it becomes kind of an ongoing resource."

Ron Blue, another Alternative Paths Counselor, was instrumental in getting Medina's Hope Squad program up and running.

"I think we've seen a lot of progress over the past 15 or 20 years in regards to how mental health is treated and the discussion around it," he said.

"You have (Cleveland Cavalier) Kevin Love and other celebrities who've been more willing to speak up about their own struggles and that's kind of trickled down where everyone else isn't afraid to talk about it anymore.

That's been very important to the kids around here and look at all the good work they're doing. I think they're just getting started."

Federal data states an American is two and a half times more likely to die by suicide than homicide. Current U.S. rates of 14.5 people per 100,000 electing to take their own lives every year matches pre-

vious all-time highs experienced during the Great Depression.

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"Please have the confidence and be bold in simply opening the discussion by saying, 'I love you and care about you and I'm concerned about you,'" said Pete Bliss, a crisis intervention specialist with the Cuyahoga County Medical Examiner's Office. "Tell them, 'You're not yourself and you're not the you that I know. Tell them if they had pneumonia or a broken arm you'd be just as concerned as you are now.'"

"Asking about this isn't going to plant a bad idea in their head," he added.

"If your loved one begins to open up and talks about all these things in their life then the next step is to ask them, 'Are you thinking about ending your life to stop the pain?'" "Don't be afraid to be bold enough to ask this question.

"If they're exhibiting these behaviors, you're not going to be telling them something that isn't already going on in the back of their head."

Contact reporter Jonathan Delozier at (330) 721-4050 or jdelozier@medina-gazette.com.