

Colin loved to go boating

learning & education

Written by Jules Zucker in collaboration with Graham & Caroline Wiseman



GRAHAM & CAROLINE WISEMAN

TAKE A STAND AGAINST TEEN DEPRESSION

No parent expects to lose their child – it is a pain most would prefer not even to imagine. But in January 2013, the devastatingly unexpected befell Lafayette residents Graham & Caroline Wiseman when their son Colin lost his battle with depression and died by suicide. Their grief has since ignited a passion for raising mental health awareness among parents, in the community, and throughout schools across the state.

“Colin was first diagnosed with ADHD and took medication starting in 8th grade, but that led to depression,” explained Caroline. “He tried many medications to no avail. In 5th grade, we could see he was seriously depressed, and as parents, we thought we were doing everything right: counseling, medication, and working with the school.”

This made Colin’s passing all the more difficult for Caroline, Graham and their daughter Nicole – depression is a complicated illness with no fool-proof cure. However, an encounter with a friend of Colin’s brought Graham an epiphany that set new wheels in motion.

“On the first anniversary of Colin’s suicide, I got a text message from a girl that I didn’t know who was at Colin’s funeral and remembered what had been said. That night, she explained that her depression felt like sinking in a well, and she was ready to let go,” said Graham. “Our text conversation helped her make it through that deep dark place. Now, she is 23 and doing well. This is when I realized what an impact a few words can have.”

Determined to make sure no student felt alone in their mental health struggles, Graham began speaking to high school students and parents about alcohol and drug use, self-harm and mental illness. He also began advocating for more crisis counselors in schools and the creation of wellness centers that could provide resources for students seeking support.

“Wellness centers are a proven way to address anxiety, depression and suicide immediately and help get a child out of crisis,” said Graham. “Kids can go any time during the school day, and they can self-refer or be referred.”

Thanks to Graham’s continued work, there are now nearly 40 wellness centers in Contra Costa County. The Wisemans are also spearheading a 2020 campaign to create a specialty license plate that will raise awareness and funds for student mental illness. The process will be administered and monitored by Graham and Caroline’s own 501(c)(3) nonprofit, **BeingWellCA.org**.

“The Mental Health Awareness License plate will have a ‘4COLIN’ tagline designed by Ellery Carpenter, an Acalanes grad who knew Colin,” said Graham. “This campaign is to



Caroline & Graham celebrate Nicole's involvement in Acalanes Cheer.

fund wellness centers on high school campuses across the state.”

By creating stronger support systems for students, Graham and Caroline hope they can save or improve the lives of brave, compassionate kids like their son. Every talk they give or wellness center they open is a testament to Colin’s memory, and the Wisemans are tremendously proud of the children they raised.

“He had the ability, even as a young boy, to stand his ground, stand up for what is right ... people had to earn his respect,” reflected Graham. “He was known as the best hugger – if anyone needed a Colin hug, they knew where to get it.”

Fueled by the boundless love of a devoted parent, Graham Wiseman is determined to help students see a light at the end of their darkest tunnels. Colin may no longer be with us, but his spirit lives on in his parents’ unflagging commitment to mental health advocacy and education.

“Kids that have had suicidal ideation can’t see it from where they are, but it will get better,” said Graham. “I want kids to know that it may not totally go away, but it does get better – with medication, counseling and time, you learn how to deal with it.”



Be sure to connect with Jamie Cronk at jamie.cronk@n2pub.com or Ashley at ashley@ashleybattersby.com with any content ideas or to brainstorm future features in the Learning & Education section.

To learn more about the wellness centers and Caroline and Graham Wiseman’s work, check out beingwell.ca.org. Graham is always looking for support and sponsorship.



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