



## North Alabama Mental Health Coalition September 10, 2024

### **Attendees (in person):**

Daniel Adamek (Little Orange Fish)	Amber Anderson (Children's Rehab Service)	Sarah Bailey (UAH RAN)
Holly Baker (NACH)	Kim Bigelow (Warrior Wellness Program)	Annie Brasseale (VOP)
Melissa Caldwell (Wellstone)	Rudolfo Chavez (SVDP)	Melissa de la Cerda (Wellstone)
Woodie Deleuil (NAMI)	Richard Ennis (Madison Fire)	Nicole Goggans (SAM Foundation)
Dawn Hannon (Wellstone)	Lakebra Harper (Alliance Health)	Traci Harris (Elm Foundation)
Zack Harris (Holder Construction)	Jeff Hastings (Ross)	Jessica Hays (Huntsville Hospital)
Kim Holder (Not One More Alabama)	Debbie Igou (SOS)	Faith Jackson (Thrive AL)
Kimberly Lamar (Drug Free Partnership)	Kati Lang (Amedisys Home Health)	Heather McCaulley (VA)
Laurin Mitchell (Wellstone)	Tealacy Mitchell (Thrive Alabama)	Krista Moulton (Therapist / NAMI)
Letricia Ogutu (Wellstone)	Taralyn Rowell (Wellstone)	Abby Sanders (CRS)
Julie Schenck-Brown (Huntsville Police)	Julie Smith (SAM Foundation)	Chief Dustin Spires (Madison Fire)
Mack Yates (SVDP/VOP)	Lorenzo Young (ROSS Recovery)	Kera Duty (VA Intern)

### **Welcome and Introductions**

Introductions are important because you need to find out who to help you

### **Suicide Prevention and Awareness– SAM Foundation, Nicole Goggans**

Julie Smith gave a presentation about SAM Foundation, named after her brother who died in 2002 by suicide. The family learned from his suicide that no one is responsible for anyone else's suicide; however, they realized they should have responded immediately. They did research to try find out how to prevent suicides. SAM Foundation has been around 8 years and there are only 4 team members. They realized that they can make a difference through education. Suicide is the most preventable kind of death, so they teach communities how to intervene. You can't save everyone...you will still lose some (1 out of 10), but there are 9 that you can save.

Their mission is preventing suicide through public awareness and education. They want to be a resource for those who have been affected by suicide. They keep in contact with survivors after a suicide. Suicide is the 11<sup>th</sup> leading cause of death, overall. In 2023, there were over 50,000 deaths by suicide. Someone dies from suicide every 11 minutes, which works out to 135 deaths per day.

The effects on the community of suicide are devastating - not just losing one person, but affecting the whole community.

They have three programs: Educate, Elevate and Support. Their biggest impact is the education programs. Julie does a basic training course offered for free to organizations called QPR (Question, Persuade, Refer). The training is only 2 hours long and is great for every segment of the population and you can get a CE Unit as well. They have trained over 7500 individuals. She gave an example of a rural school system where the counselors were trained in QPR and as a result, 18 lives were saved. We all have a super power – Caring. You never know what can save someone's life.

They have an 8-hour training program (over 3 days) for first responders.

Only 50% of mental health professionals will accept a suicidal patient; they are not equipped to handle them.

The Elevate program is like the talk she is doing today; speaking engagements informing the community about suicide prevention. They have Survivor Walks - 2 walks in Alabama this month (one in Ft. Payne and one in Graysville). The walks help community members to get together and support each other. They have a walk tool kit that they will provide if someone wants to put on a walk. She feels like the community needs this to increase awareness for the problem of suicide.

They will also come to resource fairs.

The Support program partners with others in the community. Debbie Igou hosts a support group in Huntsville that meets monthly. If you have lost someone to suicide, you are 2 times as likely to commit suicide yourself. A child who loses a parent to suicide is four times as likely to commit suicide themselves. The walks and support groups help the survivors to stay healthy. There is a huge impact with these support systems.

Let her know if you have any corporate sponsor connections. This is a way to show that the corporation is helping the community. They are a small non-profit and always need support.

She gave an example of Kevin Hines who jumped off the Golden Gate Bridge and survived. The minute he left the rail he had instant regret. Most people that attempt suicide don't want to die; they just want pain to go away. He has a lifelong mental illness. Treatment is not easy, but he has learned to ask for help. Suicide is the second leading cause of death in teenagers and the number is growing, but middle age men are still the highest risk.

She encourages people to sign up for their newsletter ([www.samfound.org](http://www.samfound.org)). They have a scholarship program called Solid Ground Counseling where they help pay for counseling for a suicidal individual.

They are doing a SAFE Talk in October (9<sup>th</sup>) at the Wellstone Community Room. They received a grant to do this training. The talk includes 3 to 4 hours of training and you get CE units and it is free. It is more advanced than QPR.

There is a Taylor Hicks concert (SAM fest) on Oct. 12 at Valley Head. "Like" and "Share" on social media will help spread the word about their organization.

She had bracelets available with #I know someone.

Debbie mentioned that she had QPR training and it has helped. It is a myth that those who talk about suicide, don't do it. An important verbal clue is when a person says "the world would be better off without me".

They are looking for partners to do another grant – SOS (Signs of Suicide) for the schools. They will do the work but they need the grant to do it.

The medical workforce is at greater risk than the general population and needs this training as well. They want to protect the providers as well as the suicidal person.

### **Suicide and Our Veterans – US Dept. of Veterans Affairs, Heather McCaulley, LGSW, ACSW, MHICM**

Heather mentioned that lots of veterans have committed suicide and it has had an effect on her. She is a social work case manager with veterans. She does the MHICMP (Mental Health Intensive Care Management Program). They encounter suicidal veterans on their home visits. It is a crisis situation and they have to work with the veterans to keep them alive. It is a constant battle. She had lots of information on the table at the meeting.

Heather has been working at the VA for 17 years and she is seeing a lot of younger vets with problems. You have to meet them where they are and then try to get them whatever they need to stay safe. If you know any veteran, send them to the VA Clinic on 500 Market View across from the CCI.

People have misconceptions about the VA, but they have changed and learned from the veterans that they serve.

Someone asked about the opioid money that was supposed to be distributed to veterans with opioid addiction. Heather did not have updates on the money; however, she said that veterans with opioid addiction can obtain treatment for free, but it is located in Tuscaloosa. Veterans can get Narcan at the Huntsville clinic for free. The staff will explain what options are available to the veterans. When Bradford in Huntsville has a bed, they may be able to go there; otherwise, addiction treatment is available in Tuscaloosa.

Someone asked about the process for a veteran to get help if they are in crisis and where do you call.

988 is the national number for suicide (Push 1 if you are a veteran). If a veteran has any crisis, they can come into the VA. They don't turn anyone who is suicidal away. They can also come into the walk-in crisis clinic and they have a suicide prevention team there. If you can't come in, call the clinic.

It was mentioned that we can be good in a crisis moment, but the follow-up care is very important. If person is involved with the suicide prevention team, they are in constant contact. The VA will try to connect them to a therapist or the resources that they are willing to work with. Community Care is a program where the VA pays for a therapist outside of the VA. There are a lot of veterans in Huntsville; over 14,000. They need more workers.

The Vet Center is a counseling center and the VA Clinic has prescribers (psychiatrists, social workers, psychologists).

The Vet Center deals with combat veterans or MST (Military Sexual Trauma) and their families. You can apply at the Vet Center or online and they stay open later (until 7 pm).

If a crisis occurs after hours or on the weekend, you call 988 or 911. 988 will notify the local crisis team. 988 also has an online chat if they don't want to call.

The Compact Act allows veterans to get help outside the VA, but the veterans must go through the VA first.

She encouraged all veterans to get registered with the VA even if it is just for wellness checks because when a crisis occurs, you are already in the system. Suicide overrides anything, even red tape.

*Next Meeting*  
*Tuesday October 10, 2024*  
*11:00 am at Wellstone*