

World Suicide Prevention Day 2020

Joshua Bell: Get Loud and End the Stigma

Depression, excessive anxiety, isolation, or a traumatic past are just some of the factors that may lead to a suicide attempt. Although the reasons for a suicide or suicide attempt are more complex, being a combination of biological, environmental, social, and cultural factors, the majority of people who attempt suicide will often do so not because they wish to die but because they feel trapped and like it is the only way out to solve the pain that they are feeling.

In last years WSPD statement I started off with a quote. “Listen, don’t do anything like that! You have a life to live and live it out to the fullest. Create new beginnings, fill yourself with happiness. It may sound hard to do, but surround yourself with good people. Do this and you may be rewarded in the long run”. Words that were said to me in June of 2019 by a friend and words that along with many others still stick with me today. Even though there have been up and downs again since then, for me being able to remember that there are other options other than attempting suicide again is a way for me to vent what I am feeling at times. Like last year as well, this September 10th and this WSPD’s theme is working together to prevent suicide. Not just the action of suicide and raising awareness about the act of suicide and that happens after, but also advocating about the things that could lead up to an attempt or death from suicide. From talking about poor mental health to a traumatic experience and even other mental health issues, being able to open up to others about it will help to calm us and make us see that we are not the only ones who may have experienced something like this.

Each year in Canada alone, about 4 000 people die from suicide and of these 400 people about 500 of them are youth. An additional 350 000 people deliberately harm themselves every year with intention to commit suicide or self-harm. Globally, about 800 000 people die from suicide and another 160 million people attempt. These numbers are not just frightening, but are also a reflection of what can happen if someone feels like there is no way out and that they have been trapped for too long. Poor mental health, a mental health disorder, and other factors such as depression can all lead to a possible suicide attempt, but all of these attempts are able to be prevented with the correct work. In June of 2019 when I attempted suicide, although there were many reasons as to why I attempted such as feelings of isolation, not being good enough, as well as past experiences, it was also the thought like many others around the world who are worried about what will happen if they decide to say something to someone and bring up the topic of their mental health. The stigma associated with poor mental health and suicide has a tremendous impact on not only where a person will seek help, but also if that person will seek help. As of 2019 it is estimated that about 450 million people worldwide suffer from poor mental health or a mental health disorder and of these people, only 1 in 5 will be able to receive the treatment that they need for various reasons.

Over the last 6 year with everything that I have been through, I have come to see a little more what it means to be mentally strong. In your lifetime, no matter who you are, or what you do, there will be people that fight back, push back, say some things to you, and maybe even do things to you to hurt you or to harm what it is that you are doing and your goals. If this happens

on a constant it could be not only mentally draining for you but could also start to affect your mental health in a negative way. Back in elementary school and even into the start of high school for me, I was not the one to put myself out there like I am now. For most of my elementary school I was the one who sat there and did what I was asked to do; and when it came to friends and talking to people, I tended to wait until they came to me instead of me going to them. This never happened though and when it did it did not last long. By grade five I had stopped talking to people entirely and the only interaction I would have with people would be when the teacher put us in groups to work; and when this did happen, I never knew what to really do because I had not been talking to people on a regular. Whether it be from something I did or they just did not want to talk to me because they thought I was weird and awkward, this lack of talking to people and being told stuff for so many years had a tremendous impact on my mental health. However, this time has also not only given me the chance to build myself up and teach myself many things some with the help of friends now, but it has also given me this opportunity now to raise a voice about how I was feeling and hope that it will bring others forward to do the same at some point in their lives reducing the stigma further.

Through this time of not talking to people I came to the conclusion that I was the problem. That there was something wrong with me that they did not like and that is why people were not talking. I got myself so deep into this state not only because of myself no talking to anyone, but also because of how I was treated and some of the things that were said to me. Over the years, the feelings I had started to set in. I never had that friend that I could go to and tell them anything or to talk about anything without them being bothered. These feelings built up over the years and I did not know what to do about it so I just left it and did not tell anyone. It got even worse, to the point where some nights I would be up all night just thinking about what had happened that day and what had been said to me. although now I am not up due to these reasons but other reasons such as anxiety and fear over things and overthinking, it is still something that I do today. Being told that you should just die. That you are unwanted and that no one liked you. That you would be hunted down and killed if you ever thought that you had to do anything for yourself because everything is handed to you on a silver platter. That no one would notice if you just disappeared and killed yourself. It was hard to even think that with some of the things that I had been told that people cared and that they would listen to what I had to say. With me starting to talk to people again in high school, that feeling I had died down and had almost gone away. That was until between June 21st and June 25th of last year when every single day someone had to talk me out of becoming heard “on the news for the wrong reason”. It had all built up again and this time to the point where I was ready to just give up and give in and would have done so if that person did not do what they did.

When I hear people talk about what someone in a depressive, isolated and even suicidal state looks like the most common thing in the last year is that they lock themselves away and do nothing all day long. Although the person may draw back from doing things like I did, it does not mean that the person will completely stop doing what it is that they are involved in. Until last year on WSPD or now, you probably would not have thought that this was what I did last year. Although I did start to withdraw myself from doing certain things, and did start to spend more time by myself, I do enjoy doing things and working by myself. I am part of many thing and am

very active in them all. This modern-day conception that people that feel like this just hide away is very wrong. They go about their day just like everyone else without not being noticed or having others know that they feel like this. Tucked away under the smile that I still wear sometimes, so that no one else would know about it, was this feeling that I had and feelings that still have sometimes.

Suicide and all of the things that cause it are deadly and most often silent. Although many people may feel this way or have thoughts like this, they will not say something about it to anyone. I did not want anyone to know how I was feeling or what the thoughts were that were going through my head and at times still do not. Just like the almost 300 million other people world wide who are feeling like this right now, I was scared to say something about it to someone and my reasoning for it, very common as well: I did not think that anyone would care. That no one would listen and if they were going to listen that they were really not wanting to. The thought that no one else could relate to it. All of this and I was fearful of what others will do when they found out. What they would do, say and act like afterwards. At times when I do get down in this state again, these thoughts still run through my head. Thoughts of maybe I should have never said anything last year about my attempt. Thoughts that people think I am crying wolf as it is called for feeling this way. However, now after I brought it to light and have had the last year to get involved with the mental health of youth across the city and listen to people, I know that I am not the only one who has felt like this before. Now I see, just like I hope many other people will after hearing this, that there are many people who care. There are many people that you and I can talk to and that will listen to what we have to say. Sadly, for me, this only came to mind after my attempt last year, and multiple thoughts of trying again later.

One thought for me that still comes to mind just like I am sure for many people that attempt suicide is what would have happened if I did commit suicide. This is a thought that comes to my mind now and has many times for the last year. What people would have felt and how all of the people that I talk to or have talked to in the past would be affected. How everything that I am involved in would have changed. How would my family have reacted if I did it? How would my friends and people that I am close to have reacted? How would the person that talked me out of it last year feel after I did it knowing that he tried his best and yet was not able to succeed? How would life go on and how would people move on with their lives? I often think about my impact on people and how it would have stopped and how people would go on living their lives if I was not here. How much would everyone's daily routines and lives change? These are the thoughts of fear for what I could have put others through if I did it. Thoughts of wondering how the world would have changed and thoughts of wondering what would have happened if I did it at another time. In the time from my attempt to now I have come to see more than before that life is a precious gift. It is a gift that is so precious and so unlike any other that we need to live it to the fullest making no regrets along the way. It is a gift that can only be granted to us by someone from above. And, although at times he can test us and see where we will fall, he shows us the right way back. For me, through some faith and friends and dedication to something that needs more attention, he was able to guide me away, and still does, from doing such an act.

Suicide or the thought of it is something that can be brought on from a number of things as I have already mentioned; depression, social life, past trauma and so on. It is not something that is easy to talk someone out of once they get their mind in it nor is it something that is understood fully by everyone in the moment or out. For many people once they decide that they are going to do it they do and they let nothing stop them. No matter what happens, it is difficult to talk someone out of it – and even more difficult to talk yourself out of it. Last year after my attempt I made a promise to someone and have had full intention on keeping with not only that promise but with countless others that were made at that time and since. Although I do admit I have had to remind myself every now and then about them to keep myself straight, I do try my best to keep them.

As we all know we are currently in the COVID-19 pandemic and we can all expect to maybe feel a little bit lonelier and more isolated as we maintain distance from each other to help stop the spread of the virus. These feelings are normal and everyone at one point or another during this pandemic has felt them in one way or another. According to the World Health Organization, it is also possible that rates of suicide and rates of attempted suicides may go up as well during the pandemic as many people feel isolated from their loved ones and friends. People with any kind of mental illness or past history of poor mental health are the most at risk. Not only during this pandemic do we need to check in on our loved ones and friends and see how they are all really doing, talk about the things that matter most, and have good times with them and make memories, but it is even more important now than ever to reach out and show someone that you care about what is going on by asking how their day is going or how they are doing. For some people right now, this could be a turning point for them and you may leave a smile for many by doing so.

On this World Suicide Prevention Day, we follow that theme of working together to prevent suicide. Now, this does not mean just the action of suicide but it also means working together to help breakdown the stigma around it and all of the things that cause it. We need to bring light to the whole issue and not just to the end and what happens if nothing is done. We come together not only today but everyday, to lend a hand to that person that needs it most. To show them that they matter and that we care about them. To show them that we are here to help. We also thank the ones who have helped us throughout our struggles and have been there for us in our time of need. For me again this year it means thanking the person who was there last year for me and listened to me talk about what I had to. Through someone's actions, we are sometimes showed that there is more to life than what is happening now or what has happened in the past. We each have a life to live and yes, although we do go through things, we can overcome them. If we look beyond where we are now, or where we have been, and we start looking at all of the things that are to come in the future, it can change our perspective. We are here for a reason and that reason is to make a difference in other people's lives. If you have ever felt like this, it is ok to feel this way. There is nothing wrong with speaking up. There are people that can help you and no matter what you need to talk about, or for how long, someone will listen to you and will care about it too.

On this World Suicide Prevention Day, I once again renew my call that it is important to know that when someone says that they are going to kill or injure themselves that it should be taken seriously. Even though it may seem like a joke and you are not being serious, it brings up a serious matter and many red flags as to how someone may be feeling. It was because of this ‘joke’ that not many people took note of how I was really feeling. This ‘joke’ needs to stop now.

In Canada in 2016, a total of 4 526 people died from suicide – a number that rose by about 15% when compared to 2012. With suicide representing 25% of all deaths in youth across Canada, there was no doubt in my mind that after my experience, and after listening to others, that something had to be done now before it was too late. I am taking a stand. Starting a movement with the younger generation and all to bring light to the issues that need it the most. the issues that affect us every day. I do this starting with me. I am a suicide attempt survivor. I am someone who get so worried and worked up at times, that I can not think and go about daily activities or even sleep at night sometimes. I am someone who worries so much about what others thing about me and if I am good enough for them and myself. It was because of this, and seeing so many other people struggle with their own mental health that in April of this year I started the YMHM Canada (www.yhmharmch.com). A community association with the main goal of breaking down the stigma around youth mental health and pushing government bodies to do more in their support for the access to mental health resources for everyone. I encourage you all to get involved and hope to see you all in May of 2022 at Hamilton’s first Annual March for Youth Mental Health.

As I end, I leave you to think about what it is that you, personally and as a collective group, can do to help others who may be in need of help at any point in their lives. I also hope to have continued to motivated others who have felt like this or have had thought like this to come forward and say something about it. Although todays focus is on suicide and not mental health, they are both very closely connected. It is important to know that no matter what happens that it gets better and that people are here to listen to you. As I was told during my attempt, you need to “think of everyone who will be affected” by that decision that you want to make and with 7 to 10 people immediately affected, you would be missed. Even though things seem like they are not going to get better if you feel like this, they do. And you need to wait and see.

Without looking after the youth and their mental health today, think of the implications that it will have on us tomorrow. I leave you with a quote today: “Learn to enjoy every minuet of your life. Be happy now and don’t wait for something outside of yourself to make you happy. Think about how precious the time is that you have and how you want to spend that time – with friends, family, and people that you care about. Your life is precious and you need to see that”.

Together we are going to get loud about what really matters most. Thank you.