



## DELAWARE COUNTY SUICIDE PREVENTION & AWARENESS TASK FORCE

~NEWSLETTER~

ISSUE # 1 / FALL 2008

### SAVE THE DATE!!

OUR FALL CONFERENCE IS COMING!  
NOVEMBER 18<sup>TH</sup> AT DREXELBROOK  
FIND MORE INFO ON OUR WEBSITE

To submit future articles to our  
newsletter, please email drafts to  
Terri Erbacher at [terbacher@dciu.org](mailto:terbacher@dciu.org).

**\*\*Suicide rates are on the rise in Delaware County. In a typical year, we lose 60-65 community members to suicide. In 2007, we saw a shocking rise to 92 suicides....**

**Let's Talk About It!!**

Who we are: The Delaware County Suicide Prevention and Awareness Task Force (DCSPATF) was begun in 2002 by volunteers who care and who want to increase suicide awareness, decrease stigma and decrease suicide risk in the community. Our mission is to promote understanding that suicide is a preventable community-health problem in our county and to work together toward viable solutions.

Our Newsletter: This is our FIRST newsletter and we hope it is a success! We are going 'green' and sending this out electronically to save paper! Please forward to anyone who may be interested in reading this so that we can all work together to BUILD suicide AWARENESS, DECREASE STIGMA, and PREVENT future SUICIDES!



### ~The Loss of a Beloved Leader~

**Mary Ellen Carpenter, MOM** passed away on July 26, 2008. Becoming active in suicide efforts the year after the suicide of her son, Mary Ellen began a chapter of Survivors of Suicide (SOS), Inc. in Delaware County. She had been an active Board Member of SOS since 1988 and President since 1996. Mary Ellen's devotion also led her to serve on the Board of the Greater Philadelphia Chapter of the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention (AFSP) from its inception in 1996 through 2003 and to play an instrumental role in the planning of the biannual Surviving Suicide Conferences held in May and November. Mary Ellen has proudly raised six children and she most recently was awarded the prestigious **Sandy Martin Grassroots Award presented by SPAN USA**. This award is "Given each year to 'unsung heroes' working at the local or state level who clearly exemplify sustained commitment to the mission of suicide prevention." She certainly deserved it.

***Mary Ellen was an inspiration who gave so much of herself and will be missed by many.***

*(Above photo from the 2008 walk/run: Mary Ellen is pictured second from the right.)*

# In the News...

## ~Congress passes Mental Health Parity~

On Sept. 23, 2008, both the U.S. House of Representatives and Senate passed bills that will require private insurers to cover treatment for mental illness on the same terms and conditions as all other illnesses. "This groundbreaking legislation will remove an important barrier for those who suffer from mental illness and need treatment," AFSP Executive Director Robert Gebbia said. "Untreated psychiatric disorders are the leading cause of suicide, so this bill is crucial to suicide prevention." [www.spanusa.org](http://www.spanusa.org).

## ~Pennsylvania State Youth Suicide Prevention Initiative~

by Terri Erbacher

\*\*The Pennsylvania Youth Suicide Prevention Initiative has launched a new website. The mission of this initiative is a multi-system collaboration to reduce youth suicide. In this mission, the PAYSPI website links to all counties in the state that have a Suicide Prevention Task Force focusing on youth. At recent meetings of the PAYSPI Monitoring Committee, the Delaware County Task Force was given 'kudos' for all we do in our county and we are only ONE OF TWO websites in the entire state that have a youth focus and are linked to this site (along with Bucks)! Check out the PAYSPI website to read about the 1.5 million dollar grant they just received and see all they are doing across the state: <http://www.payspi.org>.

## ~State Suicide Prevention Task Force Visits Delco~

by Tony Salvatore

On October 1, 2008, the Pennsylvania Adult/Older Adult Suicide Prevention Task Force visited our county to learn about the wide range of suicide prevention and postvention activities underway here. The state body was formed in 2006 to address suicide among adults and elders, who, as is the case in Delco, account for the greatest number of suicide victims across the Commonwealth. I am a member of the state group and assisted Tom McGuirk of Main Line Health Systems, and a DCSPATF member, in informing the visitors to our history, structure, accomplishments, and awareness events such as the annual conference, walk-run, and the candle lighting memorial. Much attention was given to our county suicide prevention plan set for release in November. Helping counties develop comparable plans is a state task force objective and our plan will likely be used as a model elsewhere. For more information about state level suicide prevention in PA, go to [http://www.parecovery.org/services\\_suicide\\_prevention.shtml](http://www.parecovery.org/services_suicide_prevention.shtml).

## ~2<sup>nd</sup> Annual PA Suicide Prevention Conference~

September 9-10, 2008 - In observance of *National Suicide Prevention Week*, more than 400 people attended the 2nd Annual PA Suicide Prevention Conference, twice as many as the 2007 conference. The theme of the conference was "Outreach to Diverse Populations: Finding What Works," and keynote presentations were given by Dr. Holland Barnes, president of the [National Organization for People of Color Against Suicide](http://www.nacsuicide.org), and Dr. Weber, of [Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration](http://www.samhsa.gov) (SAMHSA). For more information and *downloads of available presentations*, visit [www.payspi.org](http://www.payspi.org).

## **\*CHECK OUT OUR WEBSITE FOR FACT SHEETS ON:**

[Firearms and Suicide](#)

[Suicide among Older Adults](#)

[Teen Suicide](#)

[Suicide and Serious Mental Illness](#)

[Alcohol and Suicide](#)

[Suicide among Adults in Pennsylvania](#)

# Recent Events

## ~THE CANDLELIGHT~

BY LINDA FALASCO

On **September 10, 2008** over 250 people joined together at Rose Tree Park for the 7th annual Candlelight Memorial for those who lost their lives to suicide. This is held in conjunction with National Suicide Awareness Day as well as Suicide Awareness Week in Delaware County. The night was filled with raw emotion as many shared their heartache and pain as well as their tribute to their loved ones and special music was played. The night was also dedicated to our beloved Mary Ellen Carpenter, who lost her battle to cancer this summer. She led many of us for the past 20 years in suicide postvention, prevention, and awareness and was greatly missed on this evening. In her honor, this year's Appreciation Award in Suicide Awareness was renamed *the "Mary Ellen Carpenter Appreciation Award"* and was given to Susan Kelleher for her amazing work in the field of suicide awareness, prevention, and postvention.

## ~ TRAINING FOR CLERGY AND PASTORAL COUNSELORS ~

BY TONY SALVATORE

On **August 21, 2008**, the Task Force and Survivors of Suicide (SOS) presented a workshop for the faith-based community entitled "Suicide & Suicide Loss: What the Faith Community Should Know" at Mercy Fitzgerald Hospital, which sponsored the event. Terri Erbacher of the Delaware County Intermediate Unit and Tony Salvatore of Montgomery County Emergency Services were the speakers. The workshop discussed the nature of suicide, how the sudden, unanticipated, and often violent aspects of a suicide traumatize those who experience such a loss, and practical guidelines for giving help and support in the immediate aftermath of a suicide. The session was well-received and attended by 30 clergypersons and several other representatives of local mental health providers. Copies of SOS's booklet ***What Clergy Need to Know About Suicide Loss*** were given to all attendees. The booklet is available at <http://phillysos.tripod.com>.

## ~THE WALK/RUN~

On **May 3, 2008**, over 180 people attended the 3rd Annual 5k Run/Walk, joining the DCSPATF to help raise community awareness about suicide prevention. This year's event, held at Ridley Creek State Park, featured a timekeeper for runners who wanted to pick up the pace, competing to win the race or striving to run their personal best. For those who preferred a slightly slower pace, the walk provided the opportunity for pleasant conversation and a chance to admire the scenery. Youth from Delaware County, PA were invited to enter their original designs in the DCSPATF 2008 Poster Contest. Among the great artwork submitted, **Shaelyn Small was awarded 1st Place**, her artwork appearing on the T-shirts given to all walk/run participants. The Poster Contest provided a way to involve area youth in the effort to raise community awareness of suicide. The Task Force thanks all participants for the outstanding designs submitted and their personal efforts to help raise awareness for the prevention of suicide. The winning design is presented below.



Keep your eye out for this year's theme and poster contest! Get your students involved so they can 'make a difference!'

# Upcoming Local Events

~ Let us know of your upcoming events - email them to [terbacher@dciu.org](mailto:terbacher@dciu.org) ~

**October 29<sup>th</sup>-November 2<sup>nd</sup>** - NAMI PA Conference, Harrisburg, PA. "Today's Family and the Faces of Mental Illness: A Life's Journey" and a Criminal Justice Symposium on Veterans with Mental Illness and the Criminal Justice System. Visit [www.namipa.org](http://www.namipa.org).

**November 4<sup>th</sup>** - 2<sup>nd</sup> Annual School Counselor In-Service Day Sponsored by Widener University with speakers from the Temple Anxiety Clinic and Feeling Blue Suicide Prevention Council - <http://dcsca.org>.

**November 18<sup>th</sup>** - 5<sup>th</sup> annual regional suicide prevention conference (8AM-4PM) at Drexelbrook Banquet Facility, Drexel Hill, PA. **Topics:** The rise of suicides in Delco, ethics, our **NEW** county-wide plan, and how you can help! For more info and to download a registration form, visit [www.delcosuicideprevention.org](http://www.delcosuicideprevention.org).

**November 22<sup>nd</sup>** - 10<sup>th</sup> Annual *Suicide Survivor's Day!* Sponsored by the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention (AFSP). Over 130 Conference Sites Worldwide and webcast available on the AFSP website with online chat to follow. Visit [www.afsp.org](http://www.afsp.org).

**December 10<sup>th</sup>** - *Next DCSPATF Steering Committee Meeting* from 9-11AM at Mirmong (100 Yearsley Mill Road, Lima, PA). **New members welcome!!** Visit [www.delcosuicideprevention.org](http://www.delcosuicideprevention.org) for more information.

## Today's Topic

~How to deal with suicide loss over the holidays~

The holidays will be here before we know it...Do what you think will be comfortable for you.

Remember, there is no **RIGHT** way to grieve. (summarized from [www.afsp.org](http://www.afsp.org))

- Think about your family's holiday traditions. Consider whether you want to continue them or create new ones.
- Remember that family members may feel differently about continuing to do things the way they've been done in the past. Try to talk openly with each other about your expectations.
- Consider whether you want to be with your family and friends for the holiday, or whether it would be more healing for you to be by yourself or go away (this year).
- Keep in mind that sometimes the anticipation of an event can be more difficult than the event itself.
- If you find it comforting to talk about your loved one, let your family and friends know that; tell them not to be afraid to mention your loved one's name.
- *Light a candle in memory of your loved one. Leave it burning (you can put it off to one side) for the duration of the holiday meal or event. The glowing flame acts as a quiet reminder of your loved one who is missing.*
- Above all, bear in mind that there is no "right" way to handle holidays, anniversaries, or birthdays. You and your family may decide to try several different approaches before finding one that feels best for you.

For more information or to get involved, visit

[www.delcosuicideprevention.org](http://www.delcosuicideprevention.org)

Mailing Address: DCSPATF, Box 175, 4 State Road,  
Media, PA 19063-1413

*Delaware County Intermediate Unit*