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In Niagara County, 'There is Help. There is Hope. Recovery is Possible.'

September is recognized across the country as "Suicide Prevention Month." Throughout this month, mental health advocates, prevention organizations, survivors, allies, and community members have been undertaking numerous activities to increase suicide prevention awareness. As the National Alliance of Mental Illness states so well, we can all benefit from honest conversations about mental health conditions and suicide, because just one conversation can change a life.

The data show, not surprisingly, an incredibly strong link between mental health and suicide. Not only did 46% of people who died by suicide have a diagnosed mental

NIAGARA COUNTY LEGISLATURE



Becky Wydysz
Chairwoman

health condition, but research suggests that 90% may have experience symptoms of mental illness. Considering that people have been experiencing converging issues that have taxed our mental health in recent years – pandemic, economic uncertainty, opioid crisis, to name a few – one can see why the national suicide rate has been increasing in recent years. Indeed, from 2011-22, the suicide rate increased by 16%. Suicide is the 10th-leading cause of death among adults in the U.S. and the second-leading cause of death among people aged 10-24.

But there are steps we can take to be part of the solution. As the slogan for our own Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Awareness states, "There is Help. There is Hope. Recovery is Possible." Indeed, intervention with those who are having suicidal thoughts is absolutely paramount. Research shows people who are having thoughts of

suicide feel relief when someone asks after them in a caring way. Findings also suggest acknowledging and talking about suicide may reduce rather than increase suicidal ideation.

Indeed, the organization 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline (more on 988 below) created the hashtag #Bethe1To to spread the word about actions we can all take to help prevent suicide. They suggest we all need to be the one to: ask; be there; keep them safe; help stay connected; and follow up with any of our friends and family who we recognize may be struggling. It is particularly important that we follow up and maintain ongoing contact with those who have been discharged from hospitals and care services.

Of course, we are not asking nor expecting anyone to take on a role of mental health crisis adviser. Indeed, if you are trying to help someone, the best thing to do is to encourage

them to take advantage of the resources we currently have available. Niagara County operates a 24-hour crisis services hotline that can be reached at 716-285-3515. In addition, last year the county affiliated with the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline and the national 9-8-8 initiative. The 988 Lifeline is a national network of local crisis centers that provides free and confidential emotional support to people in suicidal crisis or emotional distress 24 hours a day, seven days a week anywhere in the U.S. Anyone who calls 9-8-8 from Niagara County is connected to Niagara County Crisis Services.

Just remember: Anyone could be struggling mentally and harboring thoughts of suicide. Everyone's story and situation is different and unique. Let's use Suicide Prevention Month as the catalyst to make sure everything really is OK with those we love who may be facing some challenges.

Putting scammers out of business

BY SHERIFF MICHAEL J. FILICETTI
Niagara County Sheriff's Office

There is a group of people out there that work tirelessly to make money – they are scammers. They never seem to rest, take a day off or slow down in their persistence to take your hard-earned dollars. On a regular basis, they come up with new ways to trick you in an attempt to illegally defraud you.

The best remedies to fight this activity are frequent education, prompt reporting and extra diligence by you.

Our office has been speaking to groups across Niagara County about current scams and how to protect yourself against these unsavory scammers. Our social media platforms have also been helpful in providing the latest information on what is trending in the world of scams.

Many of our community engagements are geared toward our senior

population. Scams are targeted at our older generation more than any other group. Scammers usually make their attempts by telephone and sometimes by email. My first piece of advice is to not answer your phone if you do not recognize the number. If it is someone you know, they will most likely leave a message, and you can call them back.

If you do answer and it's a scammer, this can be a critical moment for you. These individuals can be very convincing, when they are spinning their latest tale they want you to buy into. Scams range from a grandchild being in jail; the IRS or the Social Security Administration needing your personal information; a bank looking to confirm your information; a lottery that you may have won; romance scams; and many, many more. They are all of the same principle: If it sounds suspect, it probably is.

The scammer will pressure you to make a quick decision, and they

prey upon you doing exactly that. The best course of action, if you do answer the phone, is to slow things down and confirm, confirm, confirm. Hang up and call who you need to verify what you just heard. This may be a family member, your local bank, another involved organization, or law enforcement. Please take the time; this is an important step and may stop you from being scammed.

Unfortunately, once money, gift cards or other payments are given, it is very difficult to get them back.

I have to say that it breaks my heart every time I hear of another victim losing money they have saved their whole life. These are preventable with some education and a little detective work by you. If you do think you have been scammed or are about to be scammed, please contact your local law enforcement agency for assistance. Any agency will be able to assist you with your situation.

I often hear from residents, "I didn't want to bother you with this." Please understand that this is not a bother – and can often prevent a scam or future scams. We are here to help you. You can find additional information on scams at www.aarp.org, www.irs.gov, www.consumer.ftc.gov and www.fbi.gov. There are many other great resources available online to offer help regarding scams.

Please stay vigilant, don't offer information to strangers, and always be suspicious of things that just don't sound right. Remember, we are here to help you.

If you have a group that would like to request a presentation on scams, please contact our community services division at 716-438-3310. We will be happy to come out and speak with your organization.

Working together, we can put some of these scammers out of business.

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