

October Article – Elkhart County Suicide Prevention Coalition – Goshen News

How comfortable are you with the topic of suicide?? Last month on September 10th, many people around the world observed *World Wide Suicide Prevention Day*. Several members of the Elkhart County Suicide Prevention Coalition decided to bring recognition to this day by having their Annual Awareness Walk in Downtown Goshen during the First Fridays event. As I was one of the members walking that day, I approached passersby with free pencils and magnets from the Coalition listing information and emergency numbers, for individuals that may be suicidal. I was surprised by the different comments and expressions. As I encouraged people to take an item for themselves or someone they might know, some took them quietly and thoughtfully and read the material on the items. I couldn't help wonder if they had, at one point in time, felt suicidal or knew of a friend or loved one who had struggled with severe depression. Conversely, other individuals quickly rejected the free items and were noticeably uncomfortable with the topic. There were even some that took the items but then laughed as I walked by and said under their breath..."Well I am sure not suicidal". I wondered if they felt the need to say that because it was embarrassing and not socially acceptable to have suicidal thoughts. I was especially touched by one family with their children that chose to walk along side us and hand out our items. What a message they gave their children that day; not only was it okay to talk about suicide but it was important to reach out to others.

There is a reason we have a World Wide Suicide Prevention Day. According to the International Association for Suicide Prevention (IASP), every year, almost one million people die from suicide; a "global" mortality rate of 16 per 100,000, or one death every 40 seconds. An interesting fact is that even though suicide rates have been highest among the male elderly, rates among young people have been increasing to such an extent that they are now the group at highest risk in a third of countries, in both developed and developing countries. IASP pointed out that mental disorders (particularly depression and alcohol use disorders) are a major risk factor for suicide in Europe and North America; however, in Asian countries impulsiveness plays an important role.

We must all remember that suicide is complex with psychological, social, biological, cultural and environmental factors involved. If we hope to make a difference and decrease suicide rates, we must become comfortable talking about it and reaching out to others. If we all work together, we can make a difference.

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Elkhart County Suicide Prevention Coalition