November 2018 Newsletter

Busting Suicide Myths
By Alya Reeve, M.D., UCS Medical Director

Over 38,000 Americans die by suicide every year. Nearly 1 million individuals attempt suicide yearly. Millions more have thoughts of suicide. And, if we were to count the close family members and friends of all of those who have thought of, attempted, or completed suicide, it would equal the population.

And yet, because there are so many difficult feelings involved—often, anger, confusion, fear, isolation, and shame, among others—individuals and families are reluctant to share their experiences. For this reason, stigma and stereotypes about suicide persist. This article aims to bring issues of suicide to light and dispel some of common misconceptions.

*True or False: Suicide doesn’t affect people like me or people I know.*
False. Suicide does not discriminate. All classes, genders, ages, and racial groups are affected. No medical or intellectual condition predicts someone’s likelihood to attempt suicide.

Often, the person at risk of suicide is experiencing a seemingly insurmountable problem, such as losing financial security, important people, or a home. Life stresses are beyond the person’s coping abilities. Sometimes substance abuse or a history of depression are involved. In other cases, a person has a disconnection from other people or few positive social relationships. And in some cases, people attempt suicide because they feel they are falling short or that there is pressure to be a different version of themselves. In all cases, the factors that predict someone’s likelihood to attempt suicide are equal among all groups.

*True or False: If someone I knew was thinking about suicide, I would know.*
Both. The warning signs that someone will make a suicide attempt may be obvious, subtle, or hidden. Caring and compassionate attention to the person may yield a clue or clues that support and prevention are needed.

Attentive friends and family may notice an increase in a person’s use of alcohol or drugs, drastic changes in mood, worsening depression, or a sense of loneliness or hopelessness. A person may make statements about feeling hopeless, helpless, or worthless.

Sometimes the signs can be much more obvious. A person may appear preoccupied with
death, take unnecessary risks, or exhibit self-destructive behavior. They may even threaten to hurt or kill themselves. Too often, people dismiss talk of suicide as a joke. If you hear this, it should always be taken seriously. At its most overt, people may even openly seek or show means to kill themselves.

It’s worth noting here that a person can have a dark personality or enjoy spending time alone and not be at risk of suicide—their wellbeing is not dependent on others’ interpretations of what makes someone well.

**True or False: Talking about suicide with someone you feel is at risk makes their risk greater.**

False. Ignoring someone’s warning signs will not make the thoughts of suicide disappear, nor will talking with the person persuade them to act on those thoughts. Most often, it’s best to be open and genuine. Starting a conversation with an open question, like “Do you ever wonder why we are alive?” allows the person to understand that you, too, sometimes wonder why we are alive. This is an indirect way to invite them to open up about their thoughts and feelings.

**True or False: There’s nothing I can do to help someone who is at risk of suicide.**

False. Just talking about their feelings with a non-judgmental person could help someone to temporarily relieve the pressure to act on their thoughts of suicide. Having chronic, recurrent thoughts of suicide is something of a chronic condition. Just like other chronic conditions, such as diabetes and high blood pressure that have symptoms to be managed and recur, feeling suicidal and the impulse to act on those feelings wax and wane over time.

It’s best to connect the person with a professional source of help. If a person is in immediate danger, call 9-1-1 or take them to the nearest Emergency Department. Nationally, you can reach the Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1-800-273-8255 or via Twitter @800273TALK. These sources of help are available 24 hours every day. Locally, you can call United Counseling Service at 802-442-5491.

To live is a struggle, but it is a creative and beautiful struggle. When we pay careful attention to each other and use crucial moments to approach each other with a helping hand, we have the greatest likelihood of preventing suicide among the people we love.

_Dr. Alya Reeve has been the medical director at United Counseling Service (UCS) since 2015 and has been a member of the medical staff at Southwestern Vermont Medical Center (SVMC) since 2017. The two organizations plan to host a Suicide Prevention Walk in the spring of 2019. Please call 802-447-5019 to participate._

**IN THE NEWS:**

Thanks to all who participated in our Superhero 5K!

On Saturday, November 3, 2018 hundreds of superheroes took to the streets for the inaugural UCS Superhero 5K. The 3.1 mile route began and ended at the Bennington Recreation Center with runners able to run down a portion of Main Street that was closed to traffic. A
cheering crowd welcomed runners as they raced to the finish line. First Place went to Tracy Bushee of North Bennington, followed by Eric Despard and Alex Olson. Prizes were also given for the best Superhero costumes.

Thank you to all of our sponsors and volunteers who made this event possible and a special thank you to the Bennington Police Department who helped make this event safe and helped lead our Superhero Kids’ Dash.

“We were so excited for this event and were pleased with the amount of participation from the community,” said Lorna Mattern, Executive Director of United Counseling Service. "We are already looking forward to next year."

All proceeds from this event benefit the UCS Client Wellness Fund. Wellness activities can help individuals focus, overcome obstacles, get along with others and decrease symptoms of depression and anxiety. Wellness programs are broad and can include physical fitness, seminars, workshops, classes, field trips, artistic endeavors such as trips to museums and a wide array of activities that promote overall well-being for our clients.

For race results, photos and more UCS Superhero 5K news follow the UCS Superhero 5k Facebook page.

Opening your heart and your home
By Dawn Danner, Director of Developmental Services

The Shared Living Program, a part of the Developmental Services Division of United Counseling Service, allows people with a developmental disability to experience living in a home as part of a family. What began as a cost-cutting program about 30 years ago has now grown to where there are 59 people placed in the homes of 45 home providers. The program, which is utilized by people with varying levels of disability, allows people to be fully integrated into the community while enjoying the benefits of being part of a family. Providers do not just open their homes but create permanent and lasting relationships with
those with disabilities. Some of the people in the program have lived with the same families for as much as 25 years, and the number of people looking to be placed in a home continues to grow.

Shared Living home providers are dedicated people with a passion for helping others. Many have raised their own children and feel the need to fill the gaps that their grown children have left in their home. Although home providers are compensated, they state they do not do it for the money. Providers open their homes because they want to give back and help someone who needs a loving and supportive environment.

Home providers are approved by UCS following an application and interview process, as well as background checks and a home inspection. Providers receive tax-free compensation as well as room and board. They also receive training and support from UCS. In addition, home providers are given a respite budget so that they can take breaks and vacations from providing care.

United Counseling Service Disabilities Services Division is currently in desperate need of home providers. We will match an individual with an Intellectual Disability and/or Autism Spectrum Disorder who best fits in your home environment with you and your family. UCS is also in high need for respite providers to provide breaks for full-time caregivers. Becoming a respite provider allows you to create your own hours and many people use this as a second job.

If you are interested in becoming a home provider or a respite provider for someone with a disability, please contact Kimberly LaChant at 802-445-7318. Opening your heart and your home to someone in need is one of the kindest things you can do and we have many individuals who desperately need a loving, caring place to call home.

Dishing up meals in the wake of Michael
By Christie Wisniewski, Bennington Banner

For 14 days beginning Oct. 15, Hebert accompanied 12 emergency responders in the Northwest Massachusetts Incident Management Team (NWMIMT) to provide relief as part of a federal response to Bay County, Florida communities affected by Hurricane Michael.

Not only is Hebert a member of NWMIMT, he is also the director of facilities and safety for United Counseling Services (UCS) in Bennington—a company that completely supported Hebert's duty to respond. "They brought me on because I know about emergency management and emergency response," Hebert said.

From the day he began his position at UCS in July, Hebert says his supervisors were "totally on board" with his involvement in emergency management. Not long after he was hired, UCS decided that it would treat emergency response work like leave for active military duty and implement a company-wide policy to do so.
"When I'm called, I get to go," he said.

For up to two weeks at a time, Hebert can join the incident response team to give aid where it is needed.....Read more.

**Ashe, Sears thanked for increased funding for mental health worker pay**

*By Jim Therrien, Banner/VT Digger*

Vermont Senate President pro tem Tim Ashe and Sen. Dick Sears received a big "thank you" from United Counseling Service staff members for working to increase state funding for mental health workers. Ashe was in Bennington Tuesday on his second stop of a listening tour to gauge the legislative needs of mental health service providers around the state. He and Sears, a Bennington Democrat, met with about 30 UCS employees gathered at the organization's headquarters building. Executive Director Lorna Mattern and Julie Held, senior human resources specialist at UCS, said additional workforce investment funding to allow.....Read more.

**Sensory Room created to help those with complex and developmental trauma**

*By Andrea Mook and Sandy Matteson, Youth and Family Services*

We had the opportunity to apply for two grants over the past year, with our goal to build a sensory room for our clients. We received funding from both the Stewarts Holiday Match Grant and the Walmart Community Grant.

We used the funds received to purchase tools to build a sensory room at Youth and Family Services at our Burgess Road location, incorporating ideas inspired by SMART (Sensory Motor Arousal Regulation Therapy) by Elizabeth Warner, PsyD, JRI. UCS staff have been trained in this mental health treatment approach for complexly traumatized children, adolescents and families whose primary problem in functioning revolves around relationships, behavioral and emotional challenges.

The goal for our clients is to increase the ability to self-regulate, helping to facilitate trauma processing, and for caregivers to experience this healing with their child. The approach focuses on utilizing tools such as weighted blankets, sensory swing, balance beams, fitness balls and body socks that promote a variety of inputs for our clients’ bodies such as sense of touch, movement and balance.

The sensory room will be utilized for ongoing treatment sessions, as well as in the moment
grounding techniques for children feeling dysregulated. This will provide us with an alternative model for treatment that will support and create curiosity of the mind and body for those who have complex and developmental trauma.

Barn Sale Raises $53,000 for Northshire UCS

The Barn Sale—“The best tag sale in Vermont”—raised $53,000 in support of United Counseling Service (UCS). The Barn Sale is held annually in the fall with proceeds supporting the Northshire branch of United Counseling Service. A special thank you to Burgess Estate Sales who helped with locating and pricing many of the beautiful pieces of furniture that were available at the sale. This was the 3rd year that the sale has been held at the Northshire Civic Center – Riley Rink.

“We are so thankful for this group of community members that donate so much of their time to help raise funds for our organization,” said Lorna Mattern, Executive Director. “The overwhelming success of this year’s sale is a result of the hard work of the committee and the commitment they have to helping those who need it most.”

Proceeds from this event specifically help the UCS Northshire programs. The Northshire programs include substance abuse recovery, outpatient mental health counseling, youth & family services, and psychiatry, among others. United Counseling Service’s mission is to help people improve their quality of life through a comprehensive behavioral and developmental system of care including education, prevention, early intervention, support and treatment of children, adults, and families in our community.

Head Start Happenings

Students receive a visit from the dentist

Dr. Anita Masaitis and her staff provided dental screenings and fluoride application for 85 Head Start and Early Head Start children in our North Bennington and River Road classrooms. This service was provided at no charge. Head Start’s tooth tutor, Meg Outwater, also does oral health education in classrooms in the fall, and provides screenings and fluoride varnish applications twice a year through a generous grant from Northeast Delta Dental.
Head Start held annual fall soccer clinic

Bennington County’s Head Start held its annual soccer clinic for 3-5 year olds at the Bennington Recreation Center. The clinic took place on Wednesday afternoons and Sunday mornings throughout September, with active parent and community participation. All children participated free of charge and each player received a t-shirt and soccer ball.

MARK YOUR CALENDARS:
Youth Mental Health First Aid

November 26 and 27 from 9:00am to 1:00pm
United Counseling Service
100 Ledge Hill Drive, Bennington, VT

YMHFA introduces participants to unique risk factors and warning signs of mental health problems in adolescents, builds understanding of the importance of early intervention, and teaches individuals how to help an adolescent in crisis or experiencing a mental health challenge.

The course teaches participants the risk factors and warning signs of a variety of mental health challenges common among adolescents, including anxiety, depression, psychosis, eating disorders, AD/HD, disruptive behavior disorders, and substance use disorder. Participants do not learn to diagnose, nor how to provide any therapy or counseling – rather, participants learn to support a youth developing signs and symptoms of a mental illness or in an emotional crisis by applying a core five-step action plan.

There is no charge, however seating is limited.
To sign up contact Amie Niles at aniles@ucsvt.org or call 802.442.5491.

Youth Mental Health First Aid is funded by Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) Community First Grant.
Join us for a free documentary film screening with presentation on Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) to follow.

**UCS Presents: RESILIENCE**

*THE BIOLOGY OF STRESS & THE SCIENCE OF HOPE*

Tuesday, December 4, 2018 at 6:30pm to 8:30pm
Manchester Community Library
138 Cemetery Ave., Manchester Center, VT

This event is free and open to the public. For more information visit www.ucsvt.org or call Katie Aiken at (802) 442-5491 ext. 332.

....and save the date for:

[UCS Presents: Becoming Bulletproof](#)

February 6, 2019

For more information on our upcoming events visit [www.ucsvt.org](http://www.ucsvt.org).
Help us build a stronger community.

We would love to hear from you. Has UCS impacted your life? If you have a story you would like to share please contact Heidi French at hfrench@ucsvt.org.

UNITED COUNSELING SERVICE

SUPERHERO
RAFFLE BASKET

Win a super sweet getaway, enjoy a fantastic dinner and a basket of maple delights.

The drawing will take place on December 21st. For questions or to purchase more tickets, please contact Chris Sargood at 802.442.5491 or email csargood@ucsvt.org.

$5 a raffle ticket

Raffle Basket includes:
- 2 night stay at Hill Farm Inn in a luxury suite with breakfast - $600 value
- Dinner for 2 at The Publyk House - $75 value
- Vermont Maple Gift Basket from the Sugar Shack: Gormly's Buttermilk Pancake Mix, Butternut Mountain Farm Honey, Sugar Shack Maple Candy, Sidehill Farm Cinnamon Pear Fruit Jam, and Vermont Maple Syrup

Proceeds from the raffle basket benefit the UCS Client Wellness Fund.
This year support from our donors is absolutely vital in ensuring that we continue to meet the growing needs of our community. Please consider making a donation to our annual fund. Your donation makes a difference and with your help we can build a stronger community!

Donations can be made to:
United Counseling Service
PO Box 588
Bennington, VT 05201
or call us at (802) 442-5491 ext. 313

Donate Now

United Counseling Service provides Bennington County with nationally recognized community-based mental health and human social services for children, adults, families, and seniors with the mission of “Building a stronger community by empowering individuals and families to live healthy and meaningful lives.” Visit www.ucsvt.org to find out more.

Are you interested in a career with a great organization?
Check out current openings with United Counseling Service at UCS Careers.

Contact UCS

Visit our website