

Suicides on the Rise

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drastically exceed the number of homicides throughout the state, where 670 individual's deaths were a result of suicide, compared to the 91 lives taken from homicide last year.

These numbers don't even begin to include the number of loved ones impacted and the non-fatal attempts by residents, which came to 7,370 in Oregon in 2010, according to the state's non-violent death report.

"The big thing here is prevention," said Parker.

In the past year, Portland Fire and Rescue has responded to 55 calls of individuals attempting to kill themselves by jumping off Portland's bridges—a total that is up by 39

calls from the previous year.

"I think people need to know there is help out there," said Colin Mcgladrey, who has worked with Fire and Rescue for eight-years.

Nick Weichal, a fellow first responder, agreed.

Both men are part of the team at Fire Station 21 that responds to the calls when someone chooses to jump from a bridge in Portland. At Waterfront Park last Thursday, they both stood at the site where their team attempted to save the life of the women who drove her car into the river.

"It seems like it happens more and more often," said Weichal. "Not only does it have an impact on family members, but it does on first responders also because we have to deal with it in our own way."

He said, however, by opening Fire Station 21, first responders have been able to increase the number of rescues they have made on the Willamette river.

According to Leslie Storm, the director of the Oregon Partnership hotline, the organization received a high increase of calls to the help line last year. She said the increase in calls can be attributed to the number of individuals facing debt and economic hardship, which has exasperated the number of suicides throughout the country.

"They really feel like they've run out of options," she said.

Storm, along with fire and rescue crews, Portland Police officers, and residents who have been impacted by suicides within their personal lives, joined together to send the

message of hope and prevention at the waterfront site where the woman took her life.

Storm, who talks with individuals everyday about what to do when suicide comes into the picture, named off several warning signs to know when someone might be thinking of taking their own lives. "Please take them seriously," she urged the crowd. "Ask about it, listen and be patient."

Storm said there are two myths that surround an individual's attempts to call out for help that too often cause misconception. One myth, she said, is that people who talk about suicide won't go through with it. Another is that by talking with someone about suicide, it will give them the idea to kill themselves.

She said, however, these beliefs are simply not true. "The stigma,

shame, secrecy and myths surrounding suicide unfortunately keep people from getting the help they need," she said.

According to Oregon Partnership, the leading causes of suicide are untreated depression and other untreated mental health disorders. The calls to the Oregon Partnership's Suicide Lifeline went from nearly 11,000 in 2008 to over 19,000 in 2010 as the economic recession took hold.

Although there isn't one determining factor to why people feel compelled to take their own lives, Parker said there is a dire need to talk about the underlying mental health issues within the country. "By its very definition, they can't see other options," he said. "By talking about it, it is preventable."

For more information about services offered by Oregon Partnership, visit orpartnership.org or call 503-244-5211.

To reach the 24-hour suicide lifeline, call 800-273-TALK.



Khalil Edwards and his mother Antionette Edwards are featured in Basic Rights Oregon's education campaign featuring local African American families. The goal is to spread awareness on the struggles faced by people of color who are also lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender.

'Our Families'

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American, and Asian and Pacific Islander communities to create three videos that feature first-hand accounts for the campaign.

"The videos highlight that families come in all shapes, sizes, sexualities and identities," said Jeana Frazzini, executive director for the organization. "Our diversity makes for a strong and vibrant community."

The 'Our Families' project also includes a newspaper ad, which focuses on a statement of support signed by over 40 straight community leaders from various communities of color.

The statement expresses that LGBTQ families of color are part of the fabric of the community, and communities are strongest when all families have the resources, respect and love they need to thrive.

According to Emily S. Ryan, another member of the Our Families project, the campaign is a collaboration of perspectives with a single focus to highlight community member's shared experiences. "Not a lot of organizations are focusing on these intersecting identities," she said. "And most are not focusing on educating straight people of color communities."

She hopes the project will help people acknowledge and cherish the depth of an individual's identity, as well as the intensity of experiences layered in being an LGBTQ person of color when creating policies and services in the future.

"The education campaign of Our Families is sharing eye-opening stories that have the power behind them to foster lasting change in both the straight people of color community and white LGBTQ community," she said.

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