

GARRETT: 80 percent of people will be personally connected to someone who takes their own life

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to go," she said. "This is really a place of hope."

The Smiths approached the microphone together and looked out at the overflow crowd. The senator described the library's new home as fitting.

"So many young men and women who just like Garrett have a debilitating physical illness of the brain walk these halls," he said.

He praised the community for helping them bear the burden of losing their son and for keeping his memory alive.

"Garrett's life was brief, but beautiful," he said, "and it continues to have meaning for others."

Sharon Smith's voice held emotion as she talked about the road so many walk down. Statistically, she said, 80 percent of us will be personally connected to someone who takes their own life. Twenty percent of us will lose a family member. She acknowledged the stigma related to mental health problems and said she hoped talking about suicide would embolden those with clinical depression to reach out and get assistance.

"There's help out there. There's no reason to be hopeless," she said. "Tomorrow can be a better day."

BMCC Board Member Kim B. Puzey described clinical depression by quoting a psychologist, two writers and a president.

"Clinical depression is truly a brain storm. Kay Redfield Jamison called it the unquiet mind. William Styron called it darkness visible. In the days of Lincoln, it was simply called melancholy. Winston Churchill called it the black dog. Nell Casey called it the unholy ghost," Puzey said. "It is truly an affliction that comes upon many of us in the human family."

Garrett, said Sharon Smith, would have approved of the gathering.

"How happy he would be," she said. "He was one who reached out to others and always had a lot of love in his heart."

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SCHOOL: 631 students have an individualized education program

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away from the ESD won't totally upend Hermiston's current practices. The district has already been taking over special education services for the past few years, including a switch to hiring its own physical therapists and occupational therapists.

Now the district will recruit a new batch of staff, including speech pathologists and school psychologists.

Cindy Middleton, whose son Rian gets therapy for both learning and physical disabilities in the life skills program at Sandstone Middle School, said she's not sure how noticeable the change will be for parents.

"When you're working with a team of 10 people and sit down at a table you may not know who is an ESD employee and who works for Hermiston School District," she said of her experiences advocating for her son.

Middleton said her biggest worry about Hermiston hiring more of its own special education employees is that those positions can be difficult to keep filled, and dealing with substitutes and series of interim employees is especially hard for students like her son.

"Consistency is a big, big thing for them, and routine, and it's really a challenge if they have somebody different every time," she said.

So far, though, Middleton said Rian has had a "marvelous experience" in Hermiston School District. She said she has seen lots of positive developments in the district's special education practices over the years. She particularly likes a new iPad app Rian and his classmates



Staff photo by E.J. Harris

Rian Middleton show Mikayla Herrera how to use an educational program on an iPad Thursday at Sandstone Middle School in Hermiston.

have been using, which adjusts to each student's comprehension level while still covering topics that their peers in a mainstream classroom are covering.

"They're talking about things that are very appropriate to their age level but adjusted to their skill level," she said.

People tend to have a narrow view of what "special education" means, but Mishra said it can look like anything from Down Syndrome students learning basic life skills at the Kik Center to a student in a mainstream classroom who sees a speech therapist for a stutter.

"The disability just has to have an impact on educational performance," he said.

This year 631 students have an individualized education program (IEP) for a total of 12 percent of students in the district. The state funds special education up to 11 percent.

"Probably 98 percent of those kids are eligible to graduate with a Hermiston High School diploma," Mishra said.

specific ways to help the student be more successful in the classroom and prepare for the transition to life after school.

"We want the IEP to be a living document," he said.

Mishra said district staff are always collecting "tips and tools" to use more broadly. For example, since students with diagnoses like ADHD often have trouble sitting still, the district has introduced exercise balls in place of chairs for some students and its physical therapists are training teachers on implementing more movement into their classrooms.

"If teachers just say, 'For 30 seconds stand up and stretch and then sit down,' that could take care of issues that would come up 10 minutes down the road that could take 20 minutes to deal with," Mishra said.

Despite leaving the Inter-Mountain ESD, the district will still use the ESD's wraparound program that handles referrals and screening of pre-kindergarten children. Mishra said that's one of the biggest changes he has seen in special education — disabilities are being caught early, sometimes in infancy, instead of the olden days when a disability often didn't get addressed until as late as third grade.

"If we can get those things early, and are able to work through that, it makes a huge difference for the kids," he said.

Mishra said helping create the right conditions for a student with special needs to flourish is a rewarding job.

"I've seen magic happen," he said.

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Happy 1st Valentine's Day to our precious Isaiah Timothy.
With Love from your Family

To my Husband & Daughter,
You have touched and filled my world with so much love. You are both sweet and beautiful in the deepest sense. You shine and sparkle my world. Thank you for being my life's companions!
Love Forever, K.

Gracie ~
You are my Special Valentine.
Love you to the moon & stars.
Love Mommy

Happy Valentines Day to my little monster!
My life wouldn't be complete without you!
Love, Mommy

There is never a dull moment
And always a laugh
You have made our lives totally awesome!
Love you so much
Grandma and Grandpa

To my Hubby Rick,
Happy Valentine's Day to the man of my dreams. It's been 16 years of ups and downs and our love keeps getting stronger. I love you to infinity and back plus 1.
Your wife Dana

There's no place in the world I'd rather be than with one of my sons...
Daniel & Eric
You are the best part of living &
I love you more than life itself...

I love my pack

Degan & Ethan ~
Only an AUNT can give hugs like a mother, keep secrets like a sister and share love like a friend!

Sweetest Sally,
God is so Good.
He gave me you and with you nothing is impossible.

HAPPY VALENTINE'S DAY TO MY "MAGIC CHEF!"
LOVE, SUE

40 Years and it's getting better and better.
I'm proud to be your wife.

Sidney,
A daughter is the happy memories of the past. The joyful moments of the present. And the hope and promise of the future. My cup runneth over...
Love, Mom

Jerrold,
A son holds his mother's hand for a little while and mother's heart forever. My cup runneth over.
Love, Mom

Cameron,
A daughter may outgrow your lap, but she will never outgrow your heart. My cup runneth over...
Love, Mom