

## **1. The historical context of the issue**

- The movement started in the early 1950's to alleviate the suffering of depressed people and to show that suicide is nothing more than a mental illness, according to (HHS,2012)

## **2. Description of the social problem**

There is a stigma around depression, self-injury, addiction, and suicide. It is not a problem that is understood by those who don't suffer from it. Those who suffer from any of these often do not reach out for help and do not feel supported.

## **3. The place(s) and time the social movement began to take root (was there an event or incident that inspired action?)**

It started with a story in the spring of 2006. Founder Jamie Tworowski wrote a story about a friend struggling with depression, addiction, and self-injury. The blog was shared and it was made clear that this was not a struggle of just one person. TWLOHA started to hear stories from people in every stage of life that were affected by depression, self-injury, and suicide from every degree.

Jamie's Story:

“Pedro the Lion is loud in the speakers, and the city waits just outside our open windows. She sits and sings, legs crossed in the passenger seat, her pretty voice hiding in the volume. Music is a safe place and Pedro is her favorite. It hits me that she won't see this skyline for several weeks, and we will be without her. I lean forward, knowing this will be written, and I ask what she'd say if her story had an audience. She smiles. "Tell them to look up. Tell them to remember the stars." I would rather write her a song, because songs don't wait to resolve, and because songs mean so much to her. Stories wait for endings, but songs are brave things bold enough to sing when all they know is darkness. These words, like most words, will be written next to midnight, between hurricane and harbor, as both claim to save her.

Renee is 19. When I meet her, cocaine is fresh in her system. She hasn't slept in 36 hours and she won't for another 24. It is a familiar blur of coke, pot, pills and alcohol. She has agreed to meet us, to listen and to let us pray. We ask Renee to come with us, to leave this broken night. She says she'll go to rehab tomorrow, but she isn't ready now. It is too great a change. We pray and say goodbye and it is hard to leave without her.

She has known such great pain; haunted dreams as a child, the near-constant presence of evil ever since. She has felt the touch of awful naked men, battled depression and addiction, and attempted suicide. Her arms remember razor blades, fifty scars that speak of self-inflicted wounds. Six hours after I meet her, she is feeling trapped, two groups of "friends" offering opposite ideas. Everyone is asleep. The sun is rising. She drinks long from a bottle of liquor, takes a razor blade from the table and locks herself in the bathroom. She cuts herself, using the blade to write "FUCK UP" large across her left forearm.

The nurse at the treatment center finds the wound several hours later. The center has no detox, names her too great a risk, and does not accept her. For the next five days, she is ours to love. We become her hospital and the possibility of healing fills our living room with life. It is unspoken and there are only a few of us, but we will be her church, the body of Christ coming alive to meet her needs, to write love on her arms.

She is full of contrast, more alive and closer to death than anyone I've known, like a Johnny Cash song or some theatre star. She owns attitude and humor beyond her 19 years, and when she tells me her story, she is humble and quiet and kind, shaped by the pain of a hundred lifetimes. I sit privileged but breaking as she shares. Her life has been so dark yet there is some soft hope in her words, and on consecutive evenings, I watch the prettiest girls in the room tell her that she's beautiful. I think it's God reminding her.

I've never walked this road, but I decide that if we're going to run a five-day rehab, it is going to be the coolest in the country. It is going to be rock and roll. We start with the basics; lots of fun, too much Starbucks and way too many cigarettes.

Thursday night she is in the balcony for Band Marino, Orlando's finest. They are indie-folk-fabulous, a movement disguised as a circus. She loves them and she smiles when I point out the A&R man from Atlantic Europe, in town from London just to catch this show.

She is in good seats when the Magic beat the Sonics the next night, screaming like a lifelong fan with every Dwight Howard dunk. On the way home, we stop for more coffee and books, Blue Like Jazz and (Anne Lamott's) *Traveling Mercies*.

On Saturday, the Taste of Chaos tour is in town and I'm not even sure we can get in, but doors do open and minutes after parking, we are on stage for Thrice, one of her favorite bands. She stands ten feet from the drummer, smiling constantly. It is a bright moment there in the music, as light and rain collide above the stage. It feels like healing. It is certainly hope.

Sunday night is church and many gather after the service to pray for Renee, this her last night before entering rehab. Some are strangers but all are friends tonight. The prayers move from broken to bold, all encouraging. We're talking to God but I think as much, we're talking to her, telling her she's loved, saying she does not go alone. One among us knows her best. Ryan sits in the corner strumming an acoustic guitar, singing songs she's inspired.

After church our house fills with friends, there for a few more moments before goodbye.

Everyone has some gift for her, some note or hug or piece of encouragement. She pulls me aside and tells me she would like to give me something. I smile surprised, wondering what it could be. We walk through the crowded living room, to the garage and her stuff.

She hands me her last razor blade, tells me it is the one she used to cut her arm and her last lines of cocaine five nights before. She's had it with her ever since, shares that tonight will be the hardest night and she shouldn't have it. I hold it carefully, thank her and know instantly that this moment, this gift, will stay with me. It hits me to wonder if this great feeling is what Christ knows when we surrender our broken hearts, when we trade death for life.

As we arrive at the treatment center, she finishes: "The stars are always there but we miss them in the dirt and clouds. We miss them in the storms. Tell them to remember hope. We have hope." I have watched life come back to her, and it has been a privilege. When our time with her began, someone suggested shifts but that is the language of business. Love is something better. I have been challenged and changed, reminded that love is that simple answer to so many of our hardest questions. Don Miller says we're called to hold our hands against the wounds of a broken world, to stop the bleeding. I agree so greatly.

We often ask God to show up. We pray prayers of rescue. Perhaps God would ask us to be that

rescue, to be His body, to move for things that matter. He is not invisible when we come alive. I might be simple but more and more, I believe God works in love, speaks in love, is revealed in our love. I have seen that this week and honestly, it has been simple: Take a broken girl, treat her like a famous princess, give her the best seats in the house. Buy her coffee and cigarettes for the coming down, books and bathroom things for the days ahead. Tell her something true when all she's known are lies. Tell her God loves her. Tell her about forgiveness, the possibility of freedom, tell her she was made to dance in white dresses. All these things are true.

We are only asked to love, to offer hope to the many hopeless. We don't get to choose all the endings, but we are asked to play the rescuers. We won't solve all mysteries and our hearts will certainly break in such a vulnerable life, but it is the best way. We were made to be lovers bold in broken places, pouring ourselves out again and again until we're called home.

I have learned so much in one week with one brave girl. She is alive now, in the patience and safety of rehab, covered in marks of madness but choosing to believe that God makes things new, that He meant hope and healing in the stars. She would ask you to remember.” –It Start With A Story (2007)

#### **4. The mission or goal of the activists**

Mission Statement:

To Write Love On Her Arms is a non-profit movement dedicated to presenting hope and finding help for people struggling with depression, addiction, self-injury, and suicide. TWLOHA exists to encourage, inform, inspire, and also to invest directly into treatment and recovery.

#### **5. Description of the group that acted**

- Bridging the gap between traditional treatment and the lives of people who need help. Created in 2006.
- TWLOHA's mission is partly to inform people about mental health issues in hopes that this will help end stigma. They hope to change the number of people that seek treatment for their depression (Vision, 2007)
- The movement started in the early 1950's to alleviate the suffering of depressed people and to show that suicide is nothing more than a mental illness, according to (HHS,2012)
- World Health Organization helped create a large portion of the movement with the Suicide Prevention program (SUPRE)

Their vision: Is to actually believe the following

You were created to love and be loved

You were meant to live life in relation with other people, to know and be known.

You need to know your story is important, and you're part of a bigger story according to The vision goes on from here and is very long but to summarize it, as said in the last few lines, "the vision is hope and hope is real" according to (Vision,2007)

TWLOHA's Programs:

- The Storytellers Campaign is an initiative to start a mental health dialogue in High Schools. High School Students work with a faculty member to create awareness, build community within their campus and raise funds for TWLOHA (suicide is the third leading cause of death among adolescents according to (Vision, 2007).
- University Chapters are a network of student organizations on College campuses that work to do the work of TWLOHA's mission in hopes of addressing the annual 1000 annual College student suicides.
- Intern program
- Street Team is an online space for supporters. They have a range of freedom to do activities within the community and the internet. The website creates tasks for members to go do in the community or on the internet.
- MOVE conference aims to equip and educate the audience about Depression. It's a one or two day conference providing information on depression. It's presented from professional counselors according to (Vision, 2007). It is meant to inspire the audience so that they can have a positive impact on their community.
- Fears vs. Dreams a blog that lets people post their worst fears and dreams in hopes that they feel more connected to people with similar feelings
- Hope goes Surfing, very recent trying to spread the message to the surfing community

#### **6. Any involvement of human service professionals/organizers (if applicable)**

- Within TWLOHA:Conferences like the "Move Conference" has professional counselors who give presentations. These are key dissemination points and help spread the destigmatizing campaign.
- As a whole: The founding of the American Suicidology Center was a pivotal point in the Suicide Prevention movement. This nonprofit (?) has various HSPs within it.

According to Soubrier (2004), this organization was founded by a clinical psychologist aka HSP. Eventually the AAS started working with Hotline centers. They helped develop an accreditation

program for them. At these Hotline Centers, the workers there are Human Service Professionals as well. The AAS served a critical role in uniting Hotline Centers. Hotline centers were providing very valuable services but, they lacked leadership. The AAS can now refer anyone to the one of 600 suicide prevention centers/hotlines. The AAS made them into a network of resources that can be utilized very easily.

#### **7. The outcome (or lack thereof) of the social movement's efforts and an update of where this movement is currently**

- Originally, before the 1950s there were no national organizations with the sole purpose of addressing Suicide Prevention. By the time the 1970s came around, the AAS was formed. And, hundreds of Suicide Hotlines had been formed and networked. Resources had not only formed, they bloomed and exploded.
- According to (Soubrier, 2004, p.159), “in the years that followed, several other key developments helped advance suicide prevention in the nation.” Among these was the 2002 report *Reducing Suicide: A National Imperative*, which summarized the state of the science base, gaps in knowledge, strategies for prevention, and research designs for the study of suicide.<sup>9</sup> This landmark report presented findings from a 13-member committee formed by the Institute of Medicine in 2000, at the request of several federal agencies.
- Another important document was the 2003 report *Achieving the Promise: Transforming Mental Health Care in America*, prepared by the New Freedom Commission on Mental Health.<sup>113</sup> Assembled by President George W. Bush in 2002, the commission was asked to study the mental health service delivery system, and to make recommendations that would enable adults with serious mental illnesses and children with serious emotional disturbances to live, work, learn, and participate fully in their communities. After 1 year of study, and after reviewing research and testimony, the group issued its final report, which identified six goals and corresponding recommendations” (HHS,2012, Introduction)

The 2001 National strategy, allocated 3.5 million dollars to create a violent death reporting system. This system is now included in 18 states. And, the National Strategy also created State Suicide prevention plans. This plan is now employed in almost all states. According to HHS, 2012, in 2010, the National Action Alliance for Suicide Prevention was formed.

According to (Facts and Figures, 2014), there isn't any complete count kept of the entire U.S. Suicides. It's estimated that there are 1 million people each year who do self-inflicted harm. However, if we just focus on our own state, Suicide rates have declined since 1980. In 1980, suicide rates were at 15 out of 100,000. As of 2007, they have fluctuated from 12-14 per 100,000. So it's really hard to quantify success in this movement as a whole, however going off the numbers from this state it seems marginal.

#### Sources

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