

September is National Suicide Awareness Month



Manuel L. Peralta Jr.

I serve as the NALC's designee on the National Joint Committee (NJC) of the Employee Assistance Program (EAP). Since the summer of 2010, I have been tracking city letter carrier suicides.

This number has reached a staggering 196 suicides. The purpose of my column this month is to shine a light on the need to guide each other to reach for the available resources.

In preparation for this column, I reflected on one of the most powerful statements made on the subject by my friend, Paul Gillie, who is the past president of Mid-Michigan Branch 256. During an NALC Committee of Presidents meeting, Paul

went to the microphone and when recognized, shared the following:

...I am humbled by this opportunity to be here and share with you today. Illness is a funny thing. It can so easily be a destructive force in our lives, and the lives of those who care about us...

I was born with an inheritance handed down through the generations. It was a disease that I never knew I had because I never knew a life different than what I was living. I know now that my family tree includes an incredible number of holes and gaps where parents buried their children, parents were stolen from their families too early in life, and a multitude of families and lives were left destroyed; all brought by the carnage of an invisible disease...

Of the current generation, one cousin killed himself, as did my own brother after nearly 50 years of a mostly miserable life...While others inherit boats, cabins, houses, trust funds and other family resources that make each generation more affluent than the one before, the heritage of my family is one of destruction and dysfunction brought by an illness the medical community is ill prepared to address, let alone to cure. But it's not entirely their fault. Depression has a very real life of its own. It hides from the sunlight and prevents its victims from seeing the truth. It deceives and shirks any attempt to be found and destroyed. It attacks the host at every opportunity, making it weaker and more susceptible to its effect. It makes you feel vulnerable and responsible for the havoc it reaps as it grows stronger every day...

I believe myself to be a relatively strong person, but after 54 years of controlling my life, the disease had

finally grown stronger than I was. The sickness created an incredibly calculated event. It convinced me I was worthless; it convinced me that my wife, daughter, son and grandchildren would be better off if I were not part of their lives. It convinced me that death was the most viable solution.

Much like George Bailey in "It's a Wonderful Life," I was worth more dead than alive and if nothing else, the harm I continued to bring to those who cared about me would come to an end.

But just like the story of George Bailey, those who cared about me saved me in the end.

After eight months off work, buried in a basement void of sunlight and contact with the outside world, my daughter finally dragged me to the hospital and out of my despair. I was admitted to a rehabilitation hospital for a week and spent another two weeks in an outpatient program that saved my life, allowed me to return to work and activism with renewed energy, vigor and, most importantly, a new perspective.

...I am excited to say that every week I recognize that I feel the best I've ever felt in my life. I never knew what happiness was, but now I see a small sliver of what it looks like. I am the best I've ever been and I'm only getting stronger, better and more driven toward the things that make life worth living...

I tell this story for a reason. We are all familiar with the postings at the airports that say: "If you see something, say something." We need to apply that to our personal lives as well. I can't begin to count the number of people who knew that something was terribly wrong. Yet none knew what to do about it. When we see someone struggling with work or being wronged, we all know what to do. We challenge it through the grievance procedure. When there is something wrong with our branches, we know (or we figure out) what to do to restore our branch and hopefully make the membership more unified and stronger. But when we see someone who is in a hole deeper than we can fathom, we

SUICIDE PREVENTION AWARENESS MONTH

Learn more about what you can do as an individual, friend or family member.

[One conversation can change a life.]

NAMI.org/suicideawarenessmonth

Suicide Awareness Month (continued)

fail to act for fear of doing the wrong thing or because we simply don't know what to do. Please let me be clear: If you care about that person, you must act. Action taken from a position of love, affection or empathy toward another is always appropriate, although it may not be appreciated until much later.

...As family, we look out for each another. So please be strong, be well, please look after each other, get in each other's face when it is warranted, and don't ever give up on each other. To everyone who helped save my life, thank you. I will see you all again very soon.

Today, I reached out to Paul to ask if he would permit me to share his words with you through this month's column. Paul and I hope that his words may encourage someone to help, someone to not give up and someone to keep living.

In our friendship, Paul has always been willing to do anything he can to help others, so Paul, we thank you. To those of you reading this, never give up, never give in. Let this effort turn that light on in your life and let help reach those in need.

On the same subject, I recently watched a show titled "The Weight of Gold" on HBO. Gold medalist Michael Phelps used his experience in the Olympic world to shed light on the mental health needs of our athletes, leading up to, during and after the Olympic experience is over. Watch it with your family and talk about it afterward. There is great value in communicating openly. We should be searching our emotions, looking for answers and, more importantly, reaching out to others and to professionals for the help that is there.

This now leads me to the ask. Reach out to others to connect with the help available. Under Article 35 of the National Agreement, employees are entitled to EAP services through the national service provider. Currently, New Directions Behavioral Health provides our members and their families with the EAP services that they are entitled to at no cost. Start with EAP to get an in-depth evaluation of your situation and your needs. These services are confidential. If you have any questions, reach out to your district advisory committee or reach out to a counselor.

If someone you know is displaying these warning signs of suicidal intentions please do not hesitate to:

Question | Persuade | Refer

1. Question: Ask if they are having thoughts of suicide.
2. Persuade: Encourage them to seek professional help.
3. Refer: Assist in obtaining local resources.

- Call 911 or take them to the local emergency room or psychiatric facility
- Call the National Suicide Hotline at 800-Suicide (800-784-2433)
- Call your USPS EAP at 800-327-4968 (800-EAP-4YOU)



CALL US TODAY: 800-327-4968
800-EAP-4YOU | TTY: 877-492-7341
WWW.EAP4YOU.COM

Warning Signs

- Feeling trapped or in unbearable pain
- Talking about being a burden to others
- Giving away prized possessions
- Increasing the use of alcohol and/or drugs
- Acting anxious or agitated; behaving recklessly
- Sleeping too much or too little
- Withdrawing or feeling isolated
- Showing rage or seeking revenge
- Displaying extreme mood swings

Services provided through the USPS can be reached through:

- Web—EAP4YOU.com
- Phone—800-EAP-4YOU (800-327-4968) (24 hours a day)
- TTY—877-492-7341

The following resources are also available to anyone:

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline

800-273-8255 (available 24 hours, in English and Spanish)

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration

samsha.gov
800-273-TALK (800-273-8255)

US Department of Veterans Affairs—Mental Health

mentalhealth.va.gov/suicide_prevention

The VA website indicates:

Suicide is a national public health concern that affects all Americans. VA believes that everyone has a role to play in preventing suicide. That's why we are working with an extensive network of community partners across the country—including faith communities, employers, schools and healthcare organizations—to prevent suicide among all veterans, including those who may never come to VA for care.

Keep an eye on each other, open your heart and help!