

Suicide Trends Are Troubling and on the Rise

The recent high profile suicides of Kate Spade and Anthony Bourdain have elevated the awareness of and conversation around mental health. The shock element of why someone who appears "to have it all" would take their life only reinforces what the experts have been saying for years; mental health has no boundaries. It has no income level, no gender preference, and can occur at any stage of life. It can and does impact anyone, regardless of race or religion. It is important to note that while the suicide deaths of people like Spade and Bourdain may have heightened attention around this issue, suicide rates have been increasing across all age groups since 1999. In fact, according to the Center for Disease Control and Prevention, death by suicide has increased by 30% over the past two decades. It is now the 2nd major cause of death for youth between the ages of 10 and 24, and our older adults are the 2nd highest population at risk for suicide. Death by suicide has become the 10th leading cause of death in the United States.

The importance of mental health is gaining momentum.

Some states are beginning the conversation earlier and earlier. New York and Virginia recently passed laws mandating a mental health curriculum in their schools. In Virginia, mental health education will become part of the curriculum for 9th and 10th grades. "70% of those people who struggle with mental illness first experience an episode sometime between 14 and 24. So that's in 10th grade, it's exactly the right time when people ought to be given the tools they need to be able to understand these illnesses," said Virginia State Senator Creigh Deeds. The law New York passed updates curriculum in elementary, middle, and high schools to include material on mental health. And while we are probably a long way from mandating mental health education in our schools in NC, where on average, someone commits suicide about every six hours, the topic of mental health and suicide is moving to the forefront.

Through a grant funded by our local Jewish Federation, we are implementing programs that raise awareness about depression and suicide that also educate the

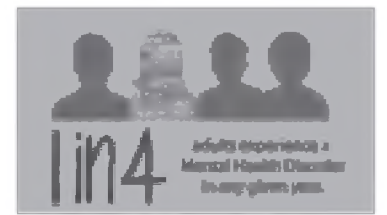
community about warning signs, strategies, and resources to help those suffering from a mental health issue. Through this Mental Health Initiative, Jewish Family Services will be hosting two programs this fall to elevate the dialogue surrounding the impact mental health has on our day-to-day lives.

On September 14, QPR, a suicide prevention program, will be offered from 11:30 AM-1 PM. QPR stands for Question, Persuade, Refer and is a training for the non-professional to learn how to identify someone who might be at risk of harming themselves and how to respond.

Coffee and Conversation, a small group discussion for anyone interested in learning more about mental health, community resources, and sharing your experience will be held on November 8 from 9-10 AM. Hear one person's experience of what it is like to live with a mental illness and share your own experiences or just learn how you can engage in the conversation of educating our community.

There are usually early indicators leading up the act of taking

one's own life. 90% of people who commit suicide have a mental illness such as depression or bi-polar disorder and between 50% and 75% of people who attempt suicide talk about their suicidal thoughts, feelings, and plans before they act. Creating awareness and learning how to help someone with a mental health issue is critical to reducing the risk of someone committing suicide. What can be done? Become aware of the signs of depression and risk factors for suicide, and be sure to take them seriously. Offer support, be there to talk and/



or listen and help by encouraging whoever is troubled to seek professional help.

For more information on the programs listed in this article or for any questions regarding mental health services, call Jewish Family Services at 704-364-6594. ✪

The Ruach and Rabbi Smookler to Provide Free Alternative Service for Rosh HaShanah

This year the Charlotte Jewish community will have a new alternative for observing Rosh Hashanah: The Rosh Hashanah Experience. The Experience, led by The Ruach (Hebrew for "spirit") and Rabbi Rachel Smookler, is a fast-paced service with lots of new Jewish music mixed with some familiar melodies and readings. It will have all the elements of a complete Rosh Hashanah service including Torah reading and blowing of the shofar.



Rabbi Rachel Smookler

The Experience happens at 10:30 AM on Monday, September 10 at the Infinity Ballroom located at 4038 Old Pineville Road and will last until about noon. Dan Ruda, The Ruach's bass player and backup singer says, "We are super excited about this venue. It is really easy to get to, has plenty of free parking, and is just a five minute walk from the light rail's Scaleybark Station ... and it has a great sound system."

When asked about what makes The Rosh Hashanah Experience special Rabbi Smookler replied, "The uplifting music will create the sacred experience necessary to transform yourself for the New Year. The Experience will shake up any previously held beliefs you may have had about religious services and will leave you wanting more."

Much of the music was written by The Ruach. The rest was written by other well-known Jewish artists including Sheldon Low, Rick Recht, Dan Nichols, and Josh Nelson. All of it combines traditional prayer and liturgy with modern music written for today's world.

Franklin Kaunitz, The Ruach's

violinist and backup vocalist, had this to say about The Rosh Hashanah Experience: "This will be a great opportunity to connect with other Jews who are looking for a more spiritual and meaningful experience during the High Holy Days. If you believe that prayer is the song of the heart, then this is the Rosh Hashanah service for you."

The Rosh Hashanah Experience is free and has been made possible as a result of generous grant made by Marshall Rauch and the Rauch Foundation. Everyone is welcome. There are no tickets, no membership. Nancy Good, lead singer and rhythm guitarist for The Ruach, encourages folks to "experience the New Year by joining a community brought together by a passion for music, Judaism, and ruach."

Prior to moving to Charlotte in August 2017, Rabbi Smookler was the Head Rabbi of Temple

Beth David, a Conservative egalitarian synagogue in Rochester, NY. Before that, she held the title of Chief Rabbi of Japan. Rabbi Smookler graduated from the University of Minnesota with a bachelor's degree in Jewish Studies and completed the rabbinical graduate program at New York City's Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion.

The Ruach is a Charlotte-based band playing modern Jewish music and is an independent 501(c)(3) tax-exempt nonprofit organization. All band members volunteer their time and talent; none are paid. The Ruach is Nancy Good, lead vocals and rhythm guitar; Peter Levinson, lead guitar and band manager; Dan Ruda, bass and backup vocals; Franklin Kaunitz, violin and backup vocals; Howard Swartz, percussion; David Krusch, drums and backup vocals; and Rick Lipson, drums. The mission of The Ruach is to spread the joy of Judaism through meaningful musical experiences that connect heart and mind, and create a spiritual community. Tracks from the band's first album "Real Jewish Rock." have been featured on Jewish Rock Radio, the internet radio station for today's Jewish music, and included on a CD that is a compilation of songs by both Israeli and American artists. Says Sheldon Low about The Ruach: "Really, really fun music; love the energy."

For more information, contact Peter Levinson at the.ruach.band@gmail.com. Follow The Ruach on Facebook @theruachband; on Instagram @the.ruach; on Twitter @TheRuachSpirit. ✪



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