

Elon reaches out to raise awareness for suicide prevention

Hannah Durbin
Senior Reporter

"For me, depression was comparable to feeling dead inside. Situations always ended up being my fault — or at least that's how it was in my mind," said one of Elon University's first-year students.

And that's how it all started.

Depression led this student, who wishes to remain anonymous, to believe the world would be better off without her, as if the only purpose she served was to be a burden to others. Feelings like these are too powerful to handle alone, but reaching out seemed impossible. Taking her life felt like the only solution. But looking back, she sees just how many people were there for her to help her through.

"For anyone who is currently suffering or feeling alone, I have a simple piece of advice — talk to someone," she said. "You may feel like you're the only person in the world feeling this way, but there are so many people out there going through the exact same thing. The only way to figure that out, though, is to reach out for guid-

ance. It will make a world of difference."

For young people between 15 and 24, suicide is the second leading cause of death in the United States. SAVE (Suicide Awareness Voices of Education, a suicide awareness foundation, says there are twice as many deaths due to suicide than HIV/AIDS. Every 38 seconds, a person attempts suicide.

Elon has been taking steps to address this growing issue.

"It's not only our desire to remain informed, but it's our professional responsibility to make sure we know the most evidence-based methods of reaching out to students in need," said Jennifer Brigman, one of Elon's licensed professional counselors. "We continually evaluate our services to better help the students and would welcome any feedback as to how we can improve."

Suicide is a serious health problem that takes a toll not only on the person struggling, but also on family, friends, classmates and community members. A depressed or suicidal person often hesitates to reach out for help because of the fear

of being embarrassed or feeling "different" from everyone else. Elon has been working to diminish this feeling for students who are struggling during their academic career.

Help is not far away for students. On-campus counseling services are offered for any student, free of charge. Counseling services provide crisis intervention to students in psychological distress, as well as support during a solution-focused session with a trained health professional.

The National Suicide Prevention Lifeline is also directly linked to the Counseling Services page on Elon's website.

The stress and workload of college could be factors contributing to the increase in mental health issues across college campuses.

"The transition to college has its ups and downs," said first-year Jordane Mink. "Some weeks are better than others. But there's a constant pressure to always be working on something. Even when I have free time, my mind is cluttered with to-do lists of assignments that I need to get done. It's exhausting."

Social pressures and feelings of isolation and disconnection are two of the main factors contributing to suicidal thoughts on campus.

"The hardest thing about the whole adjustment period is being away from everything I've ever known," said first-year Ashley Davis. "I've had to completely start over — that's enough to overwhelm anyone."

For students who are already feeling out of place, these pressures add up.

That's where Elon's services come into play. Counselors work around the clock to provide support for any student who needs it. There is a counselor on call throughout the day, as well as after hours, to help support any student experiencing a crisis or emergency.

Something else to keep in mind is that counseling services are in the process of putting together a mindfulness class that has been proven to help reduce anxiety. This class will directly address feelings of fear, racing thoughts, worries about the future, or having trouble with issues of the past.

Residence Life aims to increase number of on-campus residents

Simone Jasper
Senior Reporter

As Elon University prepares to house more student on campus, residence life data shows that the percentage of students living on campus has increased over the past 10 years.

The goal to keep 75 percent of students on campus by 2020 is detailed in the Residential Campus Initiative. The plan falls under the Elon Commitment, the university's strategic plan.

"We want to make sure that what we offer socially, intellectually and academically on campus is up to par to make students want to stay on campus all four years," said Elaine Turner, director of residence life.

During the 2004-2005 school year, 58.9 percent of students lived on campus. Now, in the 2014-2015 school year, 62.4 percent of students live on campus.

In recent years, the Colonnades neighborhood and the Station at Mill Point were added to campus. The buildings offer space for 430 and 320 students, respectively. The Global Neighborhood was finished at the beginning of this school year, adding space for another 600 students.

Turner said these options have amenities that encourage students to stay on campus. She also said classroom spaces in residence halls, Living Learning Communities and courses that are linked to residence halls impact student experiences.

"We have more single rooms and more common rooms where students can interact together," Turner said. "Having interactions outside the classroom is creating experiences that you aren't going to get off campus."

Senior Kelsey Price lives at the Station at Mill Point. She said that living with other students has given her a chance to build relationships outside of the classroom setting.

"It ties into Elon's intellectual climate goal," Price said. "It's making for a better environment. As opposed to having an older neighbor or one with a family and kids, it's helpful to be around people of the same age."

Senior Paige Becker said she doesn't have many opportunities to interact with students at her off-campus apartment, but said living on campus her first three years at Elon was helpful.

"It was easier to make friends [on cam-

pus]," she said. "I don't interact with other people in my complex. But it's kind of nice to get away from the hectic environment of campus."

Students at Elon are required to live on campus their first two years, although sophomores can apply for an exception. But Turner said the goal of Residence Life for all class years is creating neighborhoods.

"Over the past years, we've tried to come up with that neighborhood concept to try to create a connection to community so students feel that they belong on campus," Turner said.

Becker said she enjoyed living on campus and would have considered living in Mill Point if it offered an option for three

people to live together. While she said that having freedom from the Elon meal plan is an advantage, she said that her distance from campus is a burden.

"Getting home is easier when you live on campus," she said. "My parents don't like me walking alone at night. If I want to stay on campus longer, I bring my car or use E-rides."

Turner said she hopes that more people will realize that living on campus is convenient. She is confident that the university will reach its 2020 goal and that she expects the percentage of students living on campus to increase next year. One step is filling the occupancy rate, which is currently at 99.4 percent, meaning 99.4 percent of the rooms on campus

are filled.

"In order to get us [to the goal], we would need more residence facilities," she said. "We might build more [in the future]. We have plans to do renovations for older existing facilities."

Senior MacKenzie Lowery, who has lived in Oak Hill for two years, said current on-campus offerings are often nicer than ones off campus.

"Living on campus, the upkeep is nicer," she said. "Some of the houses that people lease off campus are gross."

But Lowery said living off campus makes her feel independent.

"You definitely have more space and options," she said. "There are living restrictions living on campus. You aren't allowed to hang things on walls."

But the on-campus rules aren't such a burden according to Price.

"Some people would argue that it's autonomous," Price said. "You still have an RA, and you can't have candles. But I think that's helpful to have those kind of rules so students don't burn down buildings."

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**ELAINE TURNER
DIRECTOR OF RESIDENCE LIFE**



Residence Life offers many options for students to live on campus during all four years at Elon. Their goal is 75 percent of students living on campus by 2020.