



Shattering the Silence Around Suicide in Dare County



September is Suicide Prevention Awareness Month—a time to raise awareness of this stigmatized, and often taboo, topic. This month provides an opportunity to shift public perception, spread hope and share vital information to people affected by suicide.

The Breaking Through Task Force, Saving Lives Task Force, Be Resilient OBX, and Dare County Department of Health & Human Services have teamed up to host a town hall event in September. The event will feature the recently filmed documentary *Shattering the Silence: A Documentary about Suicide in Dare County*.

The goal of the event is to provide individuals with a basic understanding of the impacts of suicide in Dare County. While ensuring that individuals, friends, and families have access to the resources they need to learn about, discuss suicide prevention, and to seek help.

The event will be held on Tuesday, September 27, 2022 from 5:30 am - 8:30 pm at First Flight High School. Light refreshments will be provided.

Attendees will have the opportunity to enjoy refreshments and explore resources in Dare County related to mental health at 5:30 p.m. The documentary will air at 6:15 p.m. with a question and answers panel to follow. For more information about this event, please contact Roxana Ballinger at 252.475.5619 or Roxana.Ballinger@DareNC.com.



The Initiative is a quarterly newsletter presented by the Saving Lives Task Force, the goal of this publication is to educate, inform and engage residents of Dare County.

- Our Task Force is a team of professionals and community members working toward the prevention of substance use disorders and the availability of effective treatment for all Dare county citizens in need of help.
- **Join us for our In-Person Meetings** on the 3rd Tuesday of every month at 2:00 pm.
- **For More Information** please contact Roxana Ballinger, Saving Lives Task Force Co-Chair, at 252.475.5619 or roxana.ballinger@darenc.com.

savinglivesobx.com
facebook.com/savinglivesobx

The Collision Between Hopelessness and Helplessness

People who struggle with substance use disorder are six times more likely to commit suicide; in fact, substance abuse is the second highest risk factor for suicide. Approximately 1/3 of the people who die from suicide are under the influence of drugs. Depression is the number one risk factor for suicides and the rate of major depression among those with substance use disorder is two to four times higher than the general population!

Surprised? Why is this tragedy so prevalent among those suffering from addiction? What drives these souls to take their own lives?

STIGMA: The stigma of this epidemic disease is indeed a factor! The shame associated with this disorder does not encourage those who suffer to reach out for help.

HOPELESSNESS: While in the throes of substance abuse, it's easy to think there is no hope for recovery. Broken relationships, job loss and financial issues can pile up to form a hurdle that blocks out hope. Failed attempts at "getting sober" can also block out hope.

UNHAPPINESS: Oftentimes, persons use drugs/alcohol to numb painful emotions or block memories from the past. This can lead to an unhealthy spiral of increased sadness and deep dark depression. Before they know it, they see no way out and are in a pit of despair they feel they can't escape. They feel their friends and family would be better off without them.

REGRET: Unhealthy decisions due to poor choices often pile up and leave regrets in their wake. Emotions of shame and guilt can be difficult to shake. If relapse occurs, further feelings of failure and regret can follow. With the weight of these poor decisions and feelings heavy on their hearts, those struggling with substance abuse may find it difficult to face life! They feel they don't deserve to live so they decide to end their lives.

DEFEAT: Self-criticism can lead to feelings of defeat. "I can't do anything right," "My life is one failure after another," "I can't stop using." Repeated attempts at sobriety can add to these feelings; convinced they see no way out, suicidal thoughts can creep in.

LONELINESS: Addiction is an isolating disease. Consumed with cravings, withdrawal and focus on the next fix, it's hard to connect with others. Feelings that no one can understand their pain. Wrapped in a world of hurt, they feel all alone.

HOW TO PREVENT SUICIDE: Suicide is avoidable! The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has developed various programs and practices to help prevent suicide. Maintaining supportive and nonjudgmental communication channels with those susceptible to suicide can also help. If you or someone you know needs support now, call or text 988 or chat 988lifeline.org.



THE INITIATIVE Resources:

savinglivesobx.com

PORT/New Horizons
2808 S Croatan Hwy,
Nags Head, NC 27959
252.441.2324

Trillium Health Resources
www.trilliumncaccesspoint.org
877.685.2415 – 24 Hours a Day

Mobile Crisis Team
24 Hours a Day / 7 Days a Week
866.437.1821

Suicide & Crisis Lifeline
988lifeline.org
or call or text 988

Community Care Clinic of Dare
Syringe Services Program
M-Th | 9 a.m. - 2:00 p.m.
252.261.3041

Contact your insurance company to find out more information on local providers and your plan's benefits.

S M T W T F S

EVENTS

■ **Shattering the Silence Around Suicide in Dare County: You are not alone.**

Town Hall Sept 27th at FFHS 5:30-8:30 pm. September is Suicide Prevention Awareness Month. In the most recent Dare County Community Health Needs Assessment, it was noted that suicide is the eighth leading cause of death in Dare County and the second leading cause of death among individuals 20-39 years of age. The event will feature the recently filmed documentary *Shattering the Silence: A Documentary about Suicide in Dare County*. Attendees will have the opportunity to enjoy refreshments and explore resources in Dare County related to mental health at 5:30 pm. The documentary will air at 6:15 pm with a question and answers panel to follow.

Please contact Roxana Ballinger at 252.475.5619 or Roxana.Ballinger@DareNC.com.

■ **13th Annual Walk Against Addiction**

Saturday, September 24, 2022 at 9:00am at the First Flight High School, Kill Devil Hills. We will have vendors from the field of recovery and vendors of alternatives to substance use (i.e. yoga, gym) Registration is \$10 and will include a tote bag. **Please contact Brenda Thacker at 252.202.1110 if you have any questions or if you wish to participate in any way!**

■ **Crossroads OBX**

Crossroads OBX is Christ-centered outreach offering discernment, guidance and objective planning for those who desire to change the course of their lives and help those who have been thrown off course by homelessness, addiction, incarceration or other events.

For more information contact 252.455.2510, crossroadsobx.org or crossroadsobx@gmail.com

■ **Recovery & Overdose Support Services (ROSS)**

Recovery and Overdose Support Services (ROSS) provides support groups, harm reduction education and resources, overdose response, and assistance with recovery planning.

Katy Haslar, PSS, 252.473.7861 or RecoveryServices@DareNC.com

■ **SMART Recovery OBX Addiction Support Group**

When: Mondays, 6-7pm for 60 minutes
Where: Nags Head Treatment Center, 2224 S. Croatan Hwy., Nags Head

Facilitators: Scott and Katy Haslar, smartrecoveryobx@gmail.com

■ **Alcoholics Anonymous: Meetings 7 days a week.**

Visit the website AAOBX.com for current virtual meeting schedule. Outer Banks AA Hotline 252-256-0850 and <https://aaobx.com/>

■ **Outer Banks Alateen, Outer Banks Alateen Meeting, Saturdays, 10-11am, Kitty Hawk Baptist Church, email alateen@alanonobx.com for information.**

Alateen is a fellowship of young people whose lives have been affected by alcoholism in a family member or friend.

■ **OBX Nar-anon** is a means of coping with the insanity brought about from having a family member or friend struggling with addiction.

For more details, please contact Holly Henry West at 252-489-7778.

■ **Women of Worth**

Groups are being held virtually on Tuesdays and Thursdays from 11:00am-12:00pm. The groups will focus on recovery from the evidence-based curriculum, "Helping Women Recover."

Please contact Catisha Bryant at catisha.bryant@darenc.com for more information or if you would like to join.

■ **Breaking Through Task Force, 2nd Tuesday of the month, 8:30 am**

The Breaking Through Task Force is composed of community members who wish to address communication and stigma concerns about mental health conditions and substance use disorders.

Contact Kelly Nettnin at kelly.nettnin@darenc.com www.breakthestigmaobx.com

■ **Dare Community Collaborative, 2nd Tuesday of the month, 1:30-2:30 pm**

A partnership among providers and families of youth and adults with mental health issues and/or substance use issues.

Contact Stephanie Webb, stephanie.webb@trilliumnc.org

Addiction: A Universal Struggle

Part Three of a Three Part Series

By Kira Walters, Staff writer, First Flight High School

The James Chapter

James grew up on the Outer Banks. He spent his teenage years surfing, working and doing what most local kids do. Along with Sophia and Grace, addiction was in his genes.

"I didn't really do anything until the summer when I was 15. At that point, I was flying kites for Kitty Hawk Kites and I met an old hippie guy," James said. "He asked me if I wanted to smoke a joint, so I said sure. He was also the first one to buy me alcohol." James' start with substances was not entirely out of the ordinary. According to the National Center for Drug Abuse Statistics, 2.08 million kids between the ages of 12-17 reported using drugs in the past month. Despite efforts to prevent teenage substance use, it is almost a given that teenagers will experiment, and 15 is not an uncommon age to begin. However, James struggled – and continues to struggle – with depression, anxiety and mild bipolar disorder.

"One day I got completely wasted and was jumping off the second story of Kitty Hawk Kites. They had big sand piles behind the building, so I was jumping off of the second story into a sand pile," James explained. "That was the last thing I remember before I woke up in the hospital with my stomach getting pumped. That was my start." James' drinking escalated throughout his teenage years and into early adulthood before his family decided it was time to get him help. "The drinking gradually picked up. It was what we did every weekend, and then in my senior year I had been smoking some hash outside my mom's house. My mom found the pipe and, since it didn't smell or look like weed, she thought I was smoking crack," James said. "After that, I got the intervention. My step-mom took me to my mom's house to get some clothes and some things I had left there. I walked into the room and there were probably 10 to 15 people sitting in a circle waiting for me to get there." At first, James was reluctant: "I was caught off-guard. I was angry. I felt deceived and lied to," he said. "I fought for about an hour and my grandpa took me outside and convinced me to go get help. I refused at first, but he convinced me to go for just two weeks. That was my first treatment. I was 18. That kind of slowed things down for me, kind of put me in check."

Even after James tried to get help, his addiction continued to spiral out of control.

"Sometime after my second wife and I had separated, I went to my second treatment facility. My drinking had gotten really, really bad. That was when the binge drinking started. I couldn't bear to be sober," James said. "Once I started drinking, I just had to keep going. I would wake up in the middle of the night and go to the bathroom, slam a couple beers and go back to sleep. It had to be in my system or I would start shaking. I finally called the mobile crisis myself and said, 'I need help.' I went to rehab probably three or four more times and detoxed five or six other times."

Many years later, James is yet to find the cause of his desperate battle with substance abuse. "I can't pinpoint a particular event. I don't know if I'm blocking something out. I could be. I spent a long time trying to figure that out, because you know they say addiction is a symptom of the problem," James said.

For most of his life, James was trying to get away: from his family, from his emotional pain, even from his addiction. "One thing always substitutes for another, so if I wasn't drinking, I was smoking weed. And if I wasn't smoking weed, I was drinking, or doing something else, taking pain pills," he said. "Anything to numb up, just a little bit."

Thankfully, James was able to pull himself together and get sober two years ago: "I'm 772 days without drinking right now." He now has two kids in the First Flight schools. James tries to provide as much advice and support as possible, despite not being a full-time parent. "Stay busy doing what you love," he said. "Find something that you're passionate about and put your focus into that. Make the choice to be happy with who you are."

Kira Walters is a sophomore writer for Nighthawk News Magazine, the student-run newspaper of First Flight High School. Walters and her classmates wrote six stories surrounding drug issues on the OBX following the accidental overdose of an FFHS senior in January. Walters can be reached at 24walterski77@daretolearn.org. Journalism teacher Steve Hanf oversees the newspaper classes and can be reached at hanfst@daretolearn.org.

"One day at a time."

– Alcoholics Anonymous

