Thirty Years Strong in the Fight to #StopSuicide

In the fight against suicide, there is much cause for hope. Remarkable strides have been made in the 30 years since our organization’s founding in 1987. As the largest private funder of suicide prevention research, we know much more today than we did in decades past: that suicide is related to brain function, that 90 percent of people who die by suicide have an underlying – and potentially treatable – mental health condition; and most importantly, that suicide can be prevented, through proven strategies and interventions that we know save lives.

To achieve our mission of saving lives, we also need to ensure we have a good return on investment in our efforts. That’s why we created Project 2025, our bold goal to reduce the suicide rate 20 percent by 2025. By identifying the four most critical areas through which we can have the most immediate impact in reducing loss of life – suicide prevention and firearms, large healthcare systems, emergency departments, and corrections – we ensure that our efforts will produce tangible, quantifiable results.

In support of our bold goal, we continue to partner closely with the National Action Alliance for Suicide Prevention, as well as federal agencies such as the National Institute of Mental Health, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. It’s particularly exciting to have our first memorandum of understanding with the Department of Defense to collaborate on suicide prevention. We’re currently in discussions to develop a similar arrangement with the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. We continue to forge new and emerging partnerships, such as with the National Shooting Sports Foundation, Ad Council, JED Foundation, The Hershey Company and Aetna Behavioral Health, all of which allow us to explore new ways of spreading education about mental health and suicide prevention to broader audiences nationwide.

In 2017, AFSP celebrated its 30th anniversary which provided an opportunity to look back and an opportunity to look ahead at the impact we can make throughout the country. The future clearly lies in expanding our efforts in communities.

By extending our reach in communities all across America, AFSP’s 85 chapters are mobilizing people to advocate for changes in state and federal policies. Our State Capitol Days were held in 32 states in 2017, bringing our passionate base together with public officials. Our volunteers were instrumental in passing the 21st Century Cures Act, state laws mandating training for school personnel and health professionals, and helping to protect mental health parity, and crisis line access. This year, AFSP worked with Members of Congress to form the first Suicide Prevention Task Force on Capitol Hill to focus on suicide prevention.

Our Out of the Darkness Walks program continued to experience tremendous growth this year, with over 560 walks, more than 260,000 people participating, and raising a grand total of over $21
million, including our Overnight Walks in San Diego and Washington, D.C. and our OOTD Campus Walks, where students came out in droves at over 150 campuses in support of the cause.

We also made great strides and a significant impact in our education and prevention work and in the number of programs delivered with the support of our staff and Chapter volunteers.

- Thanks to a generous Mental Health Grant from the Leon Lowenstein Foundation, AFSP’s Interactive Screening Program added 20 additional colleges and universities, enabling schools to reach distressed students and help connect them to mental health services before a crisis emerges. This year, the ISP has connected over 22,000 individuals to a counselor.

- AFSP increased efforts to reach young people about mental health and suicide prevention. The AFSP-produced documentary It’s Real: College Students and Mental Health was released this past April, along with a companion facilitator guide, making it part of campus educational programs across the county.

- The AFSP Talk Saves Lives™ presentation reached 33,000 people, with modules created to reach special populations such as the LGBTQ+ community, seniors, and the Spanish-speaking population.

- More than 360 Survivor Day events also took place in the U.S. and 21 other countries, bringing together thousands of people who found comfort and gained understanding as they shared stories of healing and hope.

- Our Survivor Outreach Program, which provides support for those who have lost loved ones, is now offered in 50 chapters, with over 400 visit requests responded to this past year.

- All of our programs are informed by research. This year, thanks to our donors, AFSP invested a record total of $4.65 million in 27 new research grants, bringing our current total investment in research to $13 million. This number includes two Focus grants - targeted, innovative, and potentially high impact studies that seek to inform and even transform suicide prevention efforts. We are truly leading the way in research, as exemplified by the 2017 International Summit on Suicide Research, co-hosted by AFSP and the International Academy of Suicide Research. The conference brought together over 400 of the leading researchers from 30 countries.

We have come a long way in the last 30 years, and there is reason to be encouraged. Thanks to our generous donors and volunteers, we raised more than $25 million this past year, keeping our fundraising and administrative costs to 15.7 percent, well below the industry standard 25 percent. But with suicide still ranking as the tenth leading cause of death in the U.S., there is still work to be done.

We hope you enjoy our new digital Annual Report format. As you scroll through, you’ll see inspiring stories of individuals in communities across the country, who are doing extraordinary work on behalf of the cause. We hope it inspires you to continue to support AFSP as we move toward a future without suicide.

Robert Gebbia
Chief Executive Officer

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