

TSPN CALL TO ACTION

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TENNESSEE SUICIDE PREVENTION NETWORK



TSPN PUBLISHES UPDATED "STATUS OF SUICIDE IN TENNESSEE" REPORT

The Tennessee Suicide Prevention Network has published its *Status of Suicide in Tennessee 2012* report, detailing suicide trends and prevention efforts in Tennessee.

This report is intended to provide state legislators, mental health professionals, and the general public with information on the problem of suicide in our state and what is being done to prevent it.

"This report is intended to inspire the reader to join TSPN in its ongoing quest to save our loved ones, our friends, our colleagues, and maybe even ourselves. The task is formidable and the stakes are high. But we are united, we are prepared, and we are resolute. We can make a difference as witnessed by our activities and success documented in this report," explains Executive Director Scott Ridgway in the executive summary.

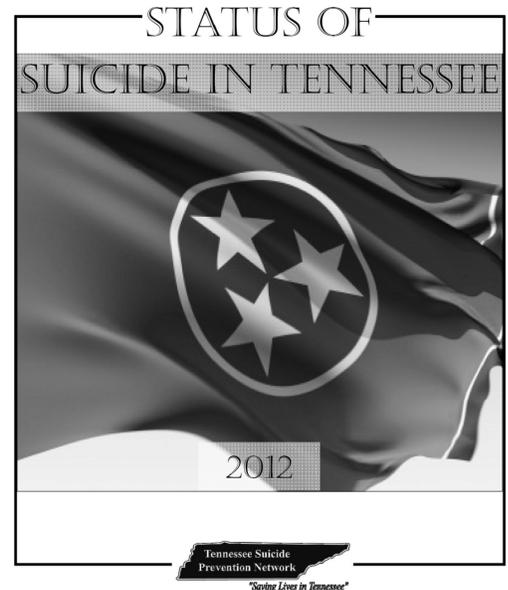
The report includes a detailed report on suicide trends within Tennessee, both overall and for various subgroups. In 2010, the latest year for which state-specific figures are available, Tennessee's age-adjusted suicide rate was 14.7 per 100,000 population, translating into 932 reported suicide deaths. This rate and number are down from previous years but are still above the national average of 11.5 per 100,000 as reported for the year 2008 by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Suicide is the second-leading cause of death within adults aged 25-34 and the third-leading cause among youth aged 15-24, and the fourth-leading cause among children aged 10-14 and adults aged 35-44.

Suicide trends over the past several years are discussed, including stable suicide rates among teens but rising rates through adulthood and midlife. The current trends are also broken down by race and gender—revealing white males to be at greatest risk—and by individual counties. Attention is also given to the nature of non-fatal versus fatal attempts and common suicide methods—almost two-thirds of all suicides in Tennessee involve a firearm.

The document also includes a summary of common suicide risk factors and an account of TSPN's suicide prevention projects. Special mention is given to last year's 10th Anniversary Symposium. Over 250 people attended this event, held April 29 at Trevecca Community Church in Nashville, which was highlighted by the presentation of a joint resolution from the Tennessee General Assembly honoring the Network for its ten years of service to the people of Tennessee. The resolution was presented by Beth Harwell, Speaker of the House of the State of Tennessee, and it received a public reading on the floor of the State Senate on March 30.

The report concludes with a listing of suicide numbers and rates for all 95 Tennessee counties for the years 2005 through 2010.

Status of Suicide in Tennessee 2012 will be published online via the TSPN website. The Network would like to thank the Office of Health Statistics within the Tennessee Department of Health for its assistance in developing the new report, as well as Dustin Keller of the Tennessee Commission on Children and Youth.



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TSPN MEMBER DISCUSSES SUICIDE LOSS IN HER NEW BOOK

TSPN member and volunteer Cindy Curtis Johnson has published a book on recovery from grief and loss from the Christian perspective. The book deals extensively with the 2009 suicide death of her son Brandon and the aftermath.

Turning Tragedy into Hope: Becoming the Person You Never Even Imagined You Could Be was published on December 20 by CrossBooks, a division of LifeWay. It is available in both paperback and hardcover via the CrossBooks website (<http://bookstore.crossbooks.com>).

In Johnson's book, she explains how her her experiences after Brandon's death and her Christian faith led her to confront past trauma and present-day conflicts with others. Johnson also shares how recovery from tragedy helped her realize her inner strength and full potential. "As a professional, Cindy knows that this process can empower anyone suffering from loss," explains the overview on the CrossBooks website. "She doesn't stop there, though. She not only illuminates a path that will help you understand tragedy's place in your life, but also encourages you to use this time to think seriously and specifically about the person you want to become now. Join Cindy on her journey of healing and hope as you identify God's plan for you."

A Fayetteville native, Johnson is the Community Education Director at Behavioral HealthCare Center in Clarksville. Since Brandon's death, Johnson has provided numerous presentations on suicide prevention within TSPN's Mid-Cumberland Region, and recently began leading suicide prevention training sessions for local schools and civic groups.

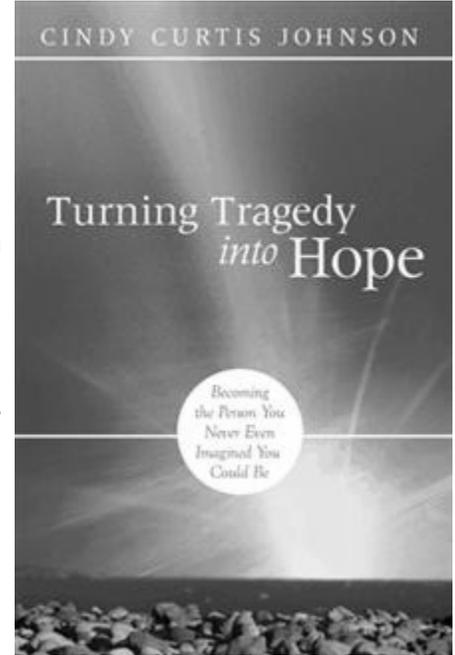


Image of book cover courtesy of Crossbooks.

JFI HELPS TENNESSEE GUARD DEVELOP SMARTPHONE APPLICATION



Jason Foundation President/CEO Clark Flatt talks about the new smartphone application as Maj. Gen. Max Haston of the Tennessee National Guard looks on (photo courtesy wpln.org).

The Tennessee National Guard has consulted with the Jason Foundation, Inc., to develop a smartphone application that can connect soldiers with licensed counselors 24 hours a day.

The Guard authorized the development of the application following a rise in the number of Guard members threatening self-harm. There have been six confirmed suicides among Guard troops since 2005, according to a December 13 report on the application by WPLN, a.k.a. Nashville Public Radio.

The new smartphone application is patterned after a similar application offered by the National Guard that facilitates a buddy system by which soldiers can check on each other and get help if they or another Guard member demonstrates suicide warning signs. The one offered by the Tennessee Guard will connect its members with a counselor no matter where they are deployed within Tennessee. "We're not on post. We don't have that immediate response, so we have to work harder to maintain contact with our airmen and our soldiers," explains Maj. Gen. Max Haston in the Internet version of the WNPL report. "So that's what this application and this battle buddy, wing man concept will do." The application may be picked up by other state National Guard units if it produces satisfactory results.

JFI President/CEO Clark Flatt (an Emeritus member of TSPN's Advisory Council) appeared at the Tennessee Guard's Nashville headquarters on December 13, along with Haston, to introduce the application to Guard members and explain how it works. JFI is a nationally recognized youth suicide prevention education agency that furnishes curricula and materials to schools across the United States. Based in Hendersonville, JFI routinely partners with TSPN for local and statewide projects. More information about JFI is available via its website (www.jasonfoundation.com).

FACEBOOK LAUNCHES INTERACTIVE CRISIS CHAT PROGRAM

Facebook has launched a program that can connect users with a crisis counselor via the site's instant messaging system, in order to help users who think one of their friends may be at risk for suicide.

Facebook, which has approximately 800 million users globally, already offered information on the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline (1-800-273-TALK) and recommendations to contact local law enforcement if a user believed someone was planning to harm themselves or others. But the new feature lets users report posts with troubling or suicidal content directly to Facebook. The system then sends the original commenter an e-mail encouraging them to call the Lifeline. The message also includes a link for a instant and confidential chat session with a trained counselor. (See the inset on page 5 of this publication for instructions on reporting suicidal posts directly from the user's page and using the Facebook Help Center.)



"One of the big goals here is to get the person in distress into the right help as soon as possible," Fred Wolens, public policy manager at Facebook, said in a December 13 Associated Press article on the program. Lidia Bernik, Associate Project Director for the Lifeline, explained that the service is perfect for people who need help but are anxious about telling someone directly. "We've heard from many people who say they want to talk to someone but don't want to call. Instant message is perfect for that," she said.

The introduction of the new chat program follows several high-profile suicide incidents involving Facebook. These included a California murder-suicide incident in November where a man posted his suicide note to the site shortly before killing his wife, in-laws, and himself. Also in July, police in Pennsylvania successfully intervened in a suicide crisis after receiving a tip-off from one of the man's Facebook friends in California regarding a disturbing post.

Facebook joins other online companies in providing suicide prevention resources to users. Online searches for "suicide" on Google and on Yahoo automatically bring up the Lifeline as the first result.

TSPN provides useful links and updates regarding its projects across the state via its own Facebook page. We would also like to thank Barbara Medlock of the American Association of Suicidology for her help in outlining the reporting process.

PETITION ENCOURAGES FUNDING FOR FIREARM BACKGROUND CHECKS



A petition encouraging Congress's full funding of the National Instant Criminal Background Check System (NICS) has attracted over 100 signatures since it was started last month.

NICS is a database managed by the FBI which is used by Federal Firearms Licensees (FFLs) to perform background checks on prospective buyers of firearms or explosives. The database includes information on people with severe mental illnesses who are not eligible to make these purchase. The program was established in 1998 and has prevented approximately 700,000 people from obtaining weapons that might have ultimately been used in homicides or suicides.

However, the Mental Health Action Network (MHAN) estimates that there are about one million people with severe mentally illness who should be in the NICS but are not. MHAN argues that this is due to the Congress's repeated undersourcing of the NICS Improvement Amendments Act of 2007, which supports funding for the program.

"We call on Congress to fully fund the NICS Improvement Amendments Act of 2007. Additionally, we call on all Governors to ensure that all severely mentally ill individuals are reported to the FBI for inclusion in the NICS database," reads the petition text, which was authored by MHAN founder Marcus Lackey.

MHAN is a mental health advocacy organization headquartered in Gulf Breeze, Florida. Its current objective is a reduction in the number of firearm suicides. According to the CDC, there were 18,223 suicide deaths involving a firearm in the U.S. in 2008, accounting for 51% of all suicide deaths that year. The CDC also estimates that 90% of persons who die by suicide have a diagnosable mental illness.

More information about MHAN is available at the group's website (www.mentalhealthactionnetwork.org). The petition itself is available on change.org.

STUDY PROBES PROTECTIVE FACTORS IN AFRICAN-AMERICAN WOMEN

African-American women at risk for suicide can be prevented from future self harm when professionals support their strengthen their sense of spiritual well-being and other protective factors that give them reasons for living, according to a recent cultural competency study out of the Emory University School of Medicine.

Researchers interviewed approximately 160 low-income African-American women in the Atlanta area who had attempted suicide within the past 12 months. They analyzed the roles of five potential protective factors that could give the subjects reasons for living that kept them from making repeat suicide attempts—the ability to cope with stress, the subject's belief in her ability to provide for her family emotionally and materially, spiritual well-being, support from family and friends, and a sense of general optimism.

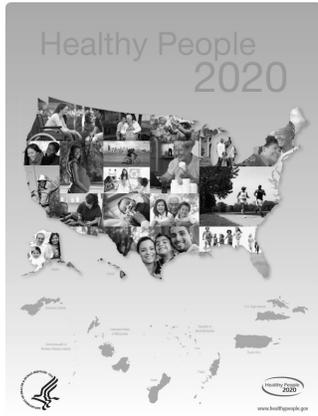
After controlling for all other factors, they found that women who reported a strong sense of spiritual well-being were nearly seventeen times more likely to claim reasons for living than women without this protective factor. They were even more likely to report reasons for living if this source of spiritual strength was available along with two or more of other protective factors studied. Some of these factors were more effective than others—for example, optimism and social support proved more valuable than coping skills or ability to obtain needed resources.

The researchers conclude that therapists and clergy counseling African-American women after prior suicide attempts should try to support their client's sense of inner peace and spiritual strength, while at the same time trying to help them develop more optimistic outlooks and enhancing their sources of social support, such as their family, friends, and church communities.

The citation for this study is as follows: West, L. M., et al. (2011). "Let me count the ways": fostering reasons for living among low-income, suicidal, African American women. *Suicide and Life-Threatening Behavior* 41(5), 491-500.

"...(W)omen who reported a strong sense of spiritual well-being were nearly seventeen times more likely to claim reasons for living..."

CDC REVIEWS PROGRESS ON HEALTHY PEOPLE 2010 OBJECTIVES



Healthy People 2020 objectives are available on the program website (www.healthypeople.gov).

A CDC analysis of the Healthy People 2010 project finds that while the program did not reach its goals for youth suicide prevention, efforts made towards that goal led to a substantial decrease in youth suicide attempts requiring medical attention.

Established by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services in 1979, the Healthy People program sets 10-year objectives for the improvement of public health in the United States. Violence and injury prevention was a major part of the 2010 round of the program, and one of the mandates for this category was the reduction in the rate of high-school-age youth suicide attempts as measured by the CDC's National Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS). (Data from state YRBSs, including the one administered in Tennessee schools, are incorporated into the national survey.)

A review of YRBSs from 1999 to 2009 found a decrease in the number of youth surveyed who reported requiring medical attention for suicide attempt injuries during the previous 12 months, from 2.6% to 1.9%. While the final results missed the Healthy People 2010 goal of 1.0%, they represent a 27% decrease in the number of critical-injury youth suicide attempts. The decline was seen in all race, sex, and age subgroups analyzed by the YRBS, although the study did note a rise in attempts among Hispanic students between 1999 and 2003 which ebbed in later years.

The researchers concluded that the last ten years' progress was due to a strategic nationwide youth suicide prevention effort that included gatekeeper training for school personnel, school-based training programs that teach students problem-solving and coping skills, and school-based mental health screening programs that identify high-risk students.

A copy of the full report is hosted on the website of the National Center on Domestic and Sexual Violence (http://www.ncdsv.org/images/AJPM_HealthyPeople2010ObjsUnintentionalInjuryViolenceAmongAdolescents_12-2011.pdf). The citation for the report is as follows: Olsen, E.O., et al. (2011). Healthy People 2010 objectives for unintentional injury and violence among adolescents: trends from the National Youth Risk Behavior Survey, 1999–2009. *American Journal of Preventative Medicine* 41(6): 551-558.

TSPN REGIONAL CALENDAR

No December meetings are scheduled unless otherwise marked. Dates in **bold and in maroon** indicate alternate meeting dates intended to accommodate state holidays or other previously scheduled events.

East Tennessee Region

monthly, 3rd Thursday, 12:00 PM

Mental Health Association of East Tennessee, Inc., 9050 Executive Park Drive, Suite 104-A, Knoxville, 37923

January 19, February 16, March 15, April 19, May 17, June 21, July 19, August 16, September 20, October 18, and November 15

Memphis/Shelby County Region

monthly, 3rd Tuesday, 11:30 AM

Benjamin L. Hooks Central Library, 3030 Poplar Avenue, Memphis, 38111

January 17, February 21, and March 20

The Community Foundation of Greater Memphis, 1900 Union Avenue, Memphis, 38104

April 17, May 15, June 19, July 17, August 21, September 18, October 16, and November 20

Mid-Cumberland Region

monthly, 2nd Thursday, 9:30 AM

Goodwill Industries of Middle Tennessee, Inc., 937 Herman Street, Nashville, 37208

January 12, February 9, March 8, April 12, May 10, June 14, July 12, August 9, September 13, October 11, and November 8

Northeast Region

monthly, 4th Tuesday, 10:30 AM

Boone's Creek Christian Church, 305 Boone's Creek Road, Gray, 37615

January 24, February 28, March 27, April 24, May 22, June 26, July 24, August 28, September 25, October 23, and November 27

Rural West

monthly, 3rd Wednesday, 10:30 AM

Behavioral Health Initiatives, 36C Sandstone Circle, Jackson, 38305

January 18, February 15, March 21, April 18, May 16, June 20, July 18, August 15, September 19, October 17, and **November 14**

South Central

monthly, 2nd Monday, 11:00 AM

Conference Room A, South Central Regional Health Office, 1216 Trotwood Avenue, Columbia, 38401

January 9, February 13, March 12, April 9, May 14, June 11, July 9, August 13, September 10, **October 15, November 19,**

and December 10

Southeast Region

monthly, 1st Thursday, 10:00 AM

Johnson Mental Health Center, 420 Bell Avenue Chattanooga, 37405

January 5, February 2, March 1, April 5, May 3, June 7, July 5, August 2, September 6, October 4, November 1, and December 6

Upper Cumberland Region

monthly, 4th Thursday, 9:00 AM

Volunteer Behavioral Health Care Systems, 1200 Willow Avenue, Cookeville, 38502

January 26, February 23, March 25, April 26, May 24, June 28, July 26, August 23, September 27, October 25, and **November 15**

Intra-State Department Meetings

Tennessee Department of Mental Health and Developmental Disabilities, Third Floor Conference Room, Cordell Hull Building, 425 Fifth

Avenue North, Nashville, 37243 (3:00 PM)

March 7, August 8, and November 7

Advisory Council

February 8 (Metro Nashville Hermitage Precinct, 3701 James Kay Lane, Hermitage)

June 6-7 (tentative dates for retreat at Montgomery Bell State Park, Burns)

September 12 (tentative date for Suicide Prevention Awareness Day, location TBA)

Blount County Mental Health Awareness and Suicide Prevention Alliance

monthly, 1st Friday, 12:00 PM

Blount County Health Department Conference Room, 302 McGhee Street, Maryville, TN 37801

January 6, February 3, March 2, **April 13**, May 4, June 1, July 6, August 3, September 7, October 5, November 2, and December 7

Davidson County Suicide Prevention Task Force

monthly, 4th Wednesday, 3:00 PM

January 25, February 22, March 28, April 25, May 23, June 27, July 25, August 22, September 26, October 24, and November 28

Giles County Suicide Prevention Task Force

quarterly, 3rd Monday, 1:30 PM

Giles County Career Center, 125 South Cedar Lane, Pulaski, 38478

March 16, June 15, September 21, and December 21

Hickman-Perry County Suicide Prevention Task Force

monthly, 4th Friday, 1:30 PM

Hickman Community Hospital, Senior Care Building, 135 East Swan Street, Centerville, 37033

January 27, February 24, March 23, April 27, May 25, June 22, July 27, August 24, September 28, October 26, and **November 16**

Reporting Suicidal Content on Facebook

From the User's Page

- From your newsfeed, click on the user's name to go to their page.
- Click on the "Report/Mark as Spam" button in the upper right hand of the comment in question. It only appears after you scroll over the X.
- After clicking the X, you will see a message that says, "Thanks for your feedback. You can undo this action or report it as abusive." Click the option to report.
- On the pop-up screen that comes up next, check the "Violence or harmful behavior" field and scroll down to "Suicidal Content." Click continue.
- Your report will be sent to Facebook and reviewed by the Safety Team, who may send the person who posted the suicidal comment an e-mail encouraging them to call the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline 1-800-273-TALK (8255) or to click on a link to begin a confidential chat session with a crisis worker.

Using the Facebook Help Center

- Go to the collection of tabs in the upper right hand corner of the page.
- Click on the arrow on the far right and scroll down to the "Help" option.
- Click on "Report Abuse or Policy Violations".
- Under "Surface Safety and Privacy Concerns" (fourth set of links down), click "Helping Someone Who Posts Suicidal Content".
- The question "How do I help someone who has posted suicidal content on the site?" (fifth question down) will be highlighted; follow the instructions and links provided.

ADVISORY COUNCIL CONTACT INFORMATION

If you are interested in getting involved with TSPN on a local level or have other questions, contact the chairperson of your region as indicated by the map provided below:

East Tennessee region

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(865) 216-9884

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Memphis and Shelby County

Madge Tullis
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