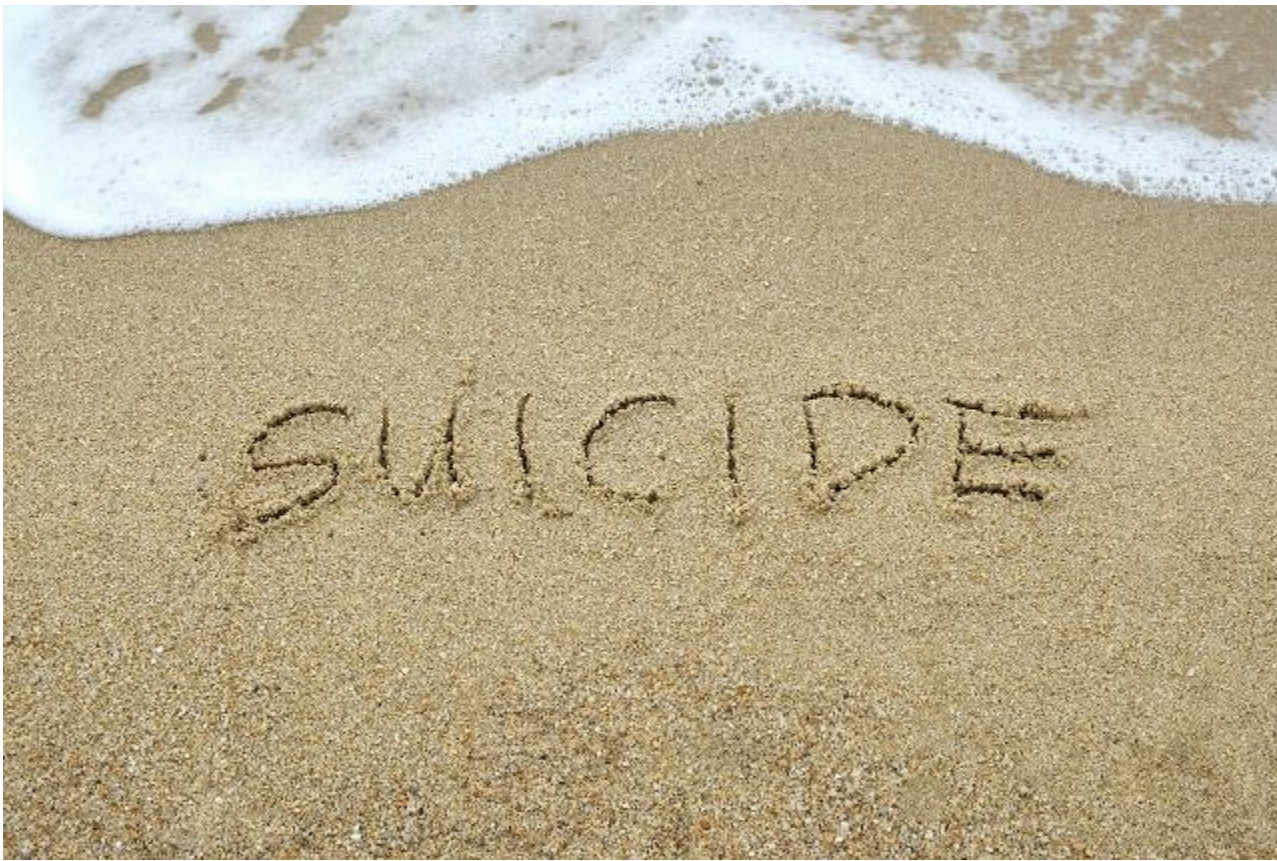


Madison County To Host Suicide Prevention Awareness Event

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EDWARDSVILLE — Katie Wilson thought she was going to die — she planned to take her own life, but instead called a friend for help.

Wilson, who suffered from suicidal ideation, admitted herself into the hospital and now looks back on that day as her “re-birth.”

“In June, I celebrated my 5th birthday, or re-birth,” Wilson said. “I consider myself lucky because that day changed my life. I’m alive because I reached out for help.”

Wilson will share her story on Friday for Madison County's Suicide Prevention Awareness event, which also happens to take place on World Suicide Prevention Day.

The Madison County Mental Health Board and the Veterans Assistance Commission are hosting the event that starts at noon in the lobby of the Administration Building, 157 N. Main St., Edwardsville. Behavioral health and veterans affairs resource providers will have tables set up with information, giveaways, and raffles.

Chairman Kurt Prenzler will read a proclamation starting at 2 p.m. followed by Wilson and several speakers to include Coroner Stephen Nonn.

"Suicide is a public health crisis," Madison County Mental Health Board Executive Director Deborah Humphrey said. "It does not care about age, gender, or sex."

Humphrey September is National Suicide Prevention Awareness Month and it's a time to draw attention to the problem of suicide and to advocate for the prevention of it.

During the past 10 years (2010 to 2020) the Coroner's Office recorded 412 suicide deaths. In 2019, local mental health providers screened more than 2,600 county residents who were positive for suicide risk.

Humphrey said the collected information demands attention and action for community-wide awareness on suicide and prevention education. In an effort to raise awareness about this national health problem, Humphrey said the stigma around mental illness and the shame people feel as a result needs to change and it's often is a reason a person doesn't ask for help.

"Suicide is a human issue and we need to do what we can by having difficult conversations," Humphrey said.

VAC Superintendent Brad Lavite said veterans are especially at risk, because so many are afraid to come forward for fear of the stigma attached to it.

For the past two years, Lavite said in response to the President's Roadmap to Empower and End National Tragedy of Suicide (PREVENTS) developed the Madison County Veterans Crisis Response Program. On March 5, 2019, the president signed Executive Order 13861, known as PREVENTS, and created an interagency task force to lead the development and implementation of a national, comprehensive roadmap to change how our nation treats mental health and understands suicide prevention.

The VAC's Crisis Response Program trains first responders on how to handle veterans in distress and crisis in real-time. In 2020, the program responded to 14 case referrals.

“When a veteran is emotionally wounded and diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and experiences stress, it can trigger an emotional crisis and bring about thoughts of suicide, attempting suicide or death,” Lavite said.

Wilson said she is looking forward to sharing her story on mental health and everything she’s gone through in hopes that it will help others.

“No one should have to go through it alone,” she said.

She said on the brighter note, the friend who took her to the hospital was there for her and three years later they were married.

“Last week I spent my 31st birthday at Disney World,” she said. “The little things to some people are what mean the most to me because I didn’t think I would be here today.”