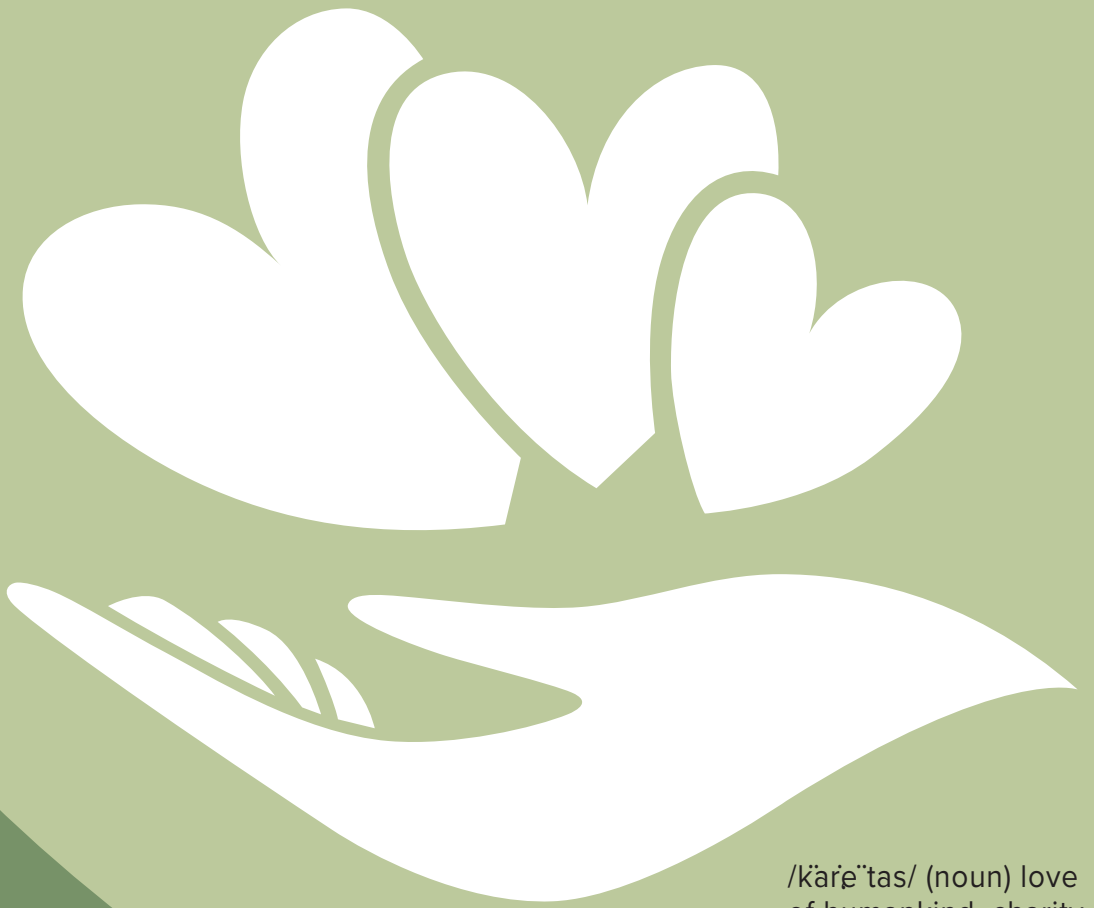


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/kăre'tas/ (noun) love of humankind, charity.

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Students of the Pre-PA Club at Utah Valley University take a tour of their local food pantry. They then delivered food orders to clients across Utah County.

Utah Crisis Food Response mobilizes to fight hunger

Aimee L. Cook
Caritas Quarterly

In March 2020, three college students in Utah recognized a pressing need in their community. Initially, their aim was simple and temporary — to deliver food and prescription medications to elderly and quarantined individuals during the COVID-19 pandemic. What began as a modest volunteer network quickly evolved into a lifeline for many, growing beyond its initial scope to address a much larger issue.

“Our mission is to ensure that no individual, family or community goes unfed,” said John Lindsay, executive director of Utah Crisis Food Response. “We partner with existing food pantries to provide

home delivery for clients who struggle to pick up food for themselves. We are a third-party delivery network.”

One such food pantry partner is Tabitha’s Way, named after a Bible scripture beloved by its founder. Tabitha’s Way opened in 2010, operates three local food pantries located in the south and north ends of Utah County and a mobile pantry in Payson. Tabitha’s Way recognizes that the need for food assistance may be temporary, yet the demand for a local food pantry remains constant.



This is due to the unpredictable challenges that can lead to food insecurity, which transcend socioeconomic boundaries.

Hungry individuals often come from all walks of life, and many are hardworking neighbors who find themselves in tough situations. Notably, children represent one of the largest groups served, highlighting the urgent necessity of this crucial support

system.

“The general public doesn’t always understand who is food insecure and why these situations hap-

pen; there are a lot of preconceived notions,” said Wendy Osborne, founder and executive director of Tabitha’s Way. “We had a gentleman who biked 18 miles to get to our food pantry for food. By the time he got here, he looked awful.”

Tabitha’s Way sources food through grocery rescue, picking up food from local grocery stores, restaurants, growers and food manufacturers. The rescued food is excess — perfectly good to eat — but surplus. Tabitha’s Way also purchases food through grant money — close to \$800,000.

“One of the obstacles we face is getting the food to the people who

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need it, the people who can't come to the food pantry to pick it up," Osborne said. "Our partnership with Utah Crisis Food Response is absolutely critical to us. When we saw what this partnership filled, we knew it had to continue. We desperately needed a way to do this, and they provide an essential service to allow us to help those individuals."

During the early days of the pandemic, the founding trio mobilized a small but dedicated group of volunteers to help those in need. They were not looking to create a nonprofit organization; their objective was merely to assist at-risk individuals through a crisis. However, as their efforts expanded, it became clear that the need for food assistance was far greater than they initially anticipated. This realization prompted them to build something more permanent.

The transition from a temporary volunteer network to a registered 501(c)(3) nonprofit was a natural progression.

"It really began as us wanting to do some good with our spare time by delivering groceries to elderly people who couldn't leave the house during the pandemic; we were really just running errands for people," said Lindsay. "After a month, we built a volunteer network, and people really wanted to be involved. They reached out through Facebook, texts, friends and family. The executive director of United Way called us and encouraged us to shift our focus and efforts."

Utah Crisis Food Response has grown to become a vital resource for the communities it serves. Today, volunteers deliver nearly

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Aimee L. Cook is an award-winning journalist with a passion for lifestyle, culture and entertainment. Her work has appeared in numerous publications across the Western region, offering insightful perspectives on diverse topics that aim to captivate and engage audiences.



Utah Crisis Food Response volunteers attend a recent outreach event.



Volunteers at a Salt Lake City food pantry are preparing to load the cars of volunteers as they arrive for pickup. All volunteers will then deliver the food to clients at their homes.



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Utah Crisis Food Response receives the 2023 “Cougs Care” award through Mountain America Credit Union at a Brigham Young University basketball game last season.

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4,000 meals per week to clients in Utah and Salt Lake County. Since its inception, the organization has delivered approximately 700,000 meals to thousands of people across the Wasatch Front. The impact is not only measured in meals but also in volunteer hours — nearly 4,000 hours have been dedicated to serving the community over the past three years.

Utah Crisis Food Response readily provides food to individuals in need. To access services, clients register on the organization’s website, where they can find information about eligibility and available resources. It’s important to note that operations hinge on the guidelines set forth by the food pantries the organization collaborates with. By working within these established rules, Utah Crisis Food Response ensures that assistance is delivered effectively and fairly to those who require it most.

A Community Effort

The success of Utah Crisis Food Response is a testament to the power of community and volunteerism.

What began as a simple effort to help during a crisis has transformed into a robust network of volunteers and partners committed to fighting hunger. Currently upwards of 168 volunteers are fulfilling 80 orders per week in designated areas.

“We saw something online that they (Utah Crisis Food Response) needed help delivering food to peo-

ple who couldn’t get food from the food banks themselves, said Lenore and John Ashby, volunteers since 2022. “We just saw a need; we love meeting the people. The gratitude of the people is always really touching. You can sure tell when you knock on a door that the need is there.”

Utah Crisis Food Response plans to be around for the long haul.

The organization is committed to expanding its reach and services to ensure that no one in Utah goes hungry. By continually adapting and growing, it aims to provide consistent and reliable support to those in need.

For more information or to get involved, visit <https://www.utahcrisisfoodresponse.com/>.



UCFR volunteers wait in line for food orders to be loaded into their vehicles for delivery.



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Jordan Education Foundation

Investing in our youth

Aimee L. Cook
Caritas Quarterly

Established in 1986, the Jordan Education Foundation (JEF) is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization dedicated to supporting school-age children. Headquartered in West Jordan, JEF is committed to enhancing the educational experiences and outcomes for nearly 67,400 students across 70 schools. Of those children, over 2,500 are designated homeless.

The vision and mission of JEF encapsulate a community fulfilling the promise of potential in every child every day. By engaging the community, JEF provides essential resources to enrich educational experiences, strengthen students and fuel success within the Jordan School District.

The Jordan School District covers funding for the JEF staff; however, funding for the programs comes from donations, partnerships and fundraisers throughout the year. The biggest fundraiser is a yearly golf tournament, which nets about \$100,000.

“We work with other family foundations, like the Larry H. Miller Cos. Foundation; Dell Loy Hansen has been fantastic to work with. A lot of groups will ask us what our needs are,” said Mike Haynes, execu-

utive director of Jordan Education Foundation. “We have really broadened awareness and now when teachers have needs, we get a call that will address a student’s unique challenge. Last year, a teacher called for a student with dental issues without insurance. Within an hour, we were able to get them to a dentist for free. There are so many needs.”

JEF has made significant strides in various areas, contributing to the holistic development and success of students within the district. The areas of focus for JEF are:

- **Health and Wellness.**

Recognizing the crucial link between health and academic performance, JEF ensures that students are classroom-ready by addressing basic health and wellness needs. This includes providing eyeglasses, hearing aids, dental care, food, hygiene products and clothing through Principal’s Pantries.

- **Scholarships and Student Support.** JEF is committed to boosting graduation rates and supporting students’ futures by funding programs designed to enhance educational outcomes. Additionally, the foundation offers scholarship opportunities to deserving students, helping them pursue higher education and career goals.

- **Classroom Grants.** To foster innovation and creativity in teaching,

JEF provides financial support to educators through classroom grants. These grants open doors for students by facilitating unique, hands-on learning experiences that go beyond traditional curricula.

- **Recognizing Excellence.** JEF takes pride in recognizing and celebrating exceptional educators and support staff. By highlighting their outstanding contributions, the foundation fosters a culture of excellence and motivation within the district.

- **Educational Programs.** Beyond the core subjects, JEF supports vital district programs in art, music, STEM and leadership. By funding these initiatives, the foundation ensures a well-rounded education that nurtures diverse talents and interests.

- **Pantry.** JEF recognizes the importance of addressing food insecurity among students, which can significantly impact their ability to learn and thrive. To combat this issue, the foundation operates food pantries that provide nutritious food options to families in need. Additionally, JEF offers weekend food packs to ensure that children have access to meals even when school is not in session. These packs contain wholesome, easy-to-prepare items that help alleviate hunger during critical times, allowing students to focus on their education rather

than worrying about where their next meal will come from.

“We help students who don’t have enough food or things that they need,” said Robyn Luke, JEF’s food pantry manager/homeless liaison. “We have coats, jackets, shoes, hygiene products — pretty much anything they need, we can get. Our students are No. 1, but if there is a new family that doesn’t have anything, we let them come in and ‘shop.’ Then we give information that can help them further. I love what I do, I love lifting people.”

- **Christmas for Kids Sub for Santa Program.** Running 10 years strong, the Christmas for Kids Sub for Santa program is an initiative that brings joy and holiday cheer to underprivileged children in the community. Over the past decade, this program has provided gifts to middle school and high school students. In 2023, 620 students shopped with a volunteer chaperone.

“The students are lined up with volunteers, many of whom speak a different language [other than English], who speak their language, and they spend time shopping with the donated \$150,” said Haynes. “This has been really cool because

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at the end of this experience, we interview the kids, and what they are most excited about was spending time with the adult who had an interest in getting to know them.”

• **Unified Sports.** JEF continues to innovate and expand its support for students. One exciting project is the Unified Sports, powered by Special Olympics and championed by Utah’s first lady Abby Cox. This initiative aims to bring inclusivity and camaraderie to school sports, enabling students of all abilities to participate and excel within unified teams, where kids with and without disabilities play together.

“Our goal is to be the first school district in Utah to be a banner school recognized by the Special Olympics,” Haynes said. “First lady Abby Cox comes out regularly to our events and kicks them off.”

Cox’s dedication to inclusivity and education is deeply rooted in her academic background. She attended Utah State University, where she earned her degree in special education with a dual emphasis in early childhood and severe disabilities. This specialized education has equipped her with the knowledge and skills needed to advocate effectively for students of all abilities, further enriching her efforts with Unified Sports and other inclusive initiatives.

“My goal has been to bring this to the forefront of school districts and, in their minds, to show them how important it is to the culture of their schools and really to help



Pictured is the Jordan Education Foundation central food pantry in West Jordan, where food is collected during the year and distributed to each of the 70 district schools.

them achieve the goals that they already have. Most of them want to have a mission of inclusion,” said Cox. “What we need is this ability to compete. Our typical developing kiddos are talking about the experiences of seeing life in a new way. Special Olympics Unified Sports really has the ability to change the world.”

The impact of JEF is made possible by the support of individuals and businesses. There are several ways to contribute:

- Volunteering. Volunteer time and skills can make a significant



Holiday Oil employees and stores held a food drive to benefit students dealing with food insecurity and then dropped their donation off at the Jordan School District offices in West Jordan. Pictured here are members of the Jordan Education Foundation staff along with Holiday Oil’s management and marketing team.

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Members of the 2023-24 school year board of directors of the Jordan Education Foundation get a little silly as they pose for a group photo. Board members volunteer to serve at least three years.



Jordan Education Foundation board member Nathan Evershed presents a check representing the value of all of the classroom grants that were awarded and funded at Rosamond Elementary School in Riverton. He poses with all of the teachers at Rosamond that received funding for their grants.

directly to funding health and wellness programs, scholarships, classroom grants and other educational initiatives.

The Jordan Education Foundation exemplifies the power of community in shaping the future of education. Through its comprehensive support for students and educators, JEF not only improves educational outcomes but also instills values of integrity, leadership, and community spirit.

For more information on how you can get involved, visit <https://www.jordaneducationfoundation.org/>.

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difference. Whether it's helping at events, supporting classroom activities, or mentoring students, volunteering opportunities are varied and rewarding.

- Donations. Both in-kind and monetary donations are crucial for JEF's operations. Contributions go



Utah first lady Abby Cox speaks to participants gathered at Glenmoor Golf Club in South Jordan for the Jordan School District's golf event for the district's 13 middle schools.



Jordan Education Foundation

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Jordan Education Foundation

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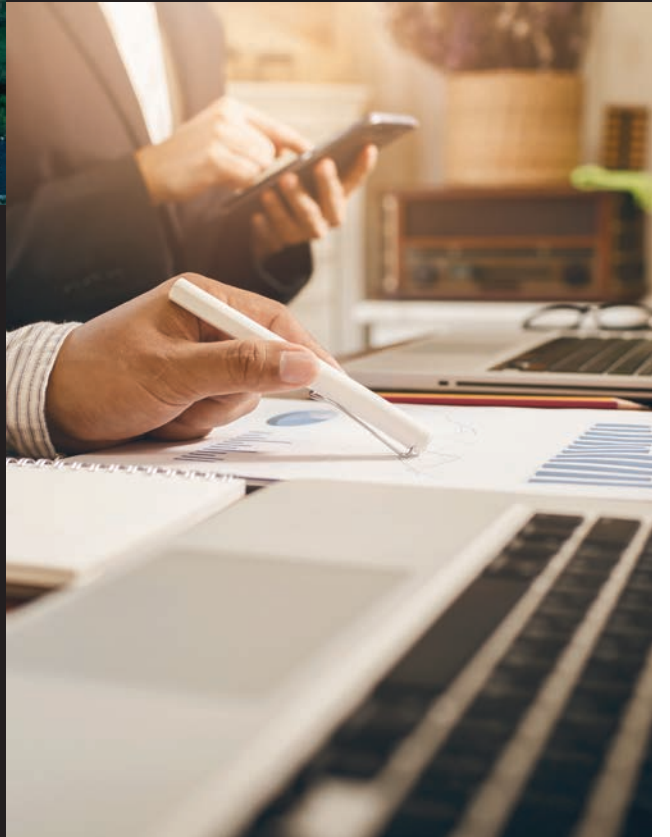
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American Foundation for Suicide Prevention

Utah

Innovative suicide prevention programs are hallmark of Utah Chapter of AFSP

Aimee L. Cook
Caritas Quarterly

In an era when mental health challenges are increasingly prevalent, the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention (AFSP) stands out with its innovative suicide prevention programs. Dedicated to saving lives and bringing hope to those affected by suicide, AFSP has pioneered a range of initiatives that foster support, education and understanding.

Established in 1987, AFSP is a voluntary health organization that provides those affected by suicide with a nationwide community empowered through research, edu-

cation, and advocacy to take action against this leading cause of death. AFSP is committed to saving lives and offering hope to those impacted by suicide, including individuals who have experienced a loss. By engaging in core strategies such as funding scientific research, educating the public about mental health and suicide prevention, advocating for public policies in this domain and supporting survivors of suicide loss, AFSP creates a culture that is informed and proactive about mental health.

Since its inception, AFSP has mobilized and connected tens of thousands of individuals affected by suicide, reached at-risk populations and their loved ones and engaged the scientific and clinical communities



A couple pauses to contemplate what suicide has meant in their lives during the annual "Out of the Darkness Walk" sponsored by the Utah Chapter of the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention.

in pioneering research. The foundation has established local chapters across all 50 states; Puerto Rico; and Washington, D.C., while educating numerous communities on suicide prevention. Additionally, AFSP has enhanced its advocacy efforts by merging with a national policy organization, enabling it to influence legislation at various government

levels. The organization has significantly boosted funding through individual donations, including thousands involved in the Out of the Darkness Walks, and has improved the media's understanding of responsible suicide reporting, reaching hundreds of thousands through diverse communication channels.

"Our mission is to help save lives and to bring hope and support to those affected by suicide," said Catina Struble, executive director of AFSP's Utah chapter. "Someone dies by suicide every 40 seconds; for us to be out there and offering the programs that we do, just to create the awareness and try to break that stigma of asking for help, it is huge."

July 16 marked the second anniversary of the 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline that was established in Utah. Since its launch in July 2022, this



Boards spell out the theme of the annual "Out of the Darkness Walk" sponsored by AFSP. Sticky Notes are provided for patrons to leave messages of their own experiences dealing with suicide.

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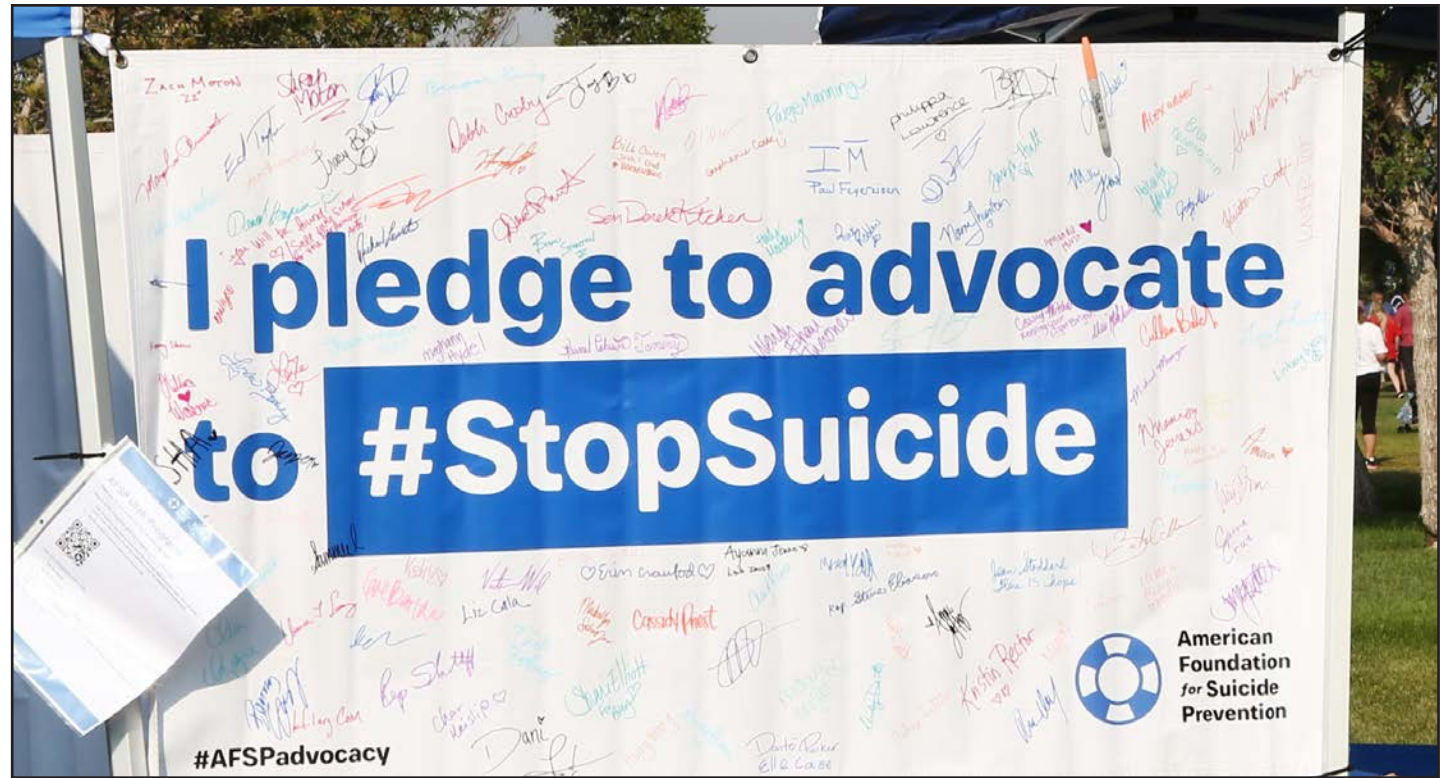
three-digit code has replaced a longer 10-digit number and has received over 9.5 million contacts, including calls, chats and texts. Trained counselors provide vital support, share local resources and connect individuals to care during critical moments.

“I have personally lost several family members to suicide, who felt like there was no other option,” Struble said. “For us to be out there letting people know there are other options, that they are not alone, is why I am here.”

Innovative Approaches to Prevention

AFSP’s commitment to innovation is evident in its multifaceted approach to preventing suicide. The organization invests in research to better understand suicide and its causes, and it uses these insights to develop evidence-based interventions.

One such intervention is the “Talk Saves Lives” program, a com-



AFSP gives attendees at the "Out of the Darkness Walk" a place to show their support for the cause. The group also displays current petitions pertaining to whatever is happening in the state Legislature regarding suicide and/or mental health bills.

munity-based presentation that equips participants with the knowledge and tools to recognize the warning signs of suicide and take action. By fostering open conversations about mental health, AFSP aims to reduce the stigma surrounding suicide and encourage individuals to seek help when needed.

“Talk Saves Lives” is AFSP’s flagship education program aimed at raising awareness about suicide prevention. The presentation covers the scope of suicide, the identified

warning signs and risk factors and effective strategies for prevention. In 2024, it was refreshed based on presenter feedback and insights from both content experts and individuals with lived experience, resulting in a more inclusive format with additional conversation strategies. This adaptable 45-to-60 minute session can be tailored to specific audiences, includ-

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A balloon arch marks the beginning of the Utah Chapter of the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention's annual "Out of the Darkness Walk."



American Foundation for Suicide Prevention

Utah

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American Foundation for Suicide Prevention



being part of the betterment of Utah as a whole. I have a neighbor that I was able to share resources with. I let them know they had an ally up the street.”

Beyond its programs, AFSP fosters a sense of community among those affected by suicide. The annual “Out of the Darkness Walks” bring together thousands of participants across the country to raise awareness and funds for suicide prevention. These events provide a platform for survivors of suicide loss and those with lived experiences of mental health struggles to share their stories and support one another.

Volunteers play a crucial role in the success of AFSP’s initiatives, especially during the seven annual “Out of the Darkness Walks” held across Utah. These events rely heavily on the dedication and commitment of volunteers who help to organize, promote and facilitate the walks. Their efforts not only ensure smooth operations but also foster a welcoming environment for participants, allowing them to share their stories and connect with others who share similar experiences.

By stepping up as leaders and supporters, volunteers embody the spirit of community that AFSP aims to cultivate, making each walk a powerful opportunity for healing, awareness and prevention. Their involvement highlights the collective strength of individuals coming together for a common cause, demonstrating that the fight against suicide is a shared responsibility that requires everyone’s participation.

“If you think someone is struggling, the misconception that you should never ask someone if they are struggling because it will then put the thought into their head — it is a myth,” Anderson said. “If we see someone struggling, the first thing we should ask them is if they are having thoughts of suicide or if they have a plan. That will help us save this individual. It is extremely important to have that open, honest conversation.”

For more information about AFSP’s programs and how to get involved, visit <https://afsp.org/chapter/utah#programs>.

and belonging, reminding them that they are not alone in their journey. Through these connections, many find solace and encouragement to navigate their healing path while honoring the memory of their loved ones.

Brook Anderson works at both the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) as the outreach specialist and volunteers as a board member and co-chair of programs with AFSP. Anderson oversees the suicide prevention grant at NAMI and has had an interest in mental health since childhood. During her early 20s, she experienced a suicide loss from a person close to her.

“Back then, (the early 1990s) there wasn’t a lot of prevention efforts, as far as suicide was concerned,” said Anderson. “As I got older and started getting more involved with the mental health field, I came across AFSP. I just really enjoyed the work; I knew when I was through the loss I had, I really needed someone to help me through

it, educate me and hold my hand so I didn’t feel so alone. It is really fulfilling for me to be that for someone.”

The impact of AFSP’s work is best illustrated through the stories of those it has helped. One such story is that of board member and co-chair of the programs committee, Michael Harris, who lost his daughter, at 14 years old, to suicide in 2019. Through the Healing Conversations program, Harris connected with a volunteer who had also experienced a loss through suicide. Harris became a volunteer for AFSP in March 2024.

“It never goes away; it is a long, tough road,” Harris shared. “I knew I was mentally and emotionally ready to get out there and provide prevention education to communities throughout Utah. It has been very therapeutic for me. Even though I still have hard times, being involved with AFSP, knowing that I can be part of a positive education and awareness and knowing that I am saving lives, helps me to know I am

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ing LGBTQ+ communities, older adults, firearm owners and workplaces, and is available both in-person and online.

Key topics include:

- Scope of the problem: Latest U.S. suicide data.
- Research: Insights into suicide causes, community impacts and risk contributors.
- Prevention: Understanding protective factors that lower risk and strategies for mental health maintenance and self-care.
- What you can do: Provide guidance on recognizing warning signs, initiating conversations and navigating support and crisis resources for yourself or others.

“Healing Conversations”

Healing Conversations gives survivors of suicide loss the opportunity to speak with volunteers who are themselves loss survivors. This program creates a supportive environment where individuals can share their experiences and feelings without judgment. By connecting with those who have faced similar losses, participants are offered empathy, understanding and validation of their grief. The conversations not only help survivors process their emotions but also foster a sense of community



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