

**13. Chillicothe Gazette, (OH)
January 15, 2007**

Headline: A reason to live; New coalition to focus on suicide prevention
By Jona Ison

Jim Butt's life was turned upside down in the spring when his teenage son, Bryant, shot and killed himself before school.

The months since have been trying and disorganized, however Butt has found himself falling into a newly formed coalition that is focusing on showing people reasons to live and spreading awareness of suicide prevention.

"I just want to try to get some education out there as far as suicide," he said, adding that he wonders what may have been different if his son's counselors had had additional training in suicide prevention. "He had talked about suicide before, but then he talked to a counselor, he said he wouldn't do that .. He was such a lovely child, and something just went wrong."

Putting life back together is difficult, but support has been key in getting through it all.

"Just support, family and friends, church and prayer to God," Butt said of how he and his wife have been coping. "The support has been amazing that we have received through all of this."

Although close to the subject, Butt's emotions are still too raw to claim any leadership roles in the Ross County Suicide Prevention Coalition, but he does think he will most likely find himself a spokesperson for the group when the emotions aren't so close to the surface.

Along with Butt, the coalition - initiated by the Paint Valley ADAMH Board in July - is the collaboration of numerous agencies, including law enforcement, social workers, and mental health workers, and is in the beginning stages of organizing.

A \$10,000 grant from The Ohio Suicide Prevention Foundation is seeding the group's start. The way the money will be spent in the community has not yet been decided, but will focus on providing education of suicide prevention.

Juni Frey, director of Paint Valley ADAMH, said suicide prevention has been gaining attention nationwide and as part of that focus, coalitions are being formed in several counties - she is currently training starter groups in seven counties - to help educate and lower the number of deaths by suicide.

"It's a grassroots level where something will happen because people are interested," Frey said. "That's how things get done. If it just develops at the state level, it doesn't work. The state can develop new training and identify clients, that's helpful, but it doesn't energize the community."

Suicide tops homicides as the cause of death nationally with 11 out of every 100,000 dying by suicide, with Ohio recording 1,287 suicides in 2002 and ranking 30th in the nation for number of completed suicides, according to the American Association of Suicidology.

However, the number only reflects completed suicides, not those attempted - Frey said they use a ratio of 25 attempts per completed suicide.

Locally, Barbara Mahaffey, who has an extensive background in mental health over the last 27 years, has been researching data in Ross County so the group has a better grasp of what it is facing. Mahaffey was designated the chair of the coalition at Monday's meeting along with Vicki McFadden. Over the last seven years, 72 suicides have been completed in the county - meaning an estimated 1,800 were attempted during the same time.

"When we looked at the last 3 years (which is needed to properly compare to state and national data), we were really concerned about how high the numbers are," Frey said, adding the coalition was formed prior to looking into the numbers. Although most recent state numbers are not yet released, Frey said Ross County is looking to be above both the national and state percentage of completed suicides.

Mahaffey, who is continuing to look into the numbers of attempted suicides, said part of the increased number of completed suicides in Ross County is the availability of guns.

"I think it is higher because we have a culture that enjoys the freedom of the use of firearms, so they're around and they're available," Mahaffey said, adding that studies have shown that areas with fewer gun restrictions have higher numbers of completed suicides.

Suicide attempts done with guns are more often completed because of the damage guns do versus suicides where pills are taken because those attempts can be thwarted much easier, causing the number of completed suicides by poisoning to be lower.

However, the numbers of overdoses may be skewed locally because many of those incidents are sent to Columbus hospitals, Mahaffey said.

As part of suicide prevention, Mahaffey hopes to impart how important it is that the group - which is in the process of fleshing out a mission, plans, and implementation methods - also focus on post-vention, those people like Butt who are left behind after a suicide and are at a higher risk to commit suicide. She is currently working on a dissertation on the health of suicide survivors.

"Helping people in need has been one of my goals in life," she said.

As for Butt - a businessman - he initially plans to help out on the financial end of the coalition and on eradicating social stigmas surrounding suicide, to get people discussing it.

"How I'm going to help out in the future, I don't know," he said.

<http://www.chillicothe Gazette.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20070114/NEWS01/701140304>