



student-run news site

[HOME](#)
[NEWS ▾](#)
[SPORTS ▾](#)
[CULTURE ▾](#)
[MULTIMEDIA ▾](#)
[LIFESTYLE](#)
[SPECIAL SERIES](#)
[ABOUT US ▾](#)

Loss on the Lawn: Suicide Prevention on Campus

5

BY ABIGAIL BLACK ON SEPTEMBER 18, 2022

NEWS



Photo by Abigail Black

Content Warning: This article contains discussions of suicide and suicide attempts.

Walking by Jefferson Lawn this past Tuesday, it would have been difficult for students and faculty not to notice the event taking place. From 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. on Sept. 13, passersby witnessed backpacks covering Jefferson Lawn. Some were sitting on the sunlit grass, while others were lining the pathways surrounding the exhibit. The large number of backpacks used in this exhibit was striking, and that might be by design since the purpose of this event was the advocacy of suicide prevention.

Send Silence Packing

This event, **Send Silence Packing**, is a program carried out through the non-profit Active Minds. Send Silence Packing was one of a number of events this past week that the **Dyson Wellness Center** (DWC) was hosting in honor of Suicide Prevention Week. The DWC hosts many events related to student health and awareness, such as the **Walk a Mile** event put on in support of sexual assault awareness last spring.

Using over 1000 backpacks for this event, Active Minds calls attention to the college students lost to suicide each year. At least 250 of these 1000 backpacks lined the walkways. The displayed backpacks tell of personal stories of people who experienced loss due to suicide.

INSTAGRAM

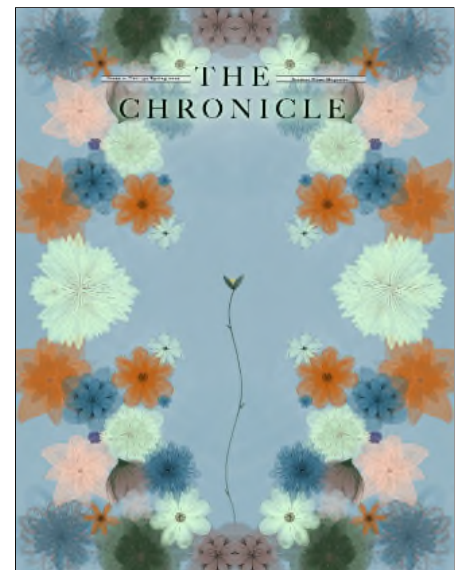


by **chroniclenc**

1 year ago

Once a cardinal, always a cardinal. Congratulations to the Class of 2022! You all are bound to do incredible things. **#cardinalpride** **#wearenc** **#northcentralcollege** **#northcentralgraduation** **#graduation2022** Michael

PRINT ISSUE



[Click Here to Download PDF](#)

Walking along the paths, signs with encouraging sayings could be read while volunteers handed out flyers. The desire for this exhibit is to start discussions on suicide prevention and mental health on college campuses. Using personal stories and the sharing of resources, spreading the message that 'you are not alone' is of central importance to this exhibit.

At the tent in front of the entrance to Wentz Science Center, interested passersby could use the iPads set up to view the organization's Behind the Backpack virtual experience. Interested readers can also view this virtual experience at [Active Minds: Behind the Backpacks](#). In addition to the Active Minds non-profit, other organizations interested in Suicide Prevention turned up. These included [National Alliance on Mental Illness](#) (NAMI) DuPage and the Naperville Police Department.

Active Minds

As mentioned above, [Active Minds](#) is a non-profit organization. In her junior year at the University of Pennsylvania, Alison Malmon initiated what would be the founding of Active Minds. The catalyst for its creation was losing her older brother to suicide during her freshman year. Her brother, Brian, had been struggling with his mental health for years but had never told anyone.

During the years following this tragic event, Malmon noticed the lack of discussion around mental health on campus. As silence due to stigma and shame were one of the reasons Malmon lost her brother, she found herself needing to do something to combat suicide on campus.

At first, a student group known as Open Minds slowly spread and their ideas increased in demand. Eventually creating a national office in Washington, D.C., and becoming an official 501(c)3 organization in 2003, Malmon and her team is helping to ensure the nonjudgmental discussion of mental illness and suicide prevention.

I talked to some of the workers at the event, in particular, a young woman named Claire Bernhard. Claire gave me her own elevator pitch on Active Minds and Send Silence Packing. She was talking about how it aimed at Suicide Prevention by sharing stories and advertising resources on campus.

On a more personal note, Claire began talking about why the Active Minds VAR tool was one of her favorites. VAR, which stands for Validate Appreciate Refer, is a conversation model that you can learn more about on their website ([Active Minds: VAR](#)). This and Send Silence Packing are just a couple of programs Active Minds has implemented to combat suicide.

"(The Active Minds VAR is) an everyday conversational tool that's very impactful and has improved the quality of the relationships in my life," said Bernhard.

Malmon was, of course, not at the event this past Tuesday. But there was a husband and wife, members of the Naperville community who helped bring this exhibit to North Central, that had their own booth. Talking with them injected even more heart and reality into the event.

The Pachas

After I had finished my initial interview, I was asked if I would like to talk to some parents who had lost their son to suicide. It turns out that one of the booths lining the walkway belonged to them and the organization

they founded in honor of their late son. What followed was a second 20-minute, heartfelt interview that I wish I could put here in its entirety.

Linda Pacha was happy to talk to me despite the difficulty of the subject. She and her husband co-sponsored with North Central to bring this event to campus. They have been members of the Naperville community for over 30 years. The importance of this event hits a personal level for them.

In 2013, they lost their son Nick to suicide when he was a freshman in college. One of the backpacks on the lawn near where we were sitting displayed his picture and story. Tom Pacha was the one who explained the significance of the number of backpacks at the event.

"The 1100 backpacks actually represent the number of kids that take their life at college each year. And it's pretty much way underreported, so it's a lot more than that probably," said Pacha.

When talking about the exhibit, Linda stressed the importance of these events. "It's very important to get these resources to let people know that, and let students and let community members know that, our community supports them. That they're not (alone), that there are resources available for (them)," said Pacha. It was also important to them to educate people about the risk factors, warning signs, and the need to reach out. Linda particularly stresses the significance of reaching out.

"There are people who care in the community: peers, professors, mental health department in the college as (well as) in the schools. But if you are suffering from any sort of mental health issue or just going through a tough time in general ... it's so important to reach out and tell someone about it," said Pacha.

This hit extra hard, as Linda explained that their son Nick did not tell anyone he was struggling until just before his death. The story was very similar to that of Malmon's brother, Brian. "We could have helped him," said Malmon. "We could have done more for him."

"Allow the help. That's one of the key messages is that if you feel like you're a burden, that's one of the things that a mental health issue will do is it will trick you into thinking you're a burden to everybody. But you're not, nobody is ever a burden. And that if you are feeling like that, first of all know that it could be your mind playing a trick on you, that you're not and that you need to reach out for the help and it's there," said Linda Pacha.

Linda had a vast array of information and experience related to suicide prevention. It was an honor to discuss the topic with her. In honor of their son, Linda and her husband started a non-profit organization called **Nick's Network of Hope**. Their website hosts a vast array of information, resources and links about challenges people experience.

In addition to this, Linda was asked to write a book. The book is entitled *Saving Ourselves From Suicide: Before and After*. In this book, she tells Nick's story, imploring people to seek and allow help and to be kind to one another.

In preparation for this book, she read through all of the stories shared on livethroughthis.org. She felt she couldn't write the book until she did. Live Through This is a website with pictures and interviews with suicide attempt survivors.

“When you go out and read those stories, it’s a great way to learn and to reduce the stigma around suicide. But what you also realize, is they’re people that look just like you and me. I mean, they’re no different. It’s a cross-section of society, from young to old, and there’s really no target audience. It affects everybody,” said Tom Pacha.

According to her, Valparaiso University is even using the book for one of its suicide prevention classes. And they do not receive money from book sales. They have donated books to schools and student service departments totaling over 1000. All of the proceeds go back into the non-profit and are then used for further suicide prevention. They gave me their book for free, simply saying that if I found it helpful: share it.

“It’s the business of us all to be saving each other from suicide,” said Linda Pacha.

Resources

The DWC is hosting Suicide Prevention Training on Sept. 21 from 2:00-3:30 p.m. on the second floor of Old Main in Smith Hall. The DWC’s phone number is 630-637-5550.

If you or anyone you know is struggling with mental health and/or thoughts of suicide please call 911 or Campus Safety (630-637-5911). For resources outside of the college, there is the 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline (988 or 800-273-8255) and the Crisis Text Line (text “BRAVE” to 741-741).

- Active Minds
- Dyson Wellness Center
- NCC
- North Central College
- Send Silence Packing
- suicide prevention

SHARE.













ABOUT AUTHOR



ABIGAIL BLACK

5 COMMENTS

Pingback: Loss On The Lawn: Suicide Prevention On Campus - NCCLinked | Illinois Digital News

Pingback: Loss on the Lawn: Suicide Prevention on Campus - Brightgram

Pingback: WATCH: The Weekly Update: September 16, 2022 - NCCLinked



CYNTHIA TATE on SEPTEMBER 29, 2022 3:04 PM

I would like to submit my son's backpack for this wonderful event. Would you please tell me how?

Pingback: [On The Record](#) | Cardinal Strong works to end mental health stigma - NCCLinked

NCCLINKED

NCCLinked.com is the student-run news site for the North Central College community. North Central College is a private higher education institution located in Naperville, IL.

SEARCH

Search

ARCHIVES

Select Month

▼