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Save A Life

By **Nancy Pardue**

Don't turn the page just yet — talking about teen suicide won't make it happen, and it could save a life.

Save A Life, the nonprofit founded by Maryanne Monaco and Victoria Bennis in 2010, has been voted by our readers as the 2014 Cary Magazine Gives Back partner.

Both impacted by teen suicide, the women work to prevent this tragedy and break its stigma, by encouraging open communication for teens and adults.

"The problem of teen suicide is widespread," Monaco said. "We try to be out there, to let them know no issue is too small — drugs, friends, bullying, we need to talk about it.

"We tell them, 'You're not the only one, and you can get through this.'"

Monaco lost her 18-year-old son, Justin, to suicide in 2008. He'd been a classmate of Bennis' at Green Hope High.

The following year, Bennis' 16-year-old brother, John, committed suicide too.

Monaco and Bennis set out to raise public awareness of teen suicide — the third leading cause of death among people ages 10 to 24 — and to offer resources.

While they are not professional counselors, both have undergone suicide prevention "gatekeeper" training from the Yellow Ribbon organization, and Bennis completed an ASIST workshop, or Applied Suicide Intervention Skills Training.

As Save A Life, they offer free presentations to schools, youth and civic groups, or anyone interested. The sessions cover mental wellness, self-image, stress management and other issues, provide suicide warning signs and risk factors, and point the way to helpful resources.

Monaco and Bennis have presented at the N.C. Youth Summit and at East Carolina University, and worked alongside the N.C. Youth Suicide Prevention Program, It's OK 2 Ask.

"There isn't a single reason for suicide; everyone has a different story," Monaco said. "We say, 'Come to a presentation, not because you're worried about suicide, but to learn.'"

One student contacted Save A Life on behalf of a friend, and later organized a school event on suicide prevention, and a club where teens can talk openly about their issues.

"We want to raise awareness all across the state of North Carolina. It will make a major impact," Bennis said. "But we need more volunteers to help teach others to be alert, to know the signs and help save a life. Our long-term goal is to have an 'ambassador' in each North Carolina high school, being proactive rather than reactive."

Save A Life is also seeking sponsors for its J + J Save A Life Memorial Scholarship, named for Justin and John; for a fall fundraising gala; and to help provide resources to continue educating the community.

"Victoria approached me with a flier and the story of her brother at a Wake County Board of Education meeting," recalled Cary Mayor Harold Weinbrecht. "The fact that a young lady could take something as personally tragic as a sibling suicide and make something positive out of it was amazing. And it really hit home for me, since one of my daughters at the time was a teen.

"Save A Life is a very important effort," he said, "and I hope everyone will help in any way they can — because the loss of any life that can be saved is one loss too many."

"We don't want other families to go through this," Bennis said. "We care so much about these teens, and want them to know somebody's here."

Visit helpingsavealife.com for more information.



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Raise Awareness

FACT: Suicide is the third leading cause of death among people ages 10-24

FACT: For every suicide death, there are 25 attempts

FACT: Boys commit suicide 4 times as often as girls
Information from the CDC

GET HELP: National Suicide Prevention Lifeline, (800) 273-TALK, suicidepreventionlifeline.org
NC Hopeline (919) 231-4525,
hopeline-nc.org

VOLUNTEER: helpingsavealife.com

Suicide Warning Signs include:

- Losing interest in activities once enjoyed
- Isolation or withdrawal from friends and family
- Changes in mood and personality
- Changes in sleeping habits and appetite
- History of depression
- Alcohol or drug abuse
- Has an organized plan or has previously attempted suicide
- Lack of social support

In its second year, *Cary Magazine Gives Back* seeks to raise awareness for nonprofit organizations serving Western Wake. Readers' votes determine the annual nonprofit partner, and throughout the year *Cary Magazine* will help promote the group's causes, events and needs.

Photography By [Jonathan Fredin](#)

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A great article and non

Submitted by Deborah Gregson (not verified) on Fri, 02/14/2014 - 7:21pm.

A great article and non profit to support. I hope the message of Save A Live will spread way beyond Cary and Wake County, to all of NC. Thank you for your program Cary Magazine Gives Back which helps your local non profits get their message out to a larger public.

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