

UND Out of the Darkness Walk: Shedding light on the importance of suicide prevention and mental health

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Community Organization

- **Partner Organization:** American Foundation for Suicide Prevention (AFSP)
- **Mission:** Save lives and bring hope to those affected by suicide
- **Population Served:** UND and Grand Forks Community and those struggling with mental health and suicide



Personal Growth

Perseverance and Flexibility

- With the uncertainty of COVID-19 in the Spring of 2020, our planning committee overcame many unforeseeable challenges
- We remained adaptable throughout the everchanging planning process
- Paved the way and introduced UND's first virtual Out of the Darkness Campus Walk

Advocacy for an important cause

- Became an advocate for mental health awareness and suicide prevention
- Reduced the stigma surrounding mental health
- Will continue the conversations and raise awareness for suicide prevention

Inclusivity

- Appreciated people's unique perspectives and listened to their stories with empathy
- Joined hands with the community to bring hope to those affected by suicide

Future goal: Continue to support and participate in AFSP events

Community Impact

What we Did:

- Held annual virtual Out of the Darkness campus walk over Zoom
- Raised funds for the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention through on-campus and community events, sponsorships, and walker contributions
- Had a strong social media presence to reach sponsors and the community to raise awareness for suicide prevention and mental health

Why Does it Matter?

- Suicide is the second leading cause of death among people ages 15-24
- Raises awareness about the prevalence of suicide and mental health in the school and community
- Gives people the opportunity to share their stories of struggling and reach those dealing with their own mental health difficulties
- Encourages those who are struggling to reach out for help and support

What Happens to the Funds Raised?

- Support research for mental health across the nation
- Support and create educational and community programs that serve those struggling with suicide and survivors of suicide loss
- Contribute to programs designed to raise awareness and educate people about mental health and suicide prevention
- Advocate for better public policies

Funds Raised	• \$21,040
Recruitment	• 250 Virtual Walkers
Sponsors	• 17 Community Sponsors
Online Engagement	• Over 1000 viewers at online event

Challenges

- Last minute transition to an online platform due to the COVID-19 pandemic
- Maintaining community engagement despite last minute changes to the event
- Balancing importance of building community awareness for suicide prevention with fundraising efforts, especially during the pandemic
- Creating engaging content for the walk event in an online platform with limited resources



Rewards

- Watch the community of Grand Forks come together and support this event despite the last-minute changes
- Realize the widespread impact suicide has on individuals and communities and seeing the importance of creating conversation
- Be able to work closely with the AFSP and learning more about their advocacy and research



Academic Learning

Service Relation to Medical Training

- Acquired a greater understanding on the pervasive effects of suicide on personal and community health
- Improved concise and persuasive communication skills that will translate to patient communication and interviewing
- Recognized that having honest conversations is the first step to preventing lives lost to suicide
- Developed an appreciation for self-care and prioritizing our own mental and physical health

Skills obtained that could not be acquired in a classroom

- Gained a deeper understanding of suicide and mental health by listening to stories from those who struggled with or have been affected by suicide
- Enhanced personal skills including listening, problem solving, organization, coordination, and flexibility
- Instilled an interest in advocating for mental health and suicide prevention



Thanks

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- Thanks to Sam Christopherson and the AFSP -North Dakota Chapter for their support and encouragement of the event
- Thanks to our 2020 community sponsors