

Katie Johnson: Good morning and welcome to Apple A Day, Lake Region and Health Care's Health and Wellness Program where we feature news and information you can use to live a healthier life. I am Katie Johnson, your host and my guest today is Maria Willits. She is the Founder of Shatter the Silence. She's also an LPN in our clinic's psychiatry department, and she's here today to talk about a special event coming up at the end of September.

Good morning Maria.

Maria Willits: Good morning Katie, thank you for having me.

Katie Johnson: Thank you for joining me. We talked last year when this event was coming up and I'm so happy that it's back for another year. It's the Shatter The Silence 5K, tell me a little bit more about the event and how it got started.

Maria Willits: Well, this year's event as in all the past years, is for suicide awareness and prevention that is our purpose is to bring education and resources and awareness to our communities. It originally was started in June of 2010, after the suicide loss of my oldest son Ricky, in April of 2009.

So, it started in [inaudible 00:01:02] as a 5K. There, I organized it for five years, and then I took a couple years break. And when I began working here at Lake Region Healthcare, our hospital Chaplain approached me and requested that I consider organizing a walk for Fergus Falls. So, myself and a group of fantastic folks that I have on the committee are now in the process and we're all geared up to have our second annual.

Katie Johnson: When you talk about the purpose of the event being suicide awareness, I can't help but think about how much suicide's been in the news in the last few months, Kate Spade and Anthony Bourdain, the big names of celebrity suicides happen in the spring. And then, the Center's for Disease Control came out with their report that said that, suicide rates are up virtually all over the country. But, Minnesota and North Dakota both had pretty alarming increases in their suicide rates. According to the report, Minnesota jumped 40% over the last 18 years and North Dakota was up 57%. Those are really troubling numbers and they tell me that the work that you are doing is more important now than ever. More than half of all deaths in 27 states, it said. People had no known mental health condition besides. That's just all just really alarming statistics.

Maria Willits: It is. And given those reports and those numbers, it makes all our work more important than ever. It said that suicide is everyone's business Katie, and that it takes a community to prevent suicide and I wholeheartedly believe this. It truly is a feat too great for one person or just one small group to take on. So it's a collaborative effort of everybody to try and help prevent suicide.

I think it's important to underscore or highlight, more than half of those deaths in those 27 states, the people had no known mental health condition. I think it's

important that people understand this doesn't mean that there wasn't an underlying mental health illness such as, depression. Depression is one of the biggest risk factors of suicide. And I point this out because, I believe there continues to be a prevalence of stigma surrounding mental illness and suicide. This stigma is what can prevent people for reaching out for help. Thus-

Katie Johnson: I think the key word there is 'no known'.

Maria Willits: Exactly.

Katie Johnson: There's a big under-reporting ... People that aren't reaching out to get those diagnoses too, because like you said, of stigma and other reasons, pride. All those barriers that get in the way of seeking that help.

Maria Willits: Absolutely. And that's my whole point is that not everybody reaches out. I'm not saying that everybody dies by suicide does have-

Katie Johnson: Right.

Maria Willits: A mental illness or is suffering from depression because, that's not always the case. But, there is still so many people that find shame in having a mental illness, and they're not reaching out. They're not telling others, they're not looking for professional help. And that's where we really, really need to start hitting that home that it's okay to reach out for help. There is help.

Katie Johnson: One of the other things I found interesting in that CDC report was that, the problems most frequently associated with suicide according to the study, are strange relationships and life stressors. So that tells me that those things can be, you know, finances, substance abuse, physical health. Any kind of crisis, I mean, life. Life happens, right? So I think part of what is important to underscore too is, like any public health issue, education. How to cope with stressors, whether you have a mental illness or not. Just plain coping with life and crisis and difficult things is important for all of us. It's back to that, it takes a community.

Maria Willits: Absolutely. You know, the coping mechanisms are number one. If we have a healthy way of coping with things that happen in life, we maybe won't fall ill to a mental illness. We're going to have other routes to turn to, other people, other ways to deal with what's going on life, rather than, hold it all in and think it's something that we have to deal on our own and pretty soon things like that can lead to depression, can lead to anxiety, thus putting us at risk for suicide.

Katie Johnson: So, what kind of resources do you recommend for people who are concerned about suicide or who are looking for some more tools to put in their resource box?

Maria Willits: Well, first of all, we have our National Suicide Prevention Hotline. That number is, **1-800-273-TALK or 1-800-273-8255**. We also have in Minnesota now, we

have a Crisis Text Line and anybody who is more comfortable with texting, to reach out for help **can text, MN to 741741**. Again, both of these types of crisis lines will connect the person with area crisis resources or other area resources to get them the help that they may need. Or maybe it'll just be somebody to talk to that will help get them through the moment.

Minnesota also has County Crisis Response teams. In our [inaudible 00:06:20] we are serviced by the mobile mental health crisis response team through Lakeland Mental Health. Their number is **1-800-223-4512** and if it's a situation where somebody's not sure that they need that resource, a person can just call and say, "What are you about? I need to know how you could help me." 'Cause people are often afraid to call. They're afraid they're going to be locked up, and that's not the case. So it's okay just to call and find out what exactly that resource is about before you disclose what you have going on.

Katie Johnson: And probably even before you disclose who you are.

Maria Willits: Absolutely. Yes. Absolutely. And then of course, there's always 9-1-1 or a local emergency room if it's a ... If somebody is in eminent danger of themselves. And the most important thing is that, if someone is struggling with mental health issues that they get professional help Katie, before it becomes a crisis. That's the point in reaching out, you want that help before it becomes a crisis situation and that can be, a therapist, it can be a psychiatrist, it can be a person's family physician. Maybe it's a church leader, somebody that you want to talk too in your church. Just somebody that you're reaching out too so you're not keeping that to yourself.

Katie Johnson: Right. Yesterday when I was preparing for this interview and you listed a lot of phone numbers. I made an entry in my address book, my contacts in my phone. Just because, you never know when you're going to encounter someone that might need that information. I want to be able to quickly search for that, have those numbers handy. And even if the person themselves might not feel comfortable reaching out, we as people who care can reach out and try to at least, equip ourselves with better knowledge and information to help those people that we love.

Maria Willits: Right. That's exactly right. And that's a great idea. I recommend that anybody who is listening to this, enter those numbers into their own phone. And that way like you said, you're not fumbling-

Katie Johnson: Right.

Maria Willits: And your not searching, you're gonna know where to go for that information.

Katie Johnson: Right. And if you're listening and didn't catch those numbers. The Apple A Day broadcast is put on our website every week, along with the written transcript so

you'll be able to get those at lrhc.org, under search for Apple A Day and look for those, and they're certainly available searching the web as well, at any time.

So let's get back to the event and how people can participate. Pre-register, register at the site, how do people go about doing that?

Maria Willits: So, registration, you can come and register the same day of the event if you're more comfortable with that. We also have registration online at active.com. And you'll just search out of the Shatter of Silence Luminary 5K Walk. And, registration fees for 25 years old and older are \$20. 15 to 24 years is \$15. And seven to 14 is \$10. Six and under are free.

Katie Johnson: And we should mention too, all of the proceeds from this event go to help educate for suicide prevention.

Maria Willits: Yes. Money raised from our 5K can be distributed to our area schools, our area communities or to collaborate with other organizations or groups who are working to educate the public about mental health and suicide prevention. Last year's grand was awarded to the Fergus Falls Alternative Learning Center, and that school used those funds to bring someone into the school to teach the students the art of mindfulness.

So this year we're looking at donating a grant to our Community Thrive Committee, to be used for their Resilience Series. Funds from this year's event will also go towards partnership with the Fergus Falls Federated Church to offer a three part suicide awareness and prevention series, over the course of this fall.

And we're still hoping that one of our area schools will come forward and want also, want one of our grants. So, yes.

Katie Johnson: Putting the money to very good use.

Maria Willits: Absolutely.

Katie Johnson: And you have some other things you mentioned, speakers and luminary bags. There are other ways to participate as well?

Maria Willits: Absolutely. Every participant who registers for the walk gets a luminary bag. That luminary bag is used just like really for life, to dedicate to the loved one that they've lost or maybe it's somebody that's struggling. And if you want to purchase extras, there's an opportunity to purchase extra luminaries. If you just want to donate or maybe you just want to buy a luminary, you can also do that online. You can contact me as well. Anybody is welcomed to come to our event. It's open to the public to participate in whatever way you wish to participate.

Katie Johnson: Great. Anything else you want to encourage people who are thinking about coming to plan for, maybe their glow in the dark gear, all that kind of good stuff or other messages before we wrap up today?

Maria Willits: We are going to have resource tables. So, if you wanna come and check out our resource tables, that would be a great idea. Also yes, please, if you're going to come and participate in the Sundown Luminary part of it, bring your glow in the dark T-shirts if you want, you can certainly decorate them or dedicate a T-shirt to a love one, and glow in the dark paint. We will have glow in the dark bracelets and necklaces at the event free of charge to give out to youth who are participating.

And, please come dressed for the weather. We will have ... This event will go off without a hitch, weather problems or not. So, unless there's thunder and lightning, we are going to go ahead and follow through with it, so.

Katie Johnson: Rain or shine. The Shatter the Silence 5K Luminary Walk and Run, coming up September 29th. Give us just a quick recap, when and where and where to get registered.

Maria Willits: So, Shatter the Silence Luminary 5K, Saturday September 29th. Registration begins at 5:00 PM at Delagoon Park. At 6:00 PM, the 5K part of our event will begin on the Central Lake's trail. From 7:00 to 7:30 we will have guest speaker and program, and then at sundown we're going to have our half 5K Luminary Walk along the Central Lake's trail. And the event will end at the end of the walk.

Katie Johnson: Awesome. So, go to active.com, search Shatter the Silence Luminary 5K and get yourself registered or just come out on the 29th to Delagoon Park in Fergus Falls and be part of this really important, education awareness event around suicide prevention.

Maria Willits, thank you so much for honoring Ricky in this way and for equipping our community to be a better resource and a better support to one another in preventing suicide throughout our area.

Maria Willits: Thank you.

Katie Johnson: Maria Willits, founder of Shatter the Silence and LPN at Lake Region Health Care's Clinic Psychiatry Department, my guest today inviting you to join us in Shattering the Silence, and reminding you there is so much to do here. Stay healthy for it. Have a great day.