



NETWORK NEWS

SUICIDE PREVENTION ACTION NETWORK USA

Opening Minds. Changing Policy. Saving Lives.®

In Search of Ordinary Heroes: SPAN USA Launches Field Liaison Program

Ralph Waldo Emerson once said, “A hero is no braver than an ordinary man, but he is braver five minutes longer.”

In 1999, Larry Lewis had no heroic aspirations as he accompanied his wife, Vanessa, to attend SPAN USA’s national event in Washington, D.C. His first visit to the nation’s capital, he planned to go to a few sessions and then see the sights. However, he ended up staying at the meeting, drawn in by the “compassion and passion” exuded by SPAN USA founders Jerry and Elsie Weyrauch. At the end of the two days, the Weyrauchs encouraged Larry and Vanessa to establish a SPAN USA presence back in Michigan. During the 12-hour drive home, Larry thought of little else. The man who had



Larry and Vanessa Lewis advance suicide prevention in Michigan.

worked for 34 years in the steel industry was about to take that brave first step toward becoming a leading suicide prevention advocate in his home state.

With the launch of its new Field Liaison Program, SPAN USA is encouraging others to take similar steps and become “ordinary” heroes in their own communities. Franklin Cook, SPAN USA secretary and chair of the board’s field development committee, said that identifying field liaisons is “a natural outcome of progress that the suicide prevention movement has been making nationally.” SPAN USA field liaisons will help educate their community about suicide prevention, mobilize grassroots support for policy change

and be a resource for suicide survivors. “People working on prevention and advocacy at the community level are the link between the National Strategy for Suicide Prevention, statewide prevention strategies and what happens locally,” Cook said. To that end, SPAN USA will recruit a field liaison from each of the 435 congressional districts to serve as those links.

SPAN USA’s Field Liaison Program will organize the people currently working to build political will and help suicide prevention take root in local communities. Kimberlee Jones, the program director of a statewide suicide prevention hotline, is already doing grassroots

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work in Fairbanks, Alaska. Her passion for suicide prevention grew out of her work with suicide survivors; she sees her role as helping survivors to find and use their voices to affect change. "Survivors feel powerless over their loss, but so many want to use their voice to prevent suicide," Jones said.

Ever since Jones attended the SPAN USA national event in 2004, she has been a pivotal link in efforts to change national and state policies. She established an e-mail network to forward SPAN USA information to survivors, clinicians and policy makers. She also helps Alaskans connect with their local and national legislators by sharing SPAN USA training materials. "We talk about how to speak with legislators in a way that encourages them to stop and listen and impassions those who are ignorant about the issue," Jones said.

In Michigan, Lewis has spent the last eight years building bridges to advance suicide prevention. In an attempt to breathe new life into a draft state suicide prevention plan that had been sitting on a shelf, Lewis convened a coalition of people from the public and private sector to resume work on the state plan. The group usually held "virtual meet-

ings" through a list serve since "Michigan has rough winters, and it's hard to get everyone together," according to Lewis. Even after the coalition reached agreement on the statewide suicide prevention plan in 2005, Lewis has maintained these important connections.

ROLLING OUT THE FIELD LIAISON PROGRAM

SPAN USA will officially unveil the Field Liaison Program at the July 2007 Suicide Prevention Awareness and Training Event. Field liaisons will be asked to disseminate policy updates and information about SPAN USA activities, increase awareness of suicide as a public health problem for every community and reach out and build partnerships with community members. Jason H. Padgett, SPAN USA field development coordinator, said, "Field liaisons are the community organizers of the 21st century."

The primary qualification to be a field liaison is the desire to prevent suicide in your community. As Lewis said, "I feel very passionate [about suicide prevention]. You don't have to be a survivor to do that. All of us are survivors in one way or another." Padgett acknowledged that volunteers will have varying amounts of time to dedicate to the field liaison role, all of which adds

to the important progress in the suicide prevention movement.

SPAN USA will ask field liaisons to serve a two-year term to coincide with the Congressional term of their elected representative and will train, support, guide and empower them to advance suicide prevention in their communities, their states and the nation. Field liaisons will be encouraged to use SPAN USA's Legislative Action Center to forward legislative updates to their own network and request that SPAN USA issue alerts via its e-mail system. In order to assist field liaisons, SPAN USA's Web site features new state pages with overviews of statewide prevention activities. Thus, field liaisons will be able to learn about the work taking place in other states as well as share their own progress. Specialized Web-content specifically for the field liaisons will be an ongoing resource for those who take on this important role.

In the early 1900s, the French writer Roman Rolland wrote, "A hero is one who does what he can. The others don't." Larry Lewis and Kimberlee Jones are doing what they can. Imagine the impact of 433 like-minded people joining their ranks.

Are you ready to be an ordinary hero in your community? ■

Join us as a Partner for Action...

Send a contribution today and help SPAN USA, America's most effective grassroots suicide prevention organization, continue opening minds, changing policies, and saving lives. By supporting SPAN USA, you can be a part of the solution and join us as we confront suicide as a public health problem. For more information, go to www.spanusa.org. Use the enclosed envelope & mail to: SPAN USA, 1025 Vermont Ave., NW, Ste 1066, Washington, DC 20005.

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WANT TO BE MORE INVOLVED? CHECK BELOW!

- I want to join SPAN USA's Action E-List
- I want more information about becoming a Field Liaison or Quilt Organizer
- I would like more information on SPAN USA and suicide prevention
- Other: _____

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- \$35
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