

# Suicide prevention group forms following several local deaths

Continued from pg. 1

She felt that there was a real need for a similar group within Halton Hills, as did Ivany who, over the past year, conducted funeral services for five people (three from Georgetown) who took their own lives.

"For me, that (many) is out of the norm," said Ivany.

Gear said suicide is a taboo subject for most people.

Both she and Ivany stress the need for that to change, for people to start talking about suicide and to increase awareness of depression and other mental illnesses that often lead to people taking their lives.

In Stephanie's case, Gear said she had been battling depression and an eating disorder for the last three years of her life. She had attempted suicide when she was 16.

Education and raising awareness of mental illness is one of the mandates of the group, and Ivany said there has been a great deal of interest shown in increasing that awareness at area high schools.

Gear said while her daughter was receiving treatment for her illness she (Odile) was unable to get any information from Stephanie's doctors because of privacy laws.

"It should be recognized when a person can't make a rational decision, a guardian or whoever, somebody, needs to take direction of that life," said Gear.

She believes advocacy with government is

needed on that issue and the group hopes to advocate with all government levels to encourage the development of a suicide prevention strategy.

Some of the group members have taken Applied Suicide Intervention Skill Training (ASIST), which teaches people how to respond to a person in danger of committing suicide.

Gear said ASIST works, and believes had it been used with Stephanie prior to her first suicide attempt she wouldn't have gone through with that attempt at 16.

"It would have changed the course of her life. She saw that (the attempt) as a failure," said Gear.

For more information about H.E.A.L- The Georgetown Suicide Prevention Group or the information night contact 1-888-688-7777.

## Fast facts

- Around the world, every 40 seconds someone dies by suicide.
- Every 10 hours someone in Ontario dies by suicide.
- Suicide is a major public health problem in many countries and accounts for nearly three per cent of all world deaths.
- In teenagers and young adults (aged 15 to 24), suicide is a leading cause of death in many countries. In Canada it is the second leading cause in that age group after car accidents.
- In Canada there are more deaths by suicide than by wars and homicides combined.
- In most countries the risk of suicide increases with increasing age.

—Information provided by the Regional Suicide Prevention Network Hamilton, Halton, Niagara, Haldimand-Norfolk, Brant



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