

Six Nations Safe Walk holds out hope for suicide prevention

By Donna Duric
Writer

The idea came to her in a dream. In it, she was walking along a lonely road on the reserve and she kept feeling like her son was right behind her. She used to walk with him all the time before he took his life on April 4, 2010.

A week shy of his 16th birthday, Tylor General said good-bye to the world via a Facebook post saying he was going out for his last smoke. He then walked

Tylor's mother, Michele, wants to ensure that no other young person here takes his or her life and she did not want her son's death to be the impetus for another youth suicide.

That, coupled with her dream, is the reason she started the grassroots group Suicide Awareness For Everyone (SAFE). The group has been walking throughout the territory since last spring handing out suicide awareness literature to anyone they come

across. Relatives there for strength.

And friends and others who want to stop the loss of the community's youth. General often sees her son in her dreams. Those visits help her feel like he's still with her and they've found a way to spend some time together.

Remembering her son, General sees a humorous boy who loved to crack jokes and would go out of his way to help people.

"He was funny. I always thought when he grew up he was going to be somebody who helped people. He was really empathetic. He would do just about anything to help people. He was really energetic and he was always smiling."

At the time, she never saw any signs that he was about to end his life.

"He had all these plans. He had just introduced me to his girlfriend and said he was saving up for a car. I couldn't believe it."

Looking back, she sees them now.

"In retrospect, there's loads of signs. He had loads of problems. I could have been more receptive. I did notice there was something off about him. If I had just said, 'is anything wrong?' he might have, he might not have told me, but at least he would have known that he could have told me if he wanted to."

Experts on suicide say it's common for the deceased's loved ones to blame themselves for the suicide, rationalizing that the survivor can't bear placing the blame on their loved one, so they place it on themselves.

After her son's death, General said she entered a strange state of numbness and shock that was almost business-like. And for whatever reason, she said she decided to check his Facebook. That's when she saw the messages. "His



More than 60 people took part in Monday's Safe Walk, drawing awareness to suicide prevention. They walked from Veteran's Park through Ohsweken. (Photo by Jim C Powless)

friends were saying they were going to come along with him," she said. "That made it even harder. Nobody should have to go through that again. I can't let nobody go through this."

Four months after he died, General had the dream.

"I was leaving this huge party on the reserve and I was walking by myself and then I felt like he was with me. I kept turning around thinking he was right behind me. I just knew he was there. In the dream, I just started talking to him. Then I just got this overwhelming feeling that he missed those walks. When I woke up from that dream I just felt it strongly that I should just walk. Then it came to me that maybe I could turn that into something that might help somebody."

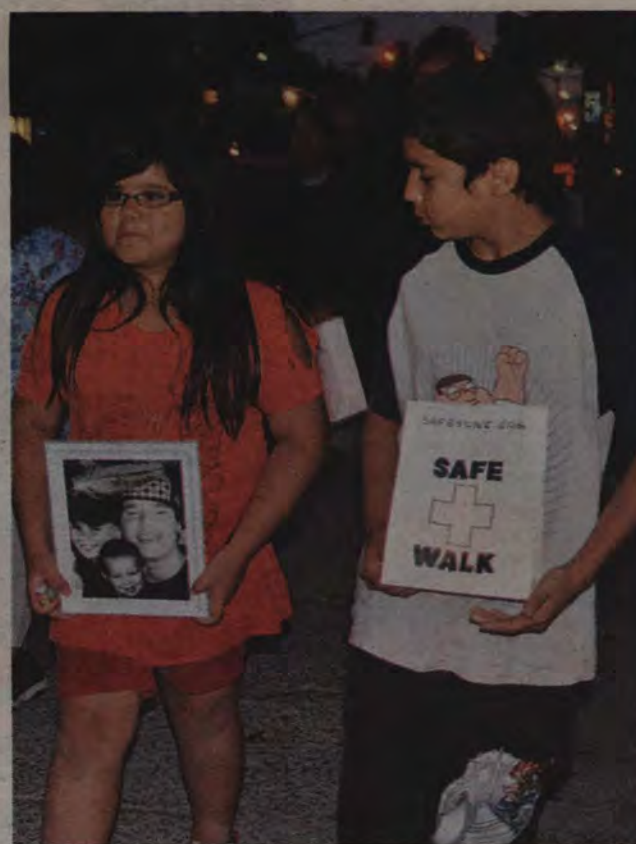
So she started SAFEwalk with a small group of people. She also started a Web site with general information on suicide awareness and prevention, along with a list of suicide-related resources both on and off the reserve.

"I don't know if it's helped anyone but it's basically just me handing out the tools for help and if they choose to use them, they

choose to use them. I hope they use them."

She has since started tak-

and that local politicians will work to step up suicide assistance services.



Safe Walk raised awareness about the need for suicide prevention programs and tears for those who remember... (Photo by Jim C Powless)

ing courses at Polytech and aims to become a social worker.

General hopes her story will put pressure on the community to get involved in suicide prevention efforts

She also says there needs to be a suicide survivors' group on Six Nations w. After all, no one else will be able to understand a survivor's pain like another survivor.



down the road from his home and hung himself in an abandoned machinery shed.

across.

This year's final walk took place on Monday night with a candlelight vigil at



Councillors Ava Hill and Helen Miller joined the Safe Walk Monday night from Veterans Park through the village. (Photo by Jim C Powless)

Soon after her son committed suicide, various grieving friends began posting disturbing messages on Facebook saying they wanted to follow in his footsteps.

Authorities and experts on Six Nations were quickly alerted and were able to prevent more youths from reaching the same fate.

Veteran's Park.

Unbeknownst to General when she planned the event, Monday was also National Suicide Awareness Day. To her, that's more fate than coincidence.

More than 60 people gathered in Veteran's park Monday night.

Families touched by sui-