

**COMMUNITY COMMENT** Mike Goldsby, September 14, 2017

A young Humboldt County man recently took his own life, leaving behind his wife and four children. This touching story can be found on the local blog, Redheaded Blackbelt, the work of Kym Kemp. The post was in early September, in observation of Suicide Awareness Month.

The Hydesville family agreed to tell their story to help others who may be facing suicide or dealing with the loss and the aftermath. Many families do not openly discuss this situation when it happens to them. Of course, people are free to deal with their grief however they see fit. But one reason people do not discuss suicide is the stigma and guilt associated with it. And more friends and family are speaking out, to try to lower the stigma and increase understanding.

The numbers are boggling. Suicide claims over 41 thousand Americans each year. The Centers for Disease Control, the CDC, puts Suicide in the top ten causes of death for all age groups above 15. And it is in the top 5 leading causes of death for ages 15 through 55. Adult suicides have increased steadily in the United States since 2001.

The Department of Veteran Affairs estimates that an average of 22 veterans die from suicide each day and they admit the actual number is probably higher. Across the nation, more women attempt suicide but more men die from their attempts. Why? Firearms. Statistically, more women attempt suicide with drug overdoses and more men with guns.

Suicide is the third leading cause of premature death in Humboldt County. An average of three or four Humboldt County people die by suicide each month.

But raw numbers don't mean that much and statistics mean nothing when you have lost friends or family to suicide. In her article, Kemp writes "Friends often struggle to find the right words to comfort family left behind. They may be afraid to say the wrong thing. Many people feel awkward and nervous when first spending time with a suicide bereaved person. It will take some time to learn how to respond. It is OK to feel awkward, but you don't need to let it prevent you from showing support."

**The Hydesville Community has rallied around this family and started a GoFundMe site. The link is on the Redheaded Blackbelt site and almost \$5,000 has been raised so far.**

**The anonymous comments responding to the article are particularly sensitive and insightful, something you do not often find with anonymous comments. One person wrote "Suicide is something that can and does happen even in the so-called "best of families." Like so many issues that may be difficult for some to discuss: the act of suicide does not discriminate based upon who one is or what they have. It is not for us to judge, especially when loved ones are left behind to grieve and agonize. Sometimes the best and maybe only thing we can do is to come to accept the fact that we cannot have all the answers, however desperately we may want them.**

**"Please let us not concern ourselves with trivial matters of feeling awkward about what to say to those in pain, but instead hopefully rise above our own often petty concerns to extend a hand of support as we would hope might be there in our own times of need. Often simply being present—no words necessary—means so much and is a great comfort. Maybe just someone to listen ,reserving all personal opinions and focusing only on what's important at these times, which is compassion."**

**There are a number of activities in Humboldt this month to raise awareness and reduce stigma. Public Health has links and resources if you want to learn more. And the county has a 24-hour crisis line at 445-7715.**

**This is Mike Goldsby for Community Comment.**