

## September 25, 2018      Depression, Mental Illnesses, & Suicide

A special thanks to our panel members for sharing their very personal experiences and their expertise. This is one of those meetings that you “just had to be there” to really get the emotions that were expressed by those in attendance and our panelists. Their experiences were very different.

- **Grace Carricarte** is the executive director of the **Ganley Foundation** ([www.ganleyfoundation.org](http://www.ganleyfoundation.org)). The foundation was created by the Ganleys after losing their son to suicide with the mission of educating communities about depression and the stigmas that prevent people from receiving proper intervention and treatment
  - o Mental health issues are so pervasive and affect so many families.
  - o The foundation provides educational presentations for schools and community organizations on the topics of stress reduction, mental health, depression, and suicide prevention.
  - o They do trainings for those working with youth.
  - o Suicide is the 2<sup>nd</sup> greatest cause of death among Americans ages 10-34.
  
- **Mindy Cassel, PhD.**, is co-founder and senior advisor of the **Children’s Bereavement Center (CBC)**.
  - o The Children’s Bereavement Center provides free peer support groups for children, young adults, and their caregivers after the death of a loved one.
  - o Groups are open to anyone who has lost a parent, sibling, grandparent, relative, or friend as a result of illness, accident, suicide, or homicide.
  - o The Center now serves over 1,500 children in 10 locations in the tri-county area.
  - o Peer-group support and/or 1 individual person can make all the difference in the world.
  - o The worst loss is your own loss.
  - o The CBC makes a big difference in the aftermath of loss.
  - o They see a significant number of people after the suicide of a loved one.
  
- **Emily Jurich** is a junior at FIU, a psychology major, and the **student president of NAMI** (National Association of Mental Illness) on campus. She is a peer-group facilitator for NAMI Miami-Dade and is a research intern in the Psychology department of the FIU med school. Her bravery and courage, resilience, and insight amazed all of us in attendance, and we appreciated her honesty and direct approach in dealing with all of us and all our questions ☐.
  - o Emily was diagnosed with Bipolar 1 disorder and suffered with depression her whole life.
  - o She was suicidal at age 8 and asked for help. Her request was treated with prayer because praying would “make it go away.”
  - o She began swimming competitively in 8<sup>th</sup> grade and that was a great way for her to cope until her college freshman year.
  - o The stress from swimming was too much that semester, and she was suicidal but didn’t want to quit.
  - o She had psychotic episodes, became delusional, and started hallucinating.
  - o She was Baker Acted for 8 days and was finally given a diagnosis.
  - o She was happy and relieved to be given a diagnosis because she finally had a name for what was going on.
  - o She was stigmatized and isolated.

- o She started taking meds and entered into therapy. The side effects of her meds are minor to her compared to the better life she is now able to lead.
  - o She got involved with NAMI and now runs a peer support group for other youth suffering with mental illness, depression, or who may be suicidal.
- Biggest factor in bolstering resilience is 1 supportive adult.
  - It is important to recognize and not ignore mental illness. Talk to the children you advocate on behalf of... they might open up to you.
  - You can't force a child to open up to you even when you try and know what's going on. If they aren't ready, they will shut you out.
  - It is more difficult for young adults in high school. The kids are much meaner and more judgmental. In college, they are much more accepting and willing to learn.
  - The FIU peer support group is for youth ages 18-23, but they will not turn down a teen who needs help and is willing to participate.
  - **Ending the Silence** is a program for high schools that addresses mental illness.
  - The biggest problem with bi-polar disorder is people go off their meds when they are feeling better. Re-regulating meds gets more and more difficult and tends to further compound the issues.
  - Kids often believe they have a problem--that there's something wrong with them--and they are broken. Instead, they should be helped to think like Emily -- I have an illness, and this medication will help me.

Thanks so much to all who made this such an interesting and informative evening and to Emily for sharing her personal story with us. **Grace at the Ganley Foundation is available to anyone who needs resources/education, and the Children's Bereavement Center is one of the most amazing, important FREE resources in our community.**