



# Coalition News

Quarterly Newsletter of the Minnesota Coalition for Death Education and Support  
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Since 1977...Education and Support for Those Providing Care to Grieving Persons

June 2019

## Mark Your Calendars

**June 11** ♦ *Natural Burial Evening*. This is a mock natural burial “graveside” ritual, beginning at 6:30 pm, and weather-permitting. Information is at <https://mn-thresholdnetwork.wordpress.com/>.

**June 13** ♦ *Reasonable Hope When Dreams Have Shattered*, presented by Ted Bowman at Pathways in Minneapolis. More info at <https://pathwaysminneapolis.org/home/features/reasonable-hope-when-dreams-shatter/>.

**June 28-30 (Willow River, MN)**

**September 20-22 (Loretto, MN)**

Camp Erin bereavement camp for children ages 6-17, who have experienced the death of a family member or friend. Information and registration at [www.fairview.org/our-community-commitment/youth-grief-services/camp-erin](http://www.fairview.org/our-community-commitment/youth-grief-services/camp-erin).

**Oct 4** ♦ MCDES Fall Conference. *Living With Grief in the Aftermath of Natural and/or Human Caused Tragedy*. Info available on page 7 and at [www.mcdes.org](http://www.mcdes.org).

## In this issue

- ♦ MCDES Spring Conference Review
- ♦ From The Vice-Chair
- ♦ Being Present: Two Reviews
- ♦ Suicide Survivor Resources
- ♦ MCDES Fall Conference
- ♦ A Beautiful Hell: Book Review and Play
- ♦ Sundries

## MCDES Spring Conference Review *Grief After Suicide: Understanding the Consequences and Caring for the Survivors*

Reviewed by Mike Erickson

Through the generosity of the Dorothy Geis Scholarship fund, the Metro North Grief Support suicide survivor’s facilitator team was privileged to attend the MCDES Spring Conference: *Grief After Suicide: Understanding the Consequences and Caring for the Survivors*. The Metro North Grief Support group recently celebrated its fortieth anniversary. Director Jackie Sandusky works with the social services team in the Anoka School System and has served as the Director for nearly two decades. Donna Mattis, a retired nurse, having spent a career at Children’s Hospital, has been a group facilitator for over fifteen years. I am a semi-retired engineer and have been a facilitator for nearly a decade. Every Monday night we have the honor of sharing stories with people at arguably the most vulnerable time in their life—the weeks and months following the suicide death of a loved one. While we have all gone through facilitator training, participating in this conference provided an invaluable opportunity for us to learn about recent progress in the field from a recognized expert.



Melinda Moore, PhD

Dr. Melinda Moore immediately connected to the audience by sharing the story of her husband’s death by suicide. As she talked about what she experienced through her grief journey, I saw my own journey and felt as if in those few moments we had become kindred souls. Dr Moore shared with us the latest statistics about suicide. In 2017, suicide was the tenth leading cause of death, with 47,173 Americans dying by suicide. I was struck by that number: in 2007, the year my son completed suicide, the CDC reported that 34,598 Americans died by suicide. Certainly the number is heading in the wrong direction. Based on these numbers, it would appear that suicide prevention strategies have been ineffective, yet certainly we have saved lives and but for the efforts in the field, the number would very likely be higher. However, as Dr Moore shared with us it is not easy to draw any conclusions from the trend—the field is “challenged by the lack of conceptual clarity about suicidal behaviors and a corresponding lack of well-defined terminology” making it difficult to accurately count the number of suicides and attempts

Conference Review continued on page 6

## Suicide Survivor Resources in Minnesota

### SAVE: Suicide Prevention, Information, and Awareness (save.org)

“Through our resources and support services, SAVE helps families and individuals across the nation cope with suicide loss.”

### American Foundation for Suicide Prevention (afsp.org).

AFSP raises awareness, funds scientific research and provides resources and aid to those affected by suicide.

Chapters: Greater MN, which includes Metro area, and Southeast MN, which includes Rochester area.

### National Suicide Prevention Lifeline (suicidepreventionlifeline.org)

The Lifeline provides 24/7, free and confidential support for people in distress, prevention and crisis resources for you or your loved ones, and best practices for professionals. 1-800-273-TALK (8255)

### Crisis Text Line: Text MN to 741741

Minnesota’s suicide prevention and mental health crisis texting services are now available 24/7. People who text MN to 741741 will be connected to Crisis Text Line. They handle 50,000 messages per month and have responded to over 20 million messages since 2013 from across the U.S., connecting people to local resources in their community. For more information, go to <https://mn.gov/dhs/partners-and-providers/policies-procedures/adult-mental-health/crisis-text-line/>

Conference Review continued from page 1

that happen annually, and of greatest concern to me, “establish suicide and suicide attempts as a major public health problem that warrants investment of resources.” I often wonder how many deaths it will take before legislatures and the public take note and invest in prevention strategies like they have for distracted driving or the opioid epidemic.

Dr. Moore then talked about different approaches to understanding suicide. Dr. Thomas Joiner’s Interpersonal Theory of Suicide struck home with me. I had read Joiner’s books in the first year after my son’s suicide. Then, his three elements included: a perceived sense of burdensomeness, a perceived thwarted sense of belonging, and access to lethal means. In the years since he first introduced the approach, access to lethal means has evolved to acquired capability. And, it just made sense to me that if you remove any of the three elements you can significantly reduce the chance of a completed suicide. Dr. Marsha Linehan’s Dialectical Behavior Theory also resonated

with me in that a person’s behavior corresponds with the level of emotions they are experiencing. Behavior happens for a reason—understanding where the emotions come from could be an important step in prevention. As facilitators after the fact, understanding these approaches gives us another tool to use in our groups that may offer some comfort to our constituents.

Dr. Moore dispelled some myths about suicide survivors for me. For the last twelve years, I have believed that for every suicide there are six survivors. The Continuum of Survivorship showed us that the real number is closer to 135—understanding the categories of exposed, affected, bereaved short-term, and bereaved long-term will help us to serve our group as we better understand their specific needs.

I think most relevant to our contribution in the field was the discussion on Post-Traumatic Growth. Picasso once said “Every act of creation is first an act of destruction,” the concept of post-traumatic growth epitomized. We see it all the time in our group when

Conference Review continued on page 7



Spring Conference Dorothy Geis Scholarship Winners with Board Member, Ed Holland  
Left to right: Ed Holland, Molly Jockheck, Jessica Miller, Jackie Sandusky, Donna Mattis, Mike Erickson

Conference Review continued from page 6

people show up in the immediate aftermath of the shattering of their assumptive world. In the early weeks most of them can't see anything good coming out of that event. What we provide is an environment for them to "ruminate" over the elements and share in the rumination of others in the group. We have the great privilege of guiding people through the three conceptual categories: changed sense of oneself, changed sense of relationship with others, and a changed philosophy of life—coming out on the other side, forever changed by the previously unimaginable tragedy they have experienced yet, recognizing as Hamilton Jordan said "the simple joys of life are everywhere and are boundless."

I want to thank MCDES and the Dorothy Geis Scholarship fund for giving me the opportunity to attend this seminar. I know I will be a better, more effective facilitator because of it.

## Dorothy Geis Scholarship Fund

The Dorothy Geis Scholarship provides small scholarships to individuals who wish to attend MCDES conferences but who are unable to afford the entire fee (e.g., student, low-income, disability). Scholarship recipients also receive a one year membership to MCDES which includes an email subscription to the quarterly newsletter, a MCDES Directory, and discounts on future conferences. Application information is at <http://mcdes.org/scholarships.html>.