

Train-the-Trainer Event Held for Survivors of Suicide Support Groups

Sixty-five people attended a two-day train-the-trainer event on “Grief and Mourning Following a Suicide Death” in June 2012 in Moosic, in the northeastern part of the state. This training, to meet the needs of survivors of suicide, was a follow-up to the regional workshops on youth suicide prevention held in Fall 2010 where support for survivors emerged as one of the top three concerns.

The train-the-trainer event, designed to help counties develop support groups for survivors of suicide, featured Susan Wesner from the STAR-Center at the University of Pittsburgh as the presenter. Susan is the author of *Survivors of Suicide: A Support Group Leader’s Handbook*, published by the STAR-Center. She offered instructions on how to run support groups that address the individual needs of adults and children. The training also included information about the grief process and self-care strategies for group leaders.

Representatives from nine counties attended the training — Carbon, Clearfield, Jefferson, Lackawanna, Luzerne, Monroe, Schuylkill, Susquehanna and Wayne — and included staff from mental health, foster care, schools and hospices. Plans are to offer follow-up support to these counties and similar training workshops in other parts of the state. Another feature of the day was a breakout session specifically for county suicide prevention task forces, to discuss mutual concerns and brainstorm ideas for improving efforts in their respective counties. Task force members from Clearfield/Jefferson Counties shared ideas from their experience. The need for support for county task forces was another concern that emerged from the 2010 regional workshops.

Following the training, one person offered this testimonial:

“I learned more than I could have imagined.... Thanks to this training I have the knowledge and confidence to tell a concerned parent what is normal and what is not during the grieving process, I can help them understand how their child will grieve, and also why it is better to be truthful with them even if their instincts are to lie to protect them.... If there are ever any more trainings like this I would love it if you can please send me an email to let me know. Thank you so much.”

For more information or to find out about how to schedule a similar training in your area, contact Paula McCommons at mccommonsp@upmc.edu or 412-864-3346, or Kathy Wallace at kw@theadvocacyalliance.org.