

*Essay by Faith Richison*

We Matter

I matter, you matter, we matter. Suicide prevention has always been a topic heavy on my heart. As someone who has struggles with thoughts of suicide and a friend to many with that same struggle, the importance of being educated on mental health and the things that lead to suicide is well known by me. If I had the chance to plan we matter week I would do everything in my power to make it impactful and mind-altering. I would do this by holding a promotion assembly, providing multiple suicide prevention trainings, several “we matter” activities, and lastly, hosting a support event.

To kick off my we matter week I would hold a school assembly. In this assembly I would promote the following week by sharing its importance and meaning. At the beginning of this assembly, I would open it myself by sharing how my personal experience with mental health has made me very empathetic for those who are going through similar things that I have. After this I would have a few of those who have contemplated suicide as well as the ones who helped them through that trying time share their story. I want to put a huge emphasis on the roles each of us have in helping one another.

The second aspect to my we matter week would be suicide prevention training. This includes training for both teachers and students. Both training courses will include what the indicators are that a person is having suicidal thoughts and how to gauge the severity of those thoughts. The training targeted for teachers will be based on how to pick up hints based on how a student interacts with other students to indicate their mental health status. Do they seem to have a fake smile? Do they tend to keep to themselves? Are they overly joyful? These are a few of the questions teachers will be trained to think about. Another thing that will be included in the

teacher training is how to be a safe place for students and make them feel welcome to reach out. Lastly teachers will be trained on who to contact for help and guidance to ensure these students know their worth. The other training will be to educate students on how to help one another through suicidal thoughts and other mental health issues. They will be trained on what phrases to use and not use when supporting someone to ensure that person is feeling wanted and loved. They will also be trained on who to reach out to so that others are aware of the situation. They will be taught the appropriate as well as the inappropriate way to be there for someone struggling. To wrap up this training both students and teachers will be informed of different types of mental illnesses and the side effects they entail. The goal of these training sessions is that everyone leaves confident that they will be able to notice somebody struggling and help them find their way back to a healthy mental state in a safe and appropriate way.

Yet another feature of my we matter week is “we matter” activities. The goal of these activities will be to emphasize the importance of suicide prevention, what happens when it’s too late, and to bring a realization that we are all worthy of life and love. One of these activities will be building hope kits. These kits will include visual and tangible reminders that we all have a reason to live. Hope kits will serve as a constant reminder of our worth and many things to live for. Another activity would include acting out real life scenarios of how to remind someone they have purpose in life when on the verge of committing suicide and what can happen when you ignore it. The last activity I would want to include is speed-connections. This activity has the same concept of speed dating, to see what you have in common. The purpose behind this activity is to show students that they are not alone in their trials. There are so many who are going through the same thing.

The last factor of my we matter week is a support event. The meaning behind this event will be to empower and encourage those who are struggling to reach out and choose help. In this event emotional support dogs will be provided as well as mental health professionals to help those who want it. Everyone struggling has the power to choose life even when their mentality won't. Throughout this support event those who are struggling will get the chance to reach out and ask questions such as how to help themselves, why do they feel the way they do, and any other questions they might have. They will be provided with long-term connections to help them through their struggles.

Life is worth the ride it takes us on. Having mental health issues is not something to be ashamed of, but it is also not something to take lightly. My we matter week would show them just that. I matter, you matter, we matter. We have so many reasons to live. Thank you for your time and the opportunity to share with you how I would plan we matter week.