

# Suicide Prevention on How It Affected My Life

By

Teressa Baldwin

- Hello my name is Teressa Baldwin
- I am a senior at Mt. Edgecumbe High School, but originally from Kotzebue.
- Before I start my speech I would like to acknowledge your teachers, these are the people you can talk to if you feel touched by this speech afterwards. Thank you!
- I would like to say that I am honored to be here to talk about my passion, suicide prevention.
- I was appointed as the youth representative for the statewide suicide prevention council by Governor Sean Parnell and I run my own campaign which you are all now a part of called Hope4Alaska.
- And I didn't get here today, by just a snap of a finger, but because
- I am one out of four people who have been affected by suicide in Alaska
- I have grown up knowing that suicide exist, my mom's brother committed suicide when I was five years old no more than 20 feet away from me.
- I remember waking up one morning to my mom's cries and looking out the window to find out that there was an ambulance outside taking him away.
- Of course I was only five years old and didn't know what to do, yeah I had people to talk to but I was five. What was there to talk about?
- I remember all of my family members being depressed for months, and my mom didn't leave the house until she was stable enough to move on.

- Being 5 and having someone take their own life that lived with you was only the beginning to my family's problems.
- I have grown up in Rural Alaska where suicides and drugs were a problem.
- In rural Alaska one out of five families experiences a loss due to suicide.
- Yet I didn't think that those people taking their lives away thought about how their death would affect someone else.
- Just as my uncle's passing away affected my whole family, a girl in Kotzebue committed suicide one block away from my house.
- She was around the age of 17, and she committed suicide the same way my uncle did. She hung herself.
- I was about nine years old, and I remember everyone in Kotzebue being affected by her death. I remember the ambulances then too, they sped pass my house, and on to the next street where she had lived.
- Of course I didn't know what they were doing. Before the age of 10, I have known six people that have committed suicide.
- Now that I am here I have to think of all those ten-year olds in Alaska experiencing the same thing I did when I was ten.
- I knew suicide was there, but I had no one to talk to and become aware of what was going on.
- When someone passed away everyone would just be in grief for a long time, I never was told why people committed suicide, and I was just told things happen move on.
- I felt sad, alone, and unsure of my self.
- I still feel the same way about my past, sad. The only difference is I now feel stable with myself, and sure of myself.

- Yeah there are times where I know I need help, and I know I need to get up and tell someone that I feel alone.
- It's like taking yourself out of the darkness, and sharing what happened, so that you can possibly take someone out of the darkness as well.
- Last year I sat down with two of the most inspirational people, Carol Waters and Barb Franks.
- Both of them are heavy advocates of suicide prevention. We talked about morals, and life skills that have truly opened doors for my surroundings.
- The point of this discussion was to get more ideas about how to promote suicide prevention.
- I learned that sharing with someone what you know can possibly help others as well.
- The fact that I have hopes and goals can really help myself out as well as others and that *change is in the air (as Barbara Franks says)*, and there shall be no more silence among teens just as myself on the topic of suicide.
- Back in January 2010, I was invited by my advisor Carol Waters to a suicide prevention summit in Anchorage
- Tons of adults came together and talk about the issue of suicide rates in Alaska.
- This is where I started to reveal my feelings about suicide, at the age 15.
- It was a safety net from what happened years before.
- It was something I know I had to be a part of. This is where I met Barb Franks,
- The Summit brought in different organizations throughout Alaska, such as NANA, ANTHC, ASRC, Tlingit organizations, and Maniilaq.

- Among those organizations was a youth led organization called AASG.
- The two youth representatives were Ariel Zlatkovski and myself
- I soon found out that a youth voice really does help out what is going on and that there is no stronger voice to the audience then someone young.
- From there I kept my eyes open for things that can relate to suicide prevention.
- Another door had opened.
- After five years of being silent about my feelings it felt like I knew what was going on.
- I remember getting a binder full of papers that I didn't quit understand, it had organizations and phone numbers for people related to jobs in the suicide prevention
- Shortly after reading this binder full of papers. I wrote down a list of goals one being "Save 100 people from committing suicide."
- I was soon to figure out that what was in the binder doesn't tell me how to move on in the future.
- When my boyfriend for the summer committed suicide.
- I was 16 years old, and from someone I knew meant a lot to me that just killed himself shocked me.
- It brought me back to the feelings of being sad, alone, and unsure of myself.
- It affected me greatly.
- I honestly thought that this guy was someone I was going to grow old with, who would always have my back.
- We were both opposites in every way.

- He liked Kid Kudi and I liked Carry Underwood, but I think those things really tied us together.
- Life just didn't seem real after he ended his life.
- In fact I remember thinking why live if I have nothing left to live for.
- I got in to some bad stuff after he committed suicide, stuff teens at the age of 16 should even be thinking about.
- But instead of committing the same deed that he did, I decided to keep myself busy.
- I stood up and started taking action in many things such as suicide prevention.
- I attended to groups such as YAHA, connections with ANTHC, the Statewide Suicide Prevention Council, and even bringing forth my ideas to my own school.
- These things helped me get involved with the suicide prevention media contest, which *then* kept me telling myself my life matters, but no one else was there to tell me that it matters as well.
- I tried to make it seem like my life has mattered I am here to perfect the suicide rates in Alaska, and govern myself into thinking that I would take control of all matters.
- I had dreams of becoming the next AASG president, after being secretary/ treasurer this was my high school dream.
- I thought I was invisible, I mean I revolved my life around AASG.
- My schedule was eat, sleep, student council.
- Being on the board made me feel secure and important.

- As a 16 year old that didn't know how to deal with matters, I thought it was okay to keep myself so busy that I wouldn't have time to think about my losses.
- And it worked up until I lost my election for becoming the next AASG president.
- By that time I hit my lowest point on the map, I lost my boyfriend and my life.
- I remember thinking what more is there to lose?
- I would go to bed re-living the moment that I lost my election and I would wake up thinking about my loss of my ex-boyfriend.
- It got to the point that I was showing signs of suicide. I would give my clothes away to people that I thought needed them more than I did.
- I would shun my activities and be unproductive in my school work; I would cry myself to sleep. All of a sudden I remembered the binder on suicide.
- I looked back at the book gates keeper and my list of goals I kept laying around my room.
- It was me bringing myself slowly out of the darkness once again.
- Yet I am sitting here talking to you about my story, it makes me wonder what others feel as their story.
- So, like I said I sat down with two inspirational leaders last year, and they shared with me a message, you need to be strong and share your story because someone who is listening can be helped.
- It was not until that moment that I knew I had to come out of my shell and share my story. Because of Barb and Carol, I listened to their stories about how suicide affected their lives.

- It also helped me realize what all those people that have committed suicide were missing, and that was security and knowing what they want to do.
- This was something that really pulled me out of the darkness; I realized that the age range of people committing suicide was not shocking anymore.
- Because all those people that committed suicide were between the ages of 14-24, the age that people reach when they soon realize they are on their own.
- When your age 18 most parents say, you've graduated, its time for you to move out.
- Well who is going to care for that person who was just moved out of their house? If I was that person I would be confused about everything.
- You have to remember that everyone has different goals and inspirations and caregivers.
- I myself, live on the line, smile, and make someone's day.
- Just because I know that is what I lived off of when I was at my lowest point.
- One story that Barbara Franks told me really touched me was a group who founded the *Alive Campaign*; it was about four close friends that did everything together.
- They were the four best friends, anyone would ask for.
- Then all of a sudden one of them admitted that he was suicidal, because he couldn't reach his goals.
- This really touched me, because his friend made that person's goal come true.

- They helped their friend to make sure that that person knew they were friends forever and have someone to talk to when he become hopeless.
- When I heard that story, the first thing I said to myself was I want to be part of the solution and not the problem with Alaska's suicide rates.
- It gave me the vision that my life was important to a fact that I want to help people stand tall against suicide.
- My message to you is that you need to be the change, because one suicide is too much as Barb Franks shared from an Elder's perspective during his presentation at the Elders & Youth Conference in Anchorage 2009.
- Yeah the books tell you the signs of suicide, but they don't tell you how to deal with the afterwards.
- The power of listening is when this comes into hand. How are we going to have a future if we keep committing suicide, because if you really think about it when just one person commits suicide, dozens of others are affected.
- It is our time:
  - to bring someone out of the darkness;
  - to tell them their live matters;
  - it is easy to make someone's day;
  - to tell someone you love them; and
  - to tell them that their life has meaning
- I know I feel bad for not telling those I had lost that I cared about them, and that I was there for them. Especially, my ex boyfriend.
- It is also easy to forget about one another when we are busy.



- We need to talk to one another help touch lives, change directions, and make other's existence positive.
- Those are the two things our future seems like it is missing.
- Love and positive lives. I know when I am old I want to be able to say I helped 100 people from committing suicide and I also know that I am going to live to tell the story of how I helped them.
- Although I am not going to be doing this forever, the question is whose going to be doing this after?
- That is when we as youth leaders need to step up and show that we care for one another.
- As Carol Waters pointed out to me, "Giving someone a fish is good to eat for one day, why not teach them how to fish so that they can eat every day."
- So instead of waiting for this to stop itself, let's be the generation to teach the rest of the generations that suicide is not the answer.