

3 Study on
Youth
Firearm Laws
and Youth
Suicides

6 Garrett
Lee Smith
Memorial
Act Passes



SPAN USA President Sandy Martin reads names of those lost to suicide from the Georgia quilt. Holding the quilt are SPAN USA board member Franklin Cook and co-founder Jerry Weyrauch.

ENERGIZING Advocates

“Thank you for the lives you have saved. For the families you have sustained because of your work.”

– U.S. Surgeon General **Richard Carmona** addressing the ninth annual SPAN USA National Awareness Event

From the steps of the Lincoln Memorial to the halls of Capitol Hill, suicide prevention advocates and survivors remembered loved ones, learned new advocacy tools and petitioned their legislators for increased suicide prevention support at the ninth annual National Awareness Event. Acknowledging the impact of

SPAN USA organizers in their own communities, the surgeon general, along with elected officials, welcomed advocates from over 20 states who gathered in Washington, D.C., on Sept. 19-21, 2004.

At certain times during the three days, the Awareness Event resembled a family reunion – where everyone was family. Taking place under a brilliant fall sky, Sunday’s memorial was one of those times. SPAN USA members greeted one another with hugs as they slowly walked around the dozens of Lifekeeper Memory Quilts on display, heard from speakers who shared their stories and listened closely as the names of those lost to suicide were read from the quilts. Pua Kaninau, a survivor of her teenage son’s suicide, traveled from Hawaii to attend her first SPAN USA National Awareness Event. She said she immediately felt welcomed by the group, noting the warm, heartfelt tone of the conference.

On Monday, survivors honed their advocacy skills and knowledge through a series of presentations and workshops.

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SPAN USA's Board of Directors would like to thank Pam Harrington and Neal Mazer, both of whom recently left the board, for their dedicated service

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executive director's message

I want to acknowledge the tremendous effort occurring at the state and community levels around suicide prevention.

In August, Texas SPAN organizer Merily Keller and her colleague Charles Vorkoper brought together more than 120 Texans from around the state to work on building community coalitions to advance suicide prevention. In September, Illinois held its state conference, *Suicide Prevention: Advancing the Illinois Strategic Plan*. In November, SPAN Idaho will hold its fourth annual suicide prevention conference.

These activities, along with recent efforts in California, Alabama, Vermont and New York and more forthcoming in Kentucky and Florida, show the suicide-prevention movement continues to thrive. SPAN USA advocates are front and center in leading the way. Together we are making a difference!

In Washington, D.C., SPAN USA continues to bring the survivor perspective to the national dialogue about suicide prevention. In September, SPAN USA co-sponsored two important conferences hosted by the Joint Commission Resources, "Preventing Patient and Resident Suicides" and "The National Conference on Behavioral Health Care: A Focus on Outcomes Research and the Use of Data." In November, SPAN USA again will partner with the Association of State and Territorial Health Officials (ASTHO) to send a survivor/advocate from each of the participating states to engage in a youth suicide prevention roundtable.

To all of you, thanks for the hard work and doing your part to open minds, change policies and save lives. Effective suicide prevention requires all of us to do our part.

Jerry Reed

SPAN USA Executive Director



coordinator's corner

Ideas, strategies, and resources from SPAN USA program coordinator Lidia Bernik

I want to share with you an exciting, new online fundraising tool called Justgiving, which allows you to create your own Web site to raise awareness and funds for suicide prevention and SPAN USA. This new system gives you an easy way to set goals, share your story, track your progress and collect donations. After using the template to customize your own page and even upload your own picture, you can click on *Tell a Friend*, and e-mail a link to your new page to all your friends, family and contacts. Supporters can donate easily and quickly via this online system, which automatically sends all recipients their tax-deductible receipt. It is a simple, efficient way to support SPAN USA and spread the word about suicide prevention.

I'd also like to highlight another innovative fundraising strategy, which a survivor recently used. To honor the memory of his brother, Stephen J. Mehler, who completed suicide in February 2004, Mark Mehler participated in – and finished – the Ironman Wisconsin Triathlon on Sept. 12, 2004. Teamed with friend Becky Reinhart, Mehler completed a 2.4-mile swim, 112-mile bike ride and 26-mile run. Through their efforts, Mehler and Reinhart raised over \$5,000 for SPAN USA.

Mehler participated in the Janus Charity Challenge, an online donation registry allowing Ironman Triathlon USA participants to raise funds for the charity of their choice. He chose SPAN USA as the recipient because he wanted the donations from family and friends throughout the country to support an organization addressing suicide prevention on a national basis. After completing his first attempt at fundraising, Mehler said, "If you tell people, most will donate, especially people whose lives have been touched by suicide in some way."

To learn more about both of these creative fundraising efforts visit www.spanusa.org. ■



resource **roundup**

Study Examines Association Between Youth-focused Firearm Laws and Youth Suicides. As firearms are used in approximately half of all youth suicides, many state and federal laws include age-specific restrictions on the purchase and possession of firearms and child-access prevention (CAP) provisions requiring safe storage of firearms. A recent study examined the association between youth-focused firearm laws and U.S. suicide rates among 14-20 year olds. Researchers concluded that CAP laws are associ-

ated with a modest reduction (8.3 percent decrease) in suicide rates among youths aged 14-17. As currently implemented, minimum-age restrictions on the purchase and possession of firearms, however, do not appear to reduce suicide rates among youths aged 14-20. The article appears in the Aug. 4, 2004, *Journal of American Medical Association*; 292: 594-601. An abstract is available at <http://jama.ama-assn.org/cgi/content/short/292/5/594>. ■

growing SPAN USA **membership**

After introducing its membership structure in early 2004, SPAN USA is delighted with the steadily increasing number of members. Thank you to the following individuals and organizations, who help prevent suicide through their SPAN USA membership, as well as their many other endeavors:

Beverly Ainsworth
Carol Allard
Debbie Allred
Donna & Amy Alt
John Alt
American Association of Suicidology
American Foundation for Suicide Prevention
Iris & Jim Angle
Rene Barrett
Baton Rouge Crisis Intervention Center
Karyl Chastain Beal
Virginia Bender
Dara Berger
Sam Bernard Ph.D.
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Philip & Marie Desena
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Betsy Donahue
Barbara Dooley
Bettie Downing
Mary Drexler
Joanna Drummond
Sue Eastgard
Peggy Farrell
Kirk D. Fasshauer
Robert Fink
Linda & Jerry Flatt
Al Floda
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Lauren Fritsch
Carl Fritts Jr.
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Ginger Gamble
Thomas Gasick
Karen Geidel
Melissa Goldsmith
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Debbie Jankord
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The Jed Foundation
Judith Johnson
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Lee Judy
Pua Kaninau
Susan Kayser
Humza Kazmi
Karen Kelly
Holland Kemp Rainey
Deborah Kimokeo
Janet Kittams-Lalley
Mr. Al Kluesner
W.H. "Buddy" Knox
Marilyn Koenig
Connie Korda
Kristine Kraft
Paddy Kutz
Sandra Smith Levine
Vanessa & Larry Lewis
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Lifekeeper Foundation
Michelle Linn-Gust
Dr. David Litts
Keri Lubell Ph.D.
Ms. Sandy Lundahl

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Dr. Ameda A. Manetta
Angela Maone
Nancy Marx
Nancy McCarty
Bonnie McClelland
Mary & Glenn McIntosh
Richard McKeon
Frederick B. Meserveg
Laura M. Meyer
Eve Meyer
Greg Miller
Brenda Molinaro
Mike & Silvia Mullan
Paul Narad
National Association for State Mental Health Program Directors (NASMHPD)
New Horizons Community Service Board
National Organization for People of Color Against Suicide (NOPCAS)
Kathy O'Hern Fowler
Susan Conlin Opheim
Sue O'Rear
Nancy, William & Geoffrey Palmer
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Michelle Protoko
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Deanna Rice
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Scott Ridgway
Pam Rieger
Randi Rivera
Micky Roberts
Elizabeth Roebuck
Stephen Roggenbaum
Alan Ross
Susan Ryan-Haupt

Margarita San Gabriel
Janet Schnell
Nancy Schubb
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Scot & Leah Simpson
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Ask a friend to join you and become a member of SPAN USA. See membership form on page 4.



Suicide prevention advocates offer one another support during the memorial event in Washington, DC.



Jerry Reed, SPAN USA executive director, (second from left) presents SPAN USA Allies for Action Awards to Sen. Christopher Dodd (D-Conn.), Sen. Gordon Smith (R-Ore.) and Rep. Bart Gordon (D-Tenn.).



U.S. Surgeon General Richard Carmona addresses SPAN USA advocates.

Energizing

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

The keynote speaker was U.S. Surgeon General Richard Carmona. Drawing from his previous experiences in direct services, Carmona mentioned the importance of increased access to mental health care, stating that mental health is a critical component of the nation's public health. He spoke of the need to advance the National Strategy for Suicide Prevention to prevent further suicides. Following the surgeon general, Sharon Smith, SPAN USA board member and

wife of Sen. Gordon Smith (R-Ore.), spoke movingly about the suicide of her son Garrett and called for increased prevention, including funding of the Garrett Lee Smith Memorial Act.

Jerry Reed, SPAN USA executive director, underscored many of the remarks offered by Carmona and Smith by announcing the findings of a recent poll commissioned by SPAN USA. The National Strategy for Suicide Prevention Benchmark Survey found that 88 percent of surveyed adults considered mental and physical health to be equally important. Yet, 62 percent of respondents believed that physical health is treated with more importance in our current health care system, highlighting the need for continued advocacy to achieve parity.

Equipped with these findings and additional prevention information, the audience participated in training workshops on organizing, fundraising and dealing with the media. Linda Falasco, a Pennsylvania advocate who has attended the Awareness Event for several years since her brother died by suicide, was enthusiastic in her praise of this year's sessions, commenting they were well put together and informative.

During the final day, participants met with legislators and their staff. SPAN USA organizers delivered educational packets and carried 24,000 petitions from their home states requesting specific action to support suicide prevention and calling for access to affordable mental health services. Since its founding, SPAN USA has delivered more than half a million petitions to Congress. ■

Membership Opportunity Send a contribution today or become a SPAN USA Member to help America's most effective grassroots suicide prevention organization continue its important work. For more information about SPAN USA membership, see www.spanusa.org/join.html. Mail to: SPAN USA, 1025 Vermont Ave. NW, Suite 1200, Washington, DC 20005

Become a SPAN USA Member:

NAME _____

ADDRESS _____

CITY / STATE _____

PHONE _____

EMAIL _____

My Contribution is...

IN HONOR OF _____

IN MEMORY OF _____

UNRESTRICTED _____

Membership

- \$25 Individual Membership
 \$15 Student or Senior Membership
 \$35 Family Membership
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I would like a S M L XL SPAN USA Tshirt

The SPAN USA Board of Directors is a diverse group of individuals from varied backgrounds. Yet, members share a common commitment: to help people touched by suicide and prevent further suicides. The following profiles introduce a few of these national leaders and highlight their determined advocacy in their own communities. Stay tuned in future editions for introduction to others on our board.

Sandra Martin, Tucker, Ga.

Sandy Martin, president, met SPAN USA founder Jerry Weyrauch at her first support group meeting three weeks after her son Tony died by suicide in 1988. She joined



Weyrauch and other advocates to grow the suicide prevention movement in Georgia, in the southeastern United States, and ultimately throughout the nation with the launch of SPAN USA. She identifies herself as the board historian, having been associated with the organization since its beginning. Martin also is well-known for starting Lifekeeper Memory Quilts, quilts put together by survivors in each state to memorialize their loved ones and help policymakers understand that suicide means the loss of a sister, brother, parent, child or friend. Sandy describes her involvement with SPAN USA and Lifekeeper as life affirming and an outlet to help others affirm their lives.

Sean Gerow, Middletown, N.Y.

Sean Gerow, treasurer, is a risk manager for Irwin Siegel Agency, a nationwide insurance company insuring human service provider agencies.



He brings to the board a broad understanding of suicide's impact, from his professional role dealing with suicide-related claims, past experience in community mental health working with youth and seniors and as a survivor of his mother's suicide. Gerow provides an important link between SPAN USA and the business world and direct care community. He advises the board on avenues for delivering its message to these groups and shares his broad knowledge of suicide prevention activities with the human service providers with

whom he works. In all of his roles, Gerow aims to educate people and deliver the message that suicide is preventable.

Seamus McCarthy, Tucson, Ariz.

SPAN USA invited Seamus McCarthy to serve on its board after learning of his important work on behalf of survivors, including producing the documentary



“Seeing Our Way Through.” The film shared the story of McCarthy and his family as they grieved and worked to accept the 1992 death of his father, Jim McCarthy, by suicide. A tireless advocate, McCarthy lectures to university classes, facilitates workshops at survivor conferences, is developing a workbook to help families heal and is establishing a SPAN Southwest affiliate. He supports SPAN USA's continued focus on survivors and grassroots efforts. “If we help people who have survived the suicide of a loved one, we also will prevent suicides, as survivors have four times the risk of attempted or completed suicide than the general population.” In addition to his suicide prevention work, McCarthy runs an independent real estate firm in Tucson.

Sharon Smith, Pendleton, Ore.

Sharon Smith joined forces with SPAN USA to help her healing process after the loss of her son Garrett to suicide in September 2003. As the wife of Sen.



Gordon Smith (R-Ore.), Smith realized she could help other families who experienced similar pain through her public role as a congressional spouse. By sharing her family's story with both legislators and constituents, she could help remove the stigma associated with suicide, highlight ways to deter suicide and push for increased funding for suicide prevention and better access to mental health care. Smith acknowledges the importance of balancing this call to public service with her numerous other commitments, including her priority of being a mom to Brittany, 24, and Morgan, 15. Noting that suicide affects families, friends and whole communities, Smith has chosen to be an advocate for people who are suffering and suicide survivors. ■

GARRETT LEE SMITH MEMORIAL ACT CLOSE TO ENACTMENT

The Garrett Lee Smith Memorial Act, a key initiative providing \$82 million in funding over three years for youth suicide prevention and early intervention programs in communities and on college campuses, is expected to be signed into law by President Bush in the coming weeks. The legislation attracted bipartisan support in both the House and Senate, including from several members who had lost loved ones to suicide. The act is named in honor of Garrett Lee Smith, the son of Sen. Smith (R-Ore.) and Sharon Smith, SPAN USA board member, who completed suicide in September 2003.

SPAN USA worked closely with Senate and House staff to ensure the legislation reflected the priorities of SPAN USA advocates: development, implementation and evaluation of suicide prevention activities. The act merged two previously introduced bills (Youth Suicide Early Intervention and Prevention Act and Campus Care and Counseling Act) to authorize three-year funding for the Suicide Prevention Resource Center; state planning, implementation and evaluation

activities; and mental and behavioral health services on college campuses.

Once the Garrett Lee Smith Memorial Act is funded through the appropriation process, suicide prevention dollars will flow directly to communities – where real prevention occurs and lives are saved (the legislation calls for 85 percent of funds to go directly to communities).

Working with its nationwide network of advocates, SPAN USA enlisted support from other national organizations, lined up co-sponsors and ensured the legislation would deliver concrete assistance to communities. Sen. Christopher Dodd (D-Conn.), the sponsor of the legislation, acknowledged the instrumental role of SPAN USA in generating a groundswell of support and the legislation's rapid approval. "SPAN USA has been an extremely helpful resource, both legislatively and as a public information source nationally. And I am honored to work in partnership with them on behalf of such a critical public health issue."

Recommended Action: Ensuring adequate funding to implement the Garrett Lee Smith Memorial Act is the next critical step. Contact your senators and representative, and ask them to support the appropriation levels as outlined

above. Also, be sure to thank your legislators if they co-sponsored this important piece of legislation. For more information and to take action, visit <http://capwiz.com/spanusa>.

NATIONAL VIOLENT DEATH REPORTING SYSTEM EXPANDS TO MORE STATES

With funding from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, four new states (California, Kentucky, New Mexico and Utah) will soon implement the National Violent Death Reporting System (NVDRS). NVDRS is a population-based injury reporting system that gathers information on violent deaths and injuries, including completed suicides, from law enforcement agencies, medical examiners and coroners, health providers and crime laboratories. The system synthesizes these multiple data sets into timely, comprehensive information states and communities can use to develop and evaluate their violence-prevention efforts. For more information on NVDRS and the complete list of 17 participating states, see www.cdc.gov/ncipc/profiles/nvdrs/facts.htm. ■

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