



SUICIDE PREVENTION ACTION NETWORK USA  
Opening Minds. Changing Policy. Saving Lives.

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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## **SPAN USA Kicks Off National Suicide Prevention Week With Memorial March for Suicide Prevention**

**WASHINGTON, D.C. (September 9, 2006)** — Today the Suicide Prevention Action Network (SPAN USA) marked the beginning of National Suicide Prevention Week with its 11<sup>th</sup> annual National Awareness Event and Memorial March for Suicide Prevention. The event, held at the World War II Memorial, began with a march on the National Mall and concluded with a speaking program featuring distinguished speakers.

Highlights also included a musical performance by Reverb, winner of the 2005 Washington Area Music Association Wammie Award for the best gospel/inspirational group, and a display of Lifekeeper Memory Quilts, which feature images of those lost to suicide.

“Today we demonstrated to citizens and lawmakers alike that suicide takes a huge toll on this nation, and that it must be addressed in every community and at every level of government,” said Jerry Reed, executive director of SPAN USA. “There are so many ways that individuals can make a real difference in the fight against suicide—they can call or write their elected officials, participate in awareness events, or educate their friends and family. No action is too small.”

World-renowned psychologist and bestselling author **Dr. Kay Redfield Jamison** gave the keynote address, discussing her own struggle with manic depression and the importance of quality mental health care in preventing suicide. Other special guests included **Washington Mystics forward-center Nakia Sanford**, who shared her personal experience of loss, and **ABC7/WJLA-TV’s Rebecca Cooper**, who served as the master of ceremonies.

Suicide prevention advocates from across the country joined the Memorial March and shared their personal stories during the subsequent speaking program. These individuals included:

- **Kirby and Susan Orme of Boise, Idaho**, became advocates for suicide prevention initiatives in their home state after losing their children Jennifer and Adrian. Kirby is the current president of SPAN Idaho.
- **Stefanie Pelkey of Spring, Texas**, lost her husband, an Iraq war veteran who suffered from post traumatic stress disorder. Herself a former captain in the U.S. Army, Stefanie now advocates for veterans and citizens suffering from post traumatic stress disorder.
- **Heidi Bryan of Phoenixville, Pa.**, has lost both friends and family members to suicide. Despite this pain and her own personal struggle with depression, Heidi founded a successful local suicide prevention group, the Feeling Blue Suicide Prevention Council. She was the winner of the 2005 SPAN USA Grassroots Award.



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Additionally, the Memorial March was led by **Tom O'Clair of Schenectady, N.Y.**, the recipient of this year's SPAN USA Founder's Award. O'Clair is a tireless advocate for mental health parity legislation in New York, fighting for the passage of Timothy's law, which is named for his 12-year-old son who completed suicide after the family's insurance provider refused to cover mental health services.

With World Suicide Prevention Day tomorrow, Sept. 10, and National Suicide Prevention Week taking place through Sept. 16, SPAN USA encouraged Americans to use this opportunity to remember those lost and take action against suicide.

Today's event was a culmination of SPAN USA's annual conference, which also included a visit to Capitol Hill on Thursday to push for public policies that help raise awareness and prevent suicide, and an awards luncheon on Friday honoring leading suicide prevention advocates.

This event was made possible through the generous support of the following sponsors: Eli Lilly and Company, the Association of American Railroads, Microsoft Corporation, Dykema Gossett PLLC, the Charles E. Kubly Foundation, T-Mobile, Forest Pharmaceuticals and MetLife. Event partners included Active Minds, the American Association of Suicidology, the National Organization for People of Color Against Suicide, CrisisLink, ACTS Helpline, the Virginia Department of Health, the Downtown Cluster of Congregations and *Advancing Suicide Prevention* magazine.

In the United States alone, more than 30,000 individuals complete suicide every year, while at least another 650,000 attempt suicide. Suicide is the 11<sup>th</sup> leading cause of death in this country, the third-leading cause of death for young people between the ages of 10 and 24, and the second-leading cause of death for American college students. But suicide is preventable—more than 90 percent of those who complete suicide suffer from depression or another diagnosable mental health or substance abuse disorder.

*SPAN USA is the nation's only suicide prevention organization dedicated to preventing suicide through public education and awareness, community action, and federal, state and local grassroots advocacy. For more information, please visit [www.spanusa.org](http://www.spanusa.org).*

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