

Night to Live 2012

Youth we Remember

Night to Live is an event which brings to light youth who have completed suicide in relation to bullying, harassment, and school violence they faced. While we call attention to those who have been targeted because of an actual or perceived sexual orientation or gender identity, we remember all students and young people who have ended their lives from this type of violence. We know that bullying is not always the direct cause of suicide, but it is a focal trigger which can cause significant emotional and psychological harm leading youth to consider self-harm and suicide.

This year, we remember the countless youth who have ended their lives in relation to hatred, bigotry, and bullying they faced. We stand in firm support of those currently suffering in our schools and commit ourselves to standing up to bullying and harassment. We specifically call attention to the following Pennsylvanians:

Within one week this September, FOUR STUDENTS in Luzerne County independently completed suicide related to bullying. They are:

Joshuah Delos Santos, 13, of Nanticoke Pennsylvania on September 18

Matthew Montagna, 16, of Pittston Pennsylvania on September 21

A 15 year old girl from Avoca, Pennsylvania on September 24

A 13 year old boy from Hazleton, Pennsylvania on September 25

As well as the recent deaths of:

Brandon Bitner of Snyder County

Britney Tongel of Northumberland County

And Jasmyn Smith of Lancaster County.

From the Times-Tribune: News of two more teenage suicides rocked Luzerne County...prompting promises by school and police officials to develop solutions to prevent young people from taking their lives.



As students shuffled into class Tuesday, the Pittston Area school community grieved the loss of a 15-year-old sophomore from Avoca who killed herself in Duryea on Monday night. Hours later, authorities learned a 13-year-old boy from Hazleton had killed himself inside a Church Street home.

In one week, the lives of four Luzerne County schoolchildren had ended in suicide, a bleak time many veteran educators say they have never experienced in their careers.

A Greater Nanticoke Area eighth-grader, 13, fatally shot himself Sept. 18 inside his Nanticoke home. A Pittston Area junior, 16, killed himself with a hunting rifle Sept. 21 at his Jenkins Twp. home. Authorities did not name the most recent victims or disclose how they died.



Joshuah Delos Santos (1999-2012)
Luzerne County, PA

From the Citizen's Voice: Many speaking at [his] vigil criticized what they called "bullies" who they said drove Delos Santos to take his own life. A Facebook tribute page to the teen was ablaze with similar complaints from classmates.

"He was really good at hiding his feelings," Nicole Delos Santos, 15, one of the boy's sisters said by phone Wednesday. "He didn't let us know."

At the vigil, the Rev. James Nash urged the crowd to help stop bullying as red flares burned at each street intersection around the square. Several students wore white shirts and dark ties in a tribute to their deceased friend, who often did the same in school.

Perrone, with the district for half a century now, estimated this was the first student to commit suicide in 30 years. The gun Joshua Delos Santos used was legally owned by the boy's father and was secured with a lock in the home, Shulz said.

Friends, family and school officials all said the tragedy was worsened by the fact the boy never told anyone of his inner struggles. His sister asked others in a similar situation not to do the same.

"Stand up for yourself and say something to someone," Nicole Delos Santos said. "There's always all these different people that will help you."

More Information: <http://citizensvoice.com/news/community-gathers-to-mourn-nanticoke-teen-1.1376188>



Matthew Montagna (1996-2012)

Luzerne County, PA

From the Citizen's Voice: Home alone on Friday night, the 16-year-old fatally shot himself with a hunting rifle at the family's Meade Street residence in Jenkins Township, officials said.

Almost immediately, classmates pointed the finger at bullying they said he endured inside Pittston Area High School and organized a memorial vigil to spotlight bullying. Now, the school and police are investigating those claims.

"I don't know if it was the reason. There could be a lot of reasons. People did call him harsh names, like retard," Matt's twin brother, Nick, said Monday, adding people also taunted Matt for his frizzy, long hair before he recently cut it short. "I didn't know what was going through his head. Maybe he couldn't take it. Everything had to build up inside of him."

Matt left behind a note, which Jenkins Township police took as part of their investigation.

Montagna said his son made it clear he "hated" attending Pittston Area each day he would drop him off at school.

..."Bullying needs to stop. It could kill somebody. Words hurt more than you think," Christina [a Pittston Area High School Parent] said.





Brandon Bitner (1996-2010)

Snyder County, PA

Fourteen year old Brandon Bitner left his Mount Pleasant Mills, Pa. home during the early morning hours on Friday, November 5, 2010. Brandon walked alone, in the cold darkness, over 6 miles to a busy intersection on US Routes 11 & 15 near Liverpool, Pa. When he arrived at his destination, Brandon stepped out in front of a Weis Markets tractor trailer truck and committed suicide.

Brandon's mother Tammy discovered her son's suicide note at their home before 4 a.m. that tragic Friday. Brandon addressed his love for his closest family and friends but also expressed his reasons for taking his own life.

In the suicide note, Brandon described constant bullying and harassment in the Mid-West School District, which had been happening for over five years. Fellow students constantly harassed Brandon on a daily basis for his appearance and his assumed sexual preference. Brandon was called gay, faggot, sissy, emo, goth, and witnesses even saw him being physically abused in the school hallways.

Brandon also laid out a mission for his family, friends, and supporters in his suicide note. He believed that his suicide would teach the school district, the surrounding communities and maybe even the world, that bullying is not something that should be taken lightly. Brandon specifically requested that his family and friends march on in his honor, to bring awareness to bullying and the mental and physical abuse that it causes.

More information: <http://brandonbitner.com/>



Britney Tongel (1994-2011)
Northumberland County, PA

From the Republican Herald:
TREVORTON - The death of a 17-year-old Line Mountain High School sophomore, reportedly by suicide at her Trevorton home in Northumberland County, has sparked an outcry about bullying.

Facebook exploded in a firestorm of comment Thursday as news of the death of Britney Tongel spread. Among the accusations, which could not be confirmed, made in a number of Facebook posts is that two girls had recently posted messages on a social networking site created by Tongel suggesting she kill herself, "and she did," one person wrote.

--Britney was a foster child. On CBS World News her foster father said: "It was kids making fun of her, because she was a foster kid 'you don't have real parents'". The bullies even attacked her memorial page on Facebook following her death, with graphics stating "I'll still be a slut down in hell" and "She is better off dead".--

More information: <http://republicanherald.com/news/line-mountain-teen-s-death-sparks-outcry-about-bullying-1.1106862>

http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=Nr4Xhfv7UvM#!



Jasmyn Smith (2001-2012)

Lancaster County, PA

From CBS 21: Jasmyn Smith would have been a sixth grader at Park Elementary School this year. The 11-year-old died from self-inflicted wounds. Her family tells CBS 21 News that she choked herself with a belt after being heavily bullied at school and online. Her family says it went on for a year and a half.

More Information:

<http://www.whptv.com/news/local/story/UPDATE-Vigil-held-for-11-year-old-who-took-her/sTEkWnX5a0Se19iUGWfKwg.csp>