

Suicide Prevention & Awareness



In the United States, **suicide claims more than 48,000 lives annually**, according to the most recently reported statistics from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. The Government of Canada reports that suicide is **the second leading cause of death among youth and young adults ages 15 to 34 years**.

A Better Tomorrow Is Possible

MARY BETH SALLEE
Community News

Today, Steven Reneau has a life he once struggled to imagine for himself: a happy marriage, three children, a career he loves, and a future he can look forward to.

But the road to get there was anything but easy.

Steven can trace the beginning of his struggles back to his late teens and early 20s.

“I had fears that I assumed were normal that would oftentimes lead to breakdowns or panic attacks,” Steven said. “At the time, I didn’t know these were obvious signs of anxiety and depression.”

Those fears often surfaced during seemingly ordinary, everyday situations.

“I hated to talk on the phone. I worried that ordering food for delivery was putting people out or inconveniencing them,” Steven said. “Driving was pretty much always me waiting for something to go wrong and for an accident to occur.”

Over time, those fears even began to affect the way Steven saw himself.

“I’d feel weak or foolish for not being able to handle simple tasks without that dread tied to them,” he explained. “This led to me building a pretty poor self-image. That view of myself led to a deep depression.”

For Steven, the two struggles became intertwined.

“And that’s how it began,” he said. “The anxiety fueled the depression, and the depression fueled the anxiety.”

Steven said those closest to him generally recognized what he was going through, particularly his eldest sister, whom he considers one of his best friends.

“She was always the person I could turn to for advice and encouragement during my lows,” Steven said.

Unlike some who struggle silently, Steven said he was open about his mental health and his struggles with anxiety and depression. But being willing to talk about his emotions also made Steven aware of the expectations that can be placed on men when it comes to expressing them.

“I was always pretty open about my feelings, and it was very clear early on that other men weren’t,” Steven shared. “I’d hear often, if I told someone something made me cry, that it wasn’t normal for men to cry. Or, there was always someone that had something negative to say about men who cried. It



▲ Photo Submitted
Steven Reneau is pictured in March 2019, during what he describes as one of the most difficult periods of his life.

made me feel like an outcast sometimes, whereas now I wear it as a badge of honor.”

Similar messages were sometimes present at home.

“It was pretty standard practice in my home that you ‘suck it up’ and that it was ‘mind over matter,’” Steven said. “Instead of being vocal about your feelings, the expectation was you moved on from them.”

“It was never pushed on me in a negative way. Instead, it was intended to encourage resilience,” Steven added in regards to those mindsets and expectations. “However, with the feelings I already had, it just felt like I was being undermined for feeling the way I did.”

As Steven’s anxiety and depression continued, the consequences became more serious. Eventually, he turned to alcohol.

“At some point, I started leaning into alcohol as a crutch to avoid the feelings that weighed on me every day,” Steven said. “I drank basically off and on all day from morning to night on days where I didn’t have other obligations.”

Instead of providing the escape he was looking for, Steven said drinking only compounded the problem, making his anxiety and depression worse. His mental health also began interfering with his ability to maintain steady employment.

STEVEN, CONTINUED ON PAGE B4



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Suicide Prevention Awareness Month



Suicide takes tens of thousands of lives each year, and affects thousands more who are left behind. Oftentimes, the stigma surrounding suicide prevents people from talking about it and seeking the help they need to survive and recover. That’s why suicide prevention starts with each of us. Participating in awareness activities, volunteering or reaching out to somebody who you think may be depressed are all ways you can help during Suicide Prevention Month and every day.

If you are in crisis, call the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at **1-800-273-TALK (8255)**.