Son’s suicide fuels creator of ‘Fresh Check’ events to prevent the same fate for others

At first glance, it looks like so many other events on a college campus. Inflatable obstacle courses, T-shirt tie-dying stations, and a student-led yoga class pepper the lawn. Students stroll by booths representing different campus groups, collecting Frisbees, sunglasses and other giveaways. Others line up by a row of local food trucks as a student acapella group performs nearby.

What differentiates this event from so many other college fairs and festivals is the important message it hopes to deliver to students — that mental health matters and you’re never alone.

Delivering that message has become a personal calling for Marisa Giarnella-Porco, who will speak at Natchaug Hospital’s ECSU Foundation Luncheon on Wednesday, March 14. Her son, Jordan, was just a month into the second semester of his freshman year at St. Michael’s College in Vermont when he took his own life.

Marisa Giarnella-Porco will be the keynote speaker at Natchaug Hospital’s ECSU Foundation Benefit Luncheon on Wednesday, March 14, in the Betty Tipton Room at the Eastern Connecticut State University Student Union. Tickets are $100 and are available at www.natchaug.org/events — all proceeds will support Natchaug’s educational programs. For more information, contact sherry.smardon@hhchealth.org.
In speaking with Jordan’s friends, we know he was exhibiting some behavior changes,” Giarnella-Porco said. “At home, before he left for the semester, he was struggling with decisions like whether he wanted to take a gap year and what his major would be.”

Jordan didn’t show some of the tell-tale symptoms of severe depression or mental illness, like withdrawal from friends or activities, and as a career social worker, Giarnella-Porco never shied away from discussing mental health or suicide in her home.

“There were some definite changes going on, but he wasn’t formally diagnosed with any mental illness and was masking his symptoms by going to school and about his routine,” Giarnella-Porco. “[After his death,] a lot of people felt that if it happened to Jordan, it could happen to anyone.”

In the wake of Jordan’s death, Giarnella-Porco channeled her grief into helping address the issue of suicide in young adults, which ranks as the second leading cause of death for the age group. With the help of family and friends, she began that journey by researching the landscape of college mental health education and awareness.

“Our initial finding was that there were some really great resources and programs out there, but we didn’t know how they were getting to the kids,” Giarnella-Porco said.

Inspired by her son’s legacy, Giarnella-Porco co-founded the Jordan Porco Foundation which debuted its signature Fresh Check Day in 2012 at Eastern Connecticut State University. Fresh Check Days raise awareness and education about mental health and suicide on college campuses.

Students participate in a tie-dye craft at one of the first Fresh Check Days at Eastern Connecticut State University. Fresh Check Days raise awareness and education about mental health and suicide on college campuses.

interactive displays and activities.

“Jordan never would have gone to a mental health event on campus, but if you made it fun with a festival-like atmosphere, you might engage somebody like Jordan to come and have conversations with people on campus and create an avenue for education and awareness,” Giarnella-Porco said.

Each Fresh Check Day takes about a semester to plan, and the organizers rely heavily on support from student groups and organizations.

“We involve all disciplines across campus, so it’s not just on the back of the counseling center,” Giarnella-Porco said. “It’s designed to bring the message to the students wherever they’re at, whether they are concerned about a friend or themselves, or they need the opportunity to see where on campus they can fit in or connect.”

Since the Jordan Porco Foundation held its first Fresh Check Day, the event has spread to college campuses across the country. In 2017 alone, there were 128 Fresh Check events in 34 states that were attended by more than 30,000 students.

Many schools, including local colleges like Eastern Connecticut and the University of Connecticut, have made Fresh Check Days an annual occurrence, and the response from students has been powerful.

“We’ve had students say, ‘I needed this. It’s finals time and I’m stressed out,’” Giarnella-Porco said. “One school shared that a student ripped up their suicide note after attending the event.”

With the success of Fresh Check Days, the Jordan Porco Foundation established two other programs — “Nine Out of Ten,” an ambassador program which empowers students on campus to find their voice and spread suicide prevention messaging in creative ways, and “4 What’s Next,” which offers high school juniors and seniors the chance to interactively discuss transitioning out of high school into work, the military or college.

“Everything we do is really peer-centered, because kids really know how to communicate with each other,” Giarnella-Porco said. “When it’s done safely and with some guidance, it’s a really effective way to promote this message… that suicide prevention is everyone’s responsibility.”

For more information about the Jordan Porco Foundation visit www.jordanporcofoundation.org.

About BHNews

BHNews is published every other Friday. Story ideas or submissions may be sent to amanda.nappi@hhchealth.org or steve.coates@hhchealth.org. Articles must be submitted as a Microsoft Word document. Every effort will be made to run the article in its entirety, but due to space constraints and style requirements, editing may be necessary.

The deadline for the next edition of BHNews is Tuesday, March 6, at noon.
Purdue Pharma ends marketing strategy in light of opioid crisis

After years of criticism that the company’s aggressive sales tactics have contributed to the opioid crisis, pharmaceutical giant Purdue Pharma announced earlier this month that it will stop marketing its opioid drugs to doctors.

Sales of OxyContin, the company’s biggest selling drug, generated $1.8 billion for the Stamford-based drug maker in 2017.

“It’s about time,” said Rushford Medical Director J. Craig Allen, MD, on the company’s decision to cut direct marketing to doctors by drug company representatives. “Every little bit helps [in the battle to stop opioid abuse], but this is just a drop in the bucket. I’d like to see pharmaceutical companies be much more active and aggressive in educating about the risks of opioids.”

The company said it will be cutting its sales force in half and is notifying doctors that salespeople will no longer come to their offices to promote the company’s pain products.

“These medications can be helpful and are certainly one of the tools to address pain. However, they are not always the best option and providers and patients need to know that they have significant complications and side effects,” Allen said. “Promoting them by educating health-care providers about their appropriate use would be the responsible thing to do. Unfortunately, there are tremendously powerful forces that reward higher sales.”

Allen said patients and providers should be aware that the longer one uses opioid medications the greater the chance of developing side effects including depression, addiction, and overdose. He said that after just 10 days of medication the likelihood that someone will still be taking it a year later is 20 percent.

“If a patient requires more than a week of opioid analgesic medication, the patient and prescriber should review the current treatment strategy,” Allen said.
Dear Colleagues:

As a Behavioral Health Network, it seems that we are doing many of the right things to attract patients and grow. We have compassionate staff; we are working on customer service; we are focusing on recovery; we have good outcomes; and we are educating the community through events, news coverage and advertisements.

But do we really know what the public thinks of us? With increased competition and the rise of consumerism, it is important that we have market perception data on the BHN, our individual entities, our programs and our competition. That's why — for the first time — we are conducting a market perception study.

Hospitals have been doing market perception studies for many years, giving them a baseline of what the public thinks of them and foundation to improve. When we launch this online market perception study in March, this will be the first time HHC has commissioned a study of this kind beyond hospitals or the system as a whole.

The study will focus on the Institute of Living, Rushford, Natchaug, our acute care locations and some of our programs, including MATCH, Recovery Coaches and Primary Care-Behavioral Health. Questions include:

- How would you rate the BHN overall?
- How would you rate (insert individual BHN entity here) overall?
- When you think of organizations that treat mental health in your region, which organizations come to mind?
- How familiar are you with (insert competitor here)?
- What were the ways you...found out about the mental health/substance abuse organizations you have used?
- How satisfied were you with the mental health/substance abuse treatment you received?

These are just a sampling of the 60 or so questions that will be asked. The study is being conducted by Market Street Research, which has significant experience in polls involving healthcare and will ensure that the study is scientifically valid. In the end we will get a report on what the public thinks of us and our competitors, and some suggestions on how we can improve.

Currently we are finalizing the questions, and we hope to begin the survey in March. We will provide more information as we get closer to launch. In the meantime, keep doing all that you do make a positive impression on our patients, their families and the public. When the survey is complete we will make sure that it is not a document that sits on a shelf somewhere — it will be our roadmap to improve what our customers — and non-customers — think about us and our competition.

Pat Rehmer, MSN, ACHE, is Hartford HealthCare senior vice president for behavioral health and president of the Behavioral Health Network.

HHC partnership brings virtual urgent care to employees

Not feeling well? Starting this month Hartford HealthCare employees and their families will be able to consult a licensed medical provider from the comfort of your home or office.

Hartford HealthCare’s partnership with American Well, a national leader in telehealth, will offer patients a new convenient way to access a provider for concerns such as anxiety, bronchitis, colds, cough, depression, diarrhea, ear infection, fever, flu, pink eye, respiratory infection, sinus infection, smoking cessation, sore throat, sprains and strains, urinary tract infection, vomiting, and weight concerns.

Urgent care video visits using a computer or mobile app will be offered to employees and their families through an exclusive pilot to help Hartford HealthCare evaluate whether such a service would enhance access to care for employees and potentially all patients in the communities we serve.

The cost of an urgent care video visit will be $49 and is not covered by insurance, but you may use your health savings account or flexible spending account to cover the cost. The service will be available to all Hartford HealthCare employees and family members. A $10 discount will be offered for first-time users. To learn more or see a doctor, visit the Virtual Urgent Care page of HHC Connect or download the Hartford HealthCare Now app from the App Store or Google Play.
As America comes to grips with yet another school shooting, parents are faced with explaining the tragedy to their children. Laura Saunders, PsyD, from the Institute of Living appeared on Fox 61, NBC-CT and WFSB last week to offer advice for parents on discussing the Parkland, Fla., shooting with their kids following the shooting.

“For young children, we really need to shield them from as much information as possible. For older kids, we have to provide factual information. There is a lot of uncertainty. [They might ask] why would someone do this? And there are a lot of things we don’t have answers to,” Saunders told NBC-CT. “We need to provide assurances not promises. Assurances that our schools are doing the best they can to keep you safe, and first responders — police and firefighters — do their best to take care of us.”

Saunders urges parents not to project their anxiety while discussing the tragedy with their children and to remind them that school shootings are low probability events. She said one of the best ways for parents and children to cope with tragedies like this is to lean on one another for support.

“It is very much a here we go again sentiment. It can be re-traumatizing for some people. It’s a very difficult and painful time in our history,” Saunders said. “We need to focus on a way to soothe ourselves. I can guarantee you that if we focus on all of the negative things that are happening, it’s not going to soothe us.”

[Image of Saunders]

Dr. Saunders offers coping advice on Parkland school shooting

More news

- NBC-CT: https://youtu.be/fr9mEq-w56E
- Fox 61: https://youtu.be/jlxGiD2ANIA

Healthy Family FunFest

Join us for an exciting and fun-filled day with health information, speakers, screenings, demonstrations, and activities for everyone from children to seniors.

Sunday, February 25, 2018
10:30 am – 3:00 pm
The Aqua Turf Club
556 Mulberry Street
Plantsville, Connecticut

FREE ADMISSION!
I-HeartRadio - Renee DiNino and Cory Myers

Brought to you by:

Hartford HealthCare
Connect to healthier.

Premiere Sponsor:
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MainStreet Community Foundation

For information on sponsoring or exhibiting, call Antoinette Ouellette at 860.378.1268 or email antoinette.ouellette@hhchealth.org. www.healthyfamilyfunfest.org
The Institute of Living is hosting an American Red Cross blood drive on Tuesday, March 6, from 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. in the Clark Social Room.

The American Red Cross has a critical need for blood donors to give now and help address a winter blood donation shortage. Severe winter weather and widespread flu have contributed to very low turnout or outright cancellation of many blood drives.

The Red Cross is encouraging all eligible donors to schedule an appointment and donate. To schedule an appointment, call 1.800.RED.CROSS (1.800.733.2767) or visit www.redcross-blood.org and enter sponsor code IOL.
Recreational therapists highlight importance of leisure activities

There is a common misconception that recreational therapists just “distract” patients with arts, crafts, pet therapy, and activities such as bingo and Nintendo Wii. The truth is that most hospitals employ recreational therapists because they are professionals who provide goal-directed interventions that assist patients to regain their maximum independent functioning in their leisure lifestyle. Their mission is to promote patients’ development of the knowledge and skills that support recovery and an improved quality of life.

February is National Therapeutic Recreation Awareness Month and Feb. 19-23 was designated as a time at the Institute of Living to recognize the value that recreational therapists add to inpatient units, outpatient programs, the Todd House and Eli’s Retreat.

For patients who are challenged by alcohol, substances, or mental illness, recreational therapists can help them understand the importance of the positive use of leisure and recreation, and the significance it has for their recovery and overall wellbeing. Recreational therapists use education and activities to increase patients’ awareness of home and community leisure resources, as well as how to overcome barriers that may impede recreation participation.

When individuals have suffered a disability through disease or an accident, recreational therapists can help patients adjust to their conditions through the use of assistive devices or other adaptations so that individuals may resume participation in their preferred activities. Adaptive skiing and wheelchair sports are examples of this kind of therapeutic recreation.

Recreational therapists continue to expand their roles at the Institute of Living. Responsibilities now include involvement on the IDEA team, CPI training, CPR instruction, various committee memberships, as well as milieu orientation and problem resolution through Start-Up and Community Meeting leadership and participation.

“Recreational therapists want to remind everyone that a balanced lifestyle is important in maintaining good physical and mental health,” said Therapeutic Recreation Coordinator Steve Fredette, MA, CTRS. “Remember that virtually anything done in your free time that is positive can lead to increased feelings of accomplishment and satisfaction, help overcome boredom and loneliness, contribute to weight loss and better physical fitness, and make possible the development of new areas of interest that give greater meaning to our lives.”

Family Resource Center Support Groups

The IOL Family Resource Center (FRC) holds regular support groups. All programs are free of charge and, unless otherwise noted, are held in the Massachusetts Cottage, First Floor Group Room at the IOL Campus, 200 Retreat Ave., Hartford. The upcoming IOL FRC Support Group schedule is as follows:

- **Support Group For Those Coping With A New Or Chronic Medical Condition.** Feb. 23, March 9, 16, 23, 30. (Every Friday except the first of the month), 1 - 2 p.m. in the Center Building, First Floor Conference Room. For young adults ages 17-26 struggling with a new diagnosis, chronic medical conditions, physical symptoms or limitations. The group will help with difficult losses and limitation due to a medical condition, and build a positive, future-oriented focus with realistic goals. To RSVP, please email marissa.sicley-rogers@hhchealth.org.

- **Depression Bipolar Support Alliance Group (DBSA).** Feb. 26, March 5, 12, 19, 26. (Every Monday), noon – 1 p.m. in the Todd Building, Bunker Room and Feb. 28, March 7, 14, 21, 28 (Every Wednesday), 7 – 8 p.m. in the Commons Building, 2nd Floor, Litchfield Room. Peer run support group for those who have been diagnosed with depression or bipolar disorder.

- **Social Support Group — LGBTQ Issues (Lesbian/Gay/Bisexual/Transgender/Questioning).** Feb. 28, March 14, 28. (Second and fourth Wednesday of each month), 5 – 6:15 p.m. in the Center Building, Young Adult Service Group Room. Support group for 16- to 23-year-olds who identify LGBTQ issues as being prominent in their lives. The goal is to discuss support strategies to manage life challenges.

- **Trauma Support Group.** Feb. 28, March 14, 28. (Second and fourth Wednesday of each month), 6-7 p.m. A peer-led group that offers a supportive environment for individuals with any type of trauma history. Attendees will discuss relevant topics and educational materials will be available. To attend, please RSVP to Laura at 860.545.7324.

- **It’s Hard To Be A Mom.** March 1, 15. (First and third Thursday of each month), 10 - 11:30 a.m. Peer-led group that acknowledges the inherent challenges with modern-day mothering and offers an opportunity for mothers to come together, share experiences, and sup-

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Family Resource Center Support Groups (continued)

port each other. This group welcomes expecting mothers and mothers with babies to discuss any and all challenges associated with motherhood. Babies welcome! Space is limited. Please RSVP to Laura at 860.545.7324.

- Hearing Voices Network (HVN). March 1, 8, 15, 22, 29. (Every Thursday), 5 – 6:30 p.m. in the Todd Building, Bunker Room. Peer run support group based firmly on a belief of self-help, mutual respect and understanding where people can safely share their experiences of voices, visions, unusual sensory perceptions. The groups offer an opportunity for people to accept and find meaning in their experiences that help them regain power over their lives.

- Support Group For Families Dealing With Major Mental Illness. March 1, 15. (First and third Thursday of each month), 5:15 – 6:30 p.m. in the Center Building, First Floor Conference Room. For family and friends of individuals who have schizophrenia, bipolar or other related disorders. Learn to care for yourself while caring for others.

- Al-Anon Parent Group. March 1, 8, 15, 22, 29. (Every Thursday), 7 - 8 p.m. One hour topic discussion.

- Dementia Support/Educational Group Meeting. March 6. (First Tuesday of each month), 11:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. in the Donnelly Conference Room, First Floor. Please join us as we bring together experts and those who want guidance, direction, and support. Space is limited — reservations are required by calling 860.545.7665.

- Substance Use Educational And Support Group. March 8 (Second Thursday of each month), 4 – 5 p.m. For family members impacted by loved ones with substance abuse.

- Anxiety Disorders: An Introduction. March 20, June 5, 6:30 – 7:45 p.m. This lecture is for families and friends of individuals who have an anxiety disorder or a related disorder. Participants will acquire a basic understanding of anxiety disorders, their treatments and suggestions to help them better cope with the illness. To attend, please RSVP to Laura at 860.545.7324.

- Autism Spectrum Support/Educational Group Meeting For Parents. March 21. (Third Wednesday of the month), 6 - 7 p.m. Providing a place for parents of children on the autism spectrum, or another related disorder, to come together and get support and information. Monthly, peer-run support groups interspersed with special guests and speakers to offer additional guidance and perspective. Please RSVP to Goviana at 860.560.1711 or gmorales@spedconnecticut.org.

- Managing Schizophrenia. April 3, 6:30 – 7:45 p.m. This presentation will discuss the impact that symptoms of schizophrenia have on everyday activities, and provide tips on what you can do to make things better at home. To attend, please RSVP to Laura at 860.545.7324.

- Dementia Lecture: An Introduction. April 17, 6:30 – 7:45 p.m. This program is for family members and friends of individuals who have dementia or a related disorder. It will present a basic understanding of the disorder, its treatment, along with specific suggestions to help family members and friends cope with the illness. To attend, please RSVP to Laura at 860.545.7324.

- Introduction To Mental Health Benefits and Services. May 1, 6:30 – 7:45 p.m. This presentation will provide an overview of benefit programs available for individuals with mental health disabilities. To attend, please RSVP to Laura at 860.545.7324.

- Depression: An Introduction To The Disorder. May 15, 6:30 – 7:45 p.m. This program is for family and friends of individuals who suffer from depression. It will present a basic understanding of major depression, its treatment, and ways family members might better cope with the illness. To attend, please RSVP to Laura at 860.545.7324.

- Schizophrenia: An Introduction To The Disorder. May 15, 6:30 – 7:45 p.m. This program is for family and friends of individuals who have schizophrenia or a related disorder. It will present a basic understanding of the disorder, its treatment, along with suggestions to help family members and friends cope with the illness. To attend, please RSVP to Laura at 860.545.7324.

- Bipolar: An Introduction To The Disorder. May 29, 6:30 – 7:45 p.m. For family members and friends of individuals who have bipolar or a related disorder. It will present a basic understanding of the disorder, its treatment, along with specific suggestions to help cope with the illness. To attend, please RSVP to Laura at 860.545.7324.

If you are a student that needs to observe a group for a class assignment, you must contact the Family Resource Center by emailing Laura Durst at laura.durst@hhhealth.org two weeks prior to the group you would like to attend. Please note, not all of our groups are open for observers and it is up to the facilitator and group members themselves.
Getting ready for spring

The Journey House girls and Master Gardeners worked together last week to make decorative dried wreaths with flowers that were grown and harvested at Journey House this year. The girls used the wreaths in a number of different ways — as decorations for their rooms, as gifts for family members and as hair pieces. Thank you to the dedicated Master Gardeners, who not only garden in the summer, but they continue to help Journey House residents to grow in the off season.

Pharmacist presents Vitamin D findings

Jose Scarpa, RPh, Natchaug Hospital director of pharmacy, will present an abstract, “Unrecognized Vitamin-D Toxicity Leads to Opioid Withdrawals, Other Adverse Effects and Overutilization of Medical Resources: A Case Report” at the College of Psychiatric and Neurologic Pharmacy Conference in Indianapolis in April. The case review was completed in partnership with Megan Carroll, MPH, Behavioral Health Network quality analyst, and Deborah Weidner, MD, MBA, regional medical director for behavioral health in the HHC East Region, BHN patient safety and quality, and medical director for primary care behavioral health integration.

The project offers a case review on a former Natchaug patient who suffered from Hypervitaminosis-D, a rare condition caused by a prolonged regimen of high doses of Vitamin D, and was unable to take scheduled medications because of the condition, resulting in pain, opioid withdrawals and psychiatric symptoms. Pharmacist intervention identified a drug-related problem that impacted quality of life and medical costs.

Empowering Young Adults: A Fresh Approach to Mental Health Programming

When:
Wednesday, March 14, 2018
Noon – 1:30 pm

Where:
Betty R. Tipton Room
Student Center, Eastern Connecticut State University, Willimantic

Hosted by
Elsa M. Núñez - President of Eastern Connecticut State University
and
Pat Rehmer - President of the Hartford HealthCare Behavioral Health Network

Guest Speaker
Marisa Giarnella-Porco - President of The Jordan Porco Foundation

• Minimum donation of $100 per guest
• Sponsored tables of ten available

RSVP by March 2 to Sherry Smardon
860.465.5910 or sherry.smardon@hhchealth.org

Luncheon sponsored by
The ECSU Foundation, Inc.
All proceeds will benefit Natchaug Hospital’s educational programs.

natchaug.org/events
Local actor helps Avon clients with anxiety, mindfulness

Clients at Rushford in Avon had a visit from Erica LuBonta from the Complete Actor’s Studio of Avon on Feb. 8.

During her visit to Rushford, LuBonta worked with clients to help them practice critical life strategies and improve communications skills. Using a variety of games and instruction, LuBonta and lead IOP clinician Pamela Mirante taught clients techniques to achieve mindfulness and relieve stress. LuBonta reminded clients that positive change doesn’t come without some discomfort.

LuBonta is a stage actor from New York City who received training with the world-renowned improvisational and sketch comedy group the Upright Citizens Brigade, whose alumni include Tina Fey and Amy Poehler. She also works as a director and teaching artist in the Education Departments of Hartford Stage and The Bushnell.

Rushford holds No One Eats Alone Day

Students involved in Rams in Action, an after-school peer leadership group at Woodrow Wilson Middle School in Middletown facilitated by Felicia Goodwine-Vaughters, Rushford prevention and wellness coordinator, organized a National No One Eats Alone Day initiative on Feb. 9 to help bring awareness to social isolation and encourage students to engage in simple acts of kindness by making sure no one is eating alone.

The Rams created posters, made morning announcements and created conversation starters for each table during lunch. Students were invited to sit with someone new at lunch and make sure everyone at the table was included.

Zero Suicide group builds momentum

For almost a year now, individuals representing various departments at Rushford have met monthly as part of the Champion Zero Suicide Committee. Zero Suicide is a commitment to suicide prevention in health and behavioral health care systems that also offers a specific set of tools and strategies.

The group has worked on safety planning for our clients and sharing information about suicide prevention as well as creating curriculum and working with our local schools.

Some of the protective factors for suicide include:

- Effective clinical care for mental, physical and substance use disorders
- Easy access to a variety of clinical interventions and support for help seeking
- Restricted access to highly lethal means of suicide
- Strong connections to family and community support
- Support through ongoing medical and mental health care relationships
- Skills in problem solving, conflict resolution and nonviolent handling of disputes
- Cultural and religious beliefs that discourage suicide and support self-preservation

Unfortunately, positive resistance to suicide is not permanent, so programs that support and maintain protection, like Zero Suicide, are an ongoing effort.

Teen night goes retro

Haddam Killingworth Healthy Coalition and Rushford combined for a Teen Night that was highlighted by roller skating with disco balls and more!