September 2024

DONOR Connection

PITTSBURGH MERCY
A HERITAGE OF HOPE

Zero Suicide Initiative: "Because One is Too Many"

September is **National Suicide Prevention Month**. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), one person dies by suicide every 11 minutes in the United States. A program at Pittsburgh Mercy aims to reduce that grim statistic.

Last year, Pittsburgh Mercy entered the **Zero Suicide Academy**, a national best practice suicide prevention program designed to increase screening and early detection for those we serve. Headed by Adult Outpatient Services supervisors **Chris Lu** and **Justin Smith**, the program is based on a **framework** of seven elements that form a holistic approach to suicide prevention within health and behavioral health care systems:

- Lead system-wide culture change committed to reducing suicides.
- Train a competent, confident, and caring workforce.
- Identify individuals with suicide risk via comprehensive screening and assessment.
- Engage all individuals at-risk of suicide using a suicide care management plan.
- Treat suicidal thoughts and behaviors directly using evidence-based treatments.
- Transition individuals through care with warm hand-offs and supportive contacts.
- Improve policies and procedures through continuous quality improvement.

The program's framework is flexible, allowing Pittsburgh Mercy to adapt it to fit in various settings, and is unique because suicide is being addressed as its own condition and not just a symptom of mental health or substance use disorder – even though many who experience suicidal ideation and behaviors are struggling with those issues.

As an organization dedicated to adopting best practices in support of those we serve, professionals from every Pittsburgh Mercy department are involved in the program – including the director of behavioral health, clinical leads, therapists, engagement care managers, peer enrollment navigators, and an executive leadership team. Pittsburgh

Mercy's goal is to reduce deaths by suicide to zero, because even one is too many.

Pittsburgh Zoo representatives introduce several of their outreach animals at our Wexford Day Program.

Carnegie Mellon University students donated over 800 hygiene kits to Operation Safety Net.

A Special Event, A Special Donation

Our community support comes from a variety of sources, and we're thrilled to share two recent examples.

- **Pittsburgh Zoo Animal Ambassadors Visit Wexford Adult Training Facility.** There's nothing quite like an animal ambassador to bring smiles to faces. On Sept. 10, residents at the facility (which serves adults with intellectual disabilities) got up close and personal with five charming zoo residents: Jack the pancake tortoise; Clark Kent the lionhead rabbit; Goober the prehensile skink; Phoenix the burrowing owl; and Burundi the ball python. Thanks to Pittsburgh Zoo staff members Melanie and Roo for making it such a memorable day!
- **CMU Students Step Up to Help the Homeless.** First-year students at Carnegie Mellon University donated and packed over 800 hygiene kits that will be distributed at our engagement center, through the Operation Safety Net Street Medicine Program, and at Second Avenue Commons shelter. Each year, CMU's Office of Residential Education works with incoming students on a community engagement project; this year's focus was Pittsburgh's homeless population. The students (most not from Pittsburgh) assembled the kits while learning about our area's resources for those experiencing homelessness. A big thank-you to CMU and these very generous students!

Calling Volunteers!

Want to put a smile on someone's face in November? Pittsburgh Mercy is recruiting volunteers to serve food at Second Avenue Commons shelter once residents move back in. The shelter serves warm meals daily to over 100 people who are experiencing homelessness. Volunteers are needed throughout November for both breakfast (7 - 9 a.m.) and dinner (4:30 - 6:30 p.m.) shifts. Duties include setting up and serving the provided meal while sharing hospitality with the guests. Contact Brendan at 412-897-8822 or at **brendan.copp@pittsburghmercy.org** to sign up or learn more. *Thank you!*

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