

Learning signs of suicide our responsibility

Laura tried to kill herself.

There's no way to soft peddle that fact. She wasn't seeking attention. Wasn't attempting to just hurt herself.

She wanted to die.

Took an overdose of prescription drugs. And when that didn't work, she slashed his wrists. But she blew it. Thankfully. She was discovered and rescued in time.

Laura's name is false, but her story isn't. She is not a composite of characteristics that we've culled from various mental health textbooks and case studies. You may even recognize her in one of the local malls. She's articulate. Effusive. A mom.

She's real and she lives in our community. Well, sometimes Laura lives; by her own admission, she often struggles to

live. But she's winning the struggle, thanks to some caring family members, social workers and mental health practitioners.

But it really shouldn't have come to this. Nobody really noticed or predicted Laura was headed toward a suicide attempt.

Or could be headed there. Those close to her – her family, friends, coworkers – could have noticed.

But the truth is, they blew it.

Just like we all blew it when someone we knew took their life and left us dumfounded and grieving.

There's no real way to soft peddle that fact, either.

To imply that no one can predict the signs of suicide is tantamount to suggesting we're powerless when we see

someone writhing in pain on the sidewalk. No, we'd recognize those signs of

Cinamon
Tousignant

OF SOUND
MIND



distress and we'd respond. We'd call 9-1-1. Or maybe even take that person to the hospital. Or, hopefully, apply some first-aid until a paramedic arrived.

That same decency and action can – and should – be directed to people like

Laura.

True, the signs a potential suicide victim exhibits may not be as clear and obvious as an open wound or a cry in agony.

But the signs from a potential suicide victim do exist and you can be trained to identify them.

We're quick to applaud anyone who's taken a First Aid or CPR course. And so we should; that type of training can save someone's life.

So, too, can the Canadian Mental Health Association's (CMHA) upcoming two-day workshop on learning the signs of suicide and knowing how to offer support.

To be sure, the Applied Suicide Intervention Training (ASIST), led by trained facilitators, will be intense and probably

more emotionally taxing than those other life-saving courses.

But the A.S.I.S.T course is as important – and arguably more important – as being taught how to apply a tourniquet or build a splint. And it's something everybody should know. Not just teachers, caregivers, counsellors, and clergy. But neighbours, friends and family members, too. Everyone.

We owe this expertise and training to people like Laura. And there's no easy way to soft peddle that fact, either.

Cinamon Tousignant is one of four facilitators with the local CMHA trained to conduct the A.S.I.S.T. workshop, which runs December 1 and 2. Visit www.cmhakarwarthalakes.ca or call 328-2704 to register.