



24-hour Crisis Intervention Hotline
and ONLINE Crisis Counseling Service

CONNECTIONS

Response of Suffolk County's E-Newsletter

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Letter From the Director:

One of the great paradoxes of the human condition is that we long for connection with others, yet we often feel very alone as we experience our own personal journey.

Many callers to the hotline speak of feelings of terrible isolation. This has never been more evident than over the past several months where we have seen a significant increase in calls related to job loss, foreclosures, loss of benefits, homelessness and worries about future financial stability. The simple act of picking up the phone and offering a warm, gentle voice and a willingness to be with that person in that moment immediately lessens feelings of isolation and can begin the long process of healing. In order to 'start over' after a sudden job loss, one has to find strength and energy from within as well as support from others.

In this issue, you will learn more about the key to this process – **listening**. Here at Response we listen in a different way than most of us are accustomed to – we call it *listening to the music behind the words*. You will also read about our next training program for new counselors. We hope you will help us spread the word about this opportunity. Now, more than ever, we need caring people willing to listen.

Meryl Cassidy, Executive Director

The Year in Review

In 2008, our crisis counselors said "hello" to 16,197 callers. Of these, 11,543 were hotline/online calls and 4,158 were support line calls. As one of approximately 200 crisis centers across the country who participate in the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline network, we responded to 494 Lifeline calls. In addition, our community educators were the face and voice for the agency in 2008 talking with 10,982 people, most of them individuals under age 22.

Our online crisis counseling program, Hear2Help, began to respond to the needs of adolescents and young adults in 2006. We have seen a 30% increase in calls to this program since its inception, with 441 calls to this program in 2008. Over 50% of our Hear2Help callers are teens and young adults, and another 20% are individuals calling concerned about a young person in their life. A significant number of Hear2Help callers express suicidal ideation and we often become an important part of their support network, maintaining follow up contact for several weeks when necessary.

Thanks to a \$7,000 grant received at the end of the calendar year from the Suicide Prevention Committee of Long Island, we were able to develop a training guide for online counselors, as well as recruit and train new counselors. Response is proud to say, we are "Hear2Help!"

Economic Crisis = Emotional Crisis

The emotional toll of the economic crisis is ringing loud and clear at Response. More and more often each day callers talk about feeling embarrassed, scared and alone, and how their overwhelming anxiety has become debilitating. For many people the simple act of getting out of bed has become a struggle.

Like the caller who recently lost his job after 35 years and now doesn't want to go

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out in public because of an overwhelming sense of shame. Or the recently divorced mom who now needs to support herself and her young children but can't find a job. Or the single man who lost his job and his relationship in the same week, and doesn't see any reason for living. Their grief has been compounded by financial uncertainty.

Response crisis counselors offer support not only by listening with acceptance and respect, but also by helping callers develop a plan of action. As described by a Northern Virginia Hotline Manager in a recent [NPR report](#), "Our plans can be really, really small, and they can be really big like "put the gun down."

Feeling like you're faced with a problem that you can't solve yet you can't avoid can be paralyzing. Knowing where to turn for support and understanding is often the first small step to emotional recovery.

The Art of Listening

"Don't worry...things will work out." Ever say that to someone – ever have someone say it to you? It's common to want to offer reassurances to a friend or loved one who is struggling, but unless we have a crystal ball how can we be sure? Our culture tells us to find answers, solve problems, and remove doubt. When we listen we're trained to listen for the answers. However it's when we listen for understanding that insight opens.

Listening for understanding involves being fully present with the person we are with. It's about "listening for the music behind the words" – for hearing what hasn't been said. It's also about allowing the person we are with to feel safe to talk about anything without fear of being judged, dismissed, or argued with -- creating an atmosphere of acceptance and respect through supportive statements and responses.

"It sounds like you're feeling really worried about the future," "Seems like you're not sure what to do next" or "I hear you saying you feel so alone with this right now." Using engaging, empathetic statements like these allows us to connect and listen for understanding. We may not be able to solve the problem as they see it, but we can help them to feel understood and, in turn, less alone. Often the caller is able to think more creatively about their options as a result.

Kay Lindahl says it best in [The Sacred Art of Listening](#), "*Perhaps one of the most precious and powerful gifts we can give another person is to really listen to them, to listen with quiet fascinated attention, with our whole being. When we listen deeply to another person we are offering a space for them to feel free to be themselves and to change and grow in their understanding.*"

A Holiday Thank You!

This past December Response of Suffolk County received a special gift – a thank you letter sent from a caller whose life has been touched by our Support Line program.

Donna sent the letter to "show us the immense impact that we have made in her life." She writes, "*I've come a long way since that call I made to you at three in the morning, the week my mother died. I thought my life was over because I did not know where to turn. I wanted to live, but I did not know how. I was emotionally paralyzed and scared. You talked me through it and stood by me while I took the positive steps to save my own life. But the remarkable thing is you've stood by me ever since!*"

Support line counselors are trained to make a number of telephone "visits" to callers each week, depending on the caller's needs. As with Donna's situation, when callers become part of our support line and let us into their lives, we are often able to link them with other community resources and advocate on their behalf when necessary.

We were proud to share Donna's letter with the community on Christmas Eve when News 12 visited our offices! They reported on the meaningful, and often life saving work our dedicated crisis counselors do – every day of the year!

Suicide Prevention Conference Honoree - Assemblywoman Patricia Eddington



Honoree Patricia Eddington is pictured here at the 2nd Annual Suicide Prevention Conference with co-chairs Meryl Cassidy and Michael Arcari. [Assemblywoman Eddington](#) is a long-time supporter of the work we do at Response and helped provide much needed funding for our Hear2Help on-line crisis counseling program in 2007.

Did you know...

... that NYS has increased the income eligibility threshold for Child Health Plus from 250 to 400 percent of the federal poverty level. Now our most vulnerable children – like those losing coverage because their parents have lost their job or those who live in low-income families will be eligible for low-cost or moderate health care coverage available through dozens of providers throughout the state!

For more information on Child Health Plus, visit www.ny.gov

Listen...You Can Make A Difference!

Learn The Art of Listening! Response of Suffolk County is looking for caring individuals to give their gift of time to others and gain valuable experience as a telephone crisis counselor. Our next free training program will take place on:

**March 21st, & 22nd and 28th & 29th, 2009
at Stony Brook University's Wang Center**

This is a weekend session, with skills training and workshops scheduled from 9:30 am to 4:00 pm each day. No experience is necessary, only a sincere willingness to learn and grow, and the ability to make a six-month commitment of four hours a week is required. To reserve your spot in the class fill out an [online application](#), or call Lisa Zeller, Training Coordinator, at 631-751-7620. **Join us!**

Response Offers a Spanish "Conexión!"

¿A Quien Llamo Para Ayuda? Response of Suffolk County has expanded its crisis counseling services to include **Conexión**, a new hotline targeting Spanish-speaking families.

Funded by the Suffolk County Youth Bureau, Conexión is intended for children and teens that are going through a difficult time, and for parents or other caregivers struggling to help them. **[Click here to download flyer!](#)**

Conexión • 631-751-7423 • Monday - Friday • 5:00 PM -10:00 PM

Up-Coming Events

March 21st, 2009 - **FREE Volunteer Training Program** – Train to become the caring voice on the other end of the phone! For more information, visit us at www.ResponseHotline.org.

Response of Suffolk County, Inc. is a nationally accredited nonprofit that has provided a crisis intervention/suicide prevention hotline for over 35 years. *Response* also offers an online crisis counseling program, a support line that makes telephone "visits" to homebound individuals, and a community outreach program that provides presentations to teens, teachers, mental health professionals, and many others.