



Join the Movement: Aspiring Towards Zero Suicide in Colorado

Opening Keynote – Leah Harris, M.A. Peer Integration Strategist, National Association of State Mental Health Directors (NASMHPD); Trainer and Consultant, National Center for Trauma-Informed Care (NCTIC)

Date: Thursday May 18, 2017

Location: Lowry Conference Center

Time: 10am-11am

Title:

How I Went From Wanting to Die to Loving Life: A Resilience Journey

Abstract:

Leah Harris spent much of her adolescence wanting to die. She will share about the critical turning point that propelled her from being a suicidal and hopeless young woman to an empowered advocate living a meaningful life in recovery. She'll discuss what it has been like to "come out" publicly as a suicide attempt survivor, and her interest in promoting trauma-informed approaches to suicide prevention and care. She will discuss the legacy of intergenerational trauma, mental illness, and addiction in her Ashkenazi Jewish family and how she has broken the cycle of silence and shame through her life and work. Leah will also share what she has discovered about resilience and healing from traumatic experience on the mind-body-spirit levels, as well as through the creative and expressive arts.

Learning Objectives:

At the conclusion of the session, participants will be able to:

- Define trauma and understand its physical and behavioral health impacts, including suicidality.
- Name the six key principles of trauma-informed approaches, as developed by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA).
- Understand what is meant by "trauma-informed suicide prevention" and why it is needed.
- Identify resilience factors that support trauma resolution and suicide prevention.
- Name specific trauma-informed strategies that can be incorporated into their organizations or programs.

Presenter Biography:

Leah Harris, M.A., is a mother, advocate, and storyteller who has written and spoken widely about her lived experiences of trauma, addiction, serious mental health challenges, suicide, resilience, and recovery. She is a trainer with SAMHSA's National Center for Trauma-Informed Care, providing technical assistance to agencies and organizations wishing to transform to a trauma-informed approach to service delivery. As a suicide attempt survivor, she advocates for the meaningful inclusion of the perspectives of attempt survivors in every aspect of suicide prevention, intervention, postvention, and research. She was a member of the Suicide Attempt Survivor Task Force of the National Action Alliance for Suicide Prevention, and contributed to the landmark document "The Way Forward: Pathways to Hope, Recovery, and Wellness with Insights from Lived Experience." Ms. Harris is a faculty member with the Zero Suicide Academy, a training for senior leaders of health and behavioral health care organizations that seeks to dramatically reduce suicides among patients in their care, and is a member of the Zero Suicide Advisory Group. Leah worked with the Mental Health Association of San Francisco (MHASP) to adapt and deliver "Sound out for Life," a training designed to help empower suicide attempt survivors to share about their experiences of suicide, behavioral health, and recovery with a variety of stakeholders. She is an advisor to and is featured in the upcoming documentary about suicide, *The S Word*. Her autobiographical solo storytelling show, "Aliens, Nazis, and Angels," was rated "Best of the Capital Fringe 2016" by DC Metro Theater Arts.

Citations:

The Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) Study". [cdc.gov](https://www.cdc.gov). Atlanta, Georgia: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, Division of Violence Prevention.

Dube SR, Anda RF, Felitti VJ, Chapman DP, Williamson DF, Giles WH. Childhood Abuse, Household Dysfunction, and the Risk of Attempted Suicide Throughout the Life Span Findings From the Adverse Childhood Experiences Study. *JAMA*. 2001;286(24):3089-3096. doi:10.1001/jama.286.24.3089

National Action Alliance for Suicide Prevention: Suicide Attempt Survivors Task Force. (2014). *The Way Forward: Pathways to hope, recovery, and wellness with insights from lived experience*. Washington, DC: Author.