

Boca Raton OBSERVER Magazine August 2015

**excerpt
featuring an interview
with BRP director,
Dr. Seth Bernstein**

BREAKING THE SILENCE

Boca Raton's Promise – The Alliance for Youth, a nonprofit organization, was established in 1998 for the purpose of identifying mental health needs, raising awareness and providing resources for young adults needing help in Boca Raton and Palm Beach County.

"We provide a number of outreach services that offer solutions to mental health problems for today's youth and raise awareness in the community to reduce the stigma attached to these issues," says Dr. Seth Bernstein, a Boca Raton resident and vice president of Boca Raton's Promise. "For example, we offer the FRIENDS program at several middle and high schools to provide after-school support services, including counseling with guidance counselors and mental health care professionals for youth needing assistance."

The organization has also implemented the national Breaking the Silence: Teaching the Next Generation About Mental Illness curriculum, developed by the National Alliance on Mental Illness, in six elementary schools.

"Students are shown videos or read stories about potential mental health illnesses or situations and then are asked to comment," Dr. Bernstein says. "This helps start conversations about touchy topics they may not otherwise be comfortable in sharing with their teachers or classmates."

Dr. Bernstein, a licensed psychologist and certified addiction professional, says that by reducing the stigma of mental illness, more doors will be opened to provide help for individuals at risk.

"Thanks to the Affordable Care Act, insurance companies are now covering mental health ailments in the same way they cover physical illness, so there is finally parity between the two," he says. "If we can identify those in need, we can help get them on the path to recovery. We have wonderful treatment options today and many resources, such as the Faulk Center for Counseling and the Ruth & Norman Rales Jewish Family Services, both in Boca Raton, that offer excellent services for those with mental illness."

Mental Health First Aid is another crucial course implemented by Boca Raton's Promise and the Alpert Jewish Family & Children's Service that is taught by nationally certified instructors to anyone in public service – or any caring citizen.

"It's an eight-hour course that helps first responders identify people in distress and teaches them how to talk and deal with them effectively," Dr. Bernstein says. "We've already trained 1,200 people, including 600 sheriff's deputies, in Palm Beach County."



Dr. Seth
Bernstein

Dr. Bernstein, who has been the staff psychologist and director of community engagement at Boys Town South Florida since 2008, says he volunteers his time because of his passion to educate others and remove the black cloud that hangs

over the heads of those who suffer from mental illness.

"I care," he says. "It is my passion. And here in Florida, a state which does not provide much funding for mental health issues, we have a long way to go to overcome the stigma and provide services for those desperately in need. Suicide is a mostly preventable death, and I want to do everything in my power to avoid this ultimate tragedy among our youth."

Bailey's family is still struggling with the aftermath of their ultimate tragedy. Pam has even changed physically. She is now taut and sinewy, having channeled her grief into hours of yoga and going for sunrise runs, when she allows herself to cry and scream in the wind.

She helped organize a chapter of HOPE (Helping Overcome Problems Effectively) – a network of support clubs for teens established by the Florida Initiative for Suicide Prevention – at Stoneman Doug-

las and holds "yogathons" to raise funds for their activities.

"I want Bailey's life to be a legacy," she says. "She was a beautiful girl. What she did was hide her feelings, and it shouldn't have happened. Her death is my work." ○

RESOURCES

**211: WILL ROUTE YOU TO
AREA-APPROPRIATE HELP
OR RESOURCES**

**800-273-TALK (8255): NATIONAL
SUICIDE PREVENTION LIFELINE**

AFSP.ORG

BOCARATONSPROMISE.ORG

FISPHOPE.ORG

JASONFOUNDATION.COM

**MADISONHOLLERAN
FOUNDATION.ORG**

