



# Ray of Hope

SPRING 2022

WESTMORELAND COUNTY  
SUICIDE AWARENESS & PREVENTION TASK FORCE

Our mission is to reduce the stigma associated with mental illness and suicide and to increase awareness that suicide is a national public health problem for individual across a lifespan.



## 2022 SPRING SPECTACULAR COMMUNITY FESTIVAL



APRIL 2, 2022, 1 PM - 4 PM  
WESTMORELAND COUNTY FAIRGROUNDS

We have partnered with the Westmoreland County Behavioral Health and Developmental Services Office and many other Human Service Organizations to host our first ever Spring Spectacular Community Festival!

Admission is **FREE** to all residents of Westmoreland County! We are very excited to have **10,000 eggs** for our egg hunt, which will be open to all ages, including adults! Inside these eggs, our participants will find candy, small prizes, and golden tickets. And we have over 200 Golden Ticket prizes!

At this "egg"citing event, we'll have Jeff Biddle from Perfection DJ's Pittsburgh announcing events and playing tunes, a Bunny Photo opportunity, Andy the Ambulance, food trucks, face painters, balloon twisters, over 50 vendor tables, and more!



## WHAT WE DO

- Offer presentations on suicide awareness and prevention, including QPR Gatekeeper Training (Question, Persuade, Refer)
- Hold the Ray of Hope Annual Walk
- Host a biennial conference and educational seminars
- Support the L.O.S.S. Support Group (Loved Ones Stolen by Suicide)
- Hold quarterly Task Force meetings

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# TASK FORCE MEMBER SPOTLIGHT



## KELLI HOOKER

### RAY OF HOPE COORDINATOR FOR MENTAL HEALTH AMERICA

#### **Kelli's Role and Responsibilities**

The Ray of Hope is thrilled to introduce you to Kelli Hooker, the new full-time Ray of Hope Coordinator! Kelli supports and implements the goals of the Ray of Hope Task Force by coordinating meetings, volunteers, training opportunities, outreach activities, and events. Another important part of Kelli's job is marketing and promoting Ray of Hope events.

On January 27, 2022, Kelli was trained to deliver QPR Gatekeeper Training and can offer this free training to any agency or group. We are thrilled to have Kelli as part of the Ray of Hope team!

#### **Below, Kelli tells you a little about herself!**

My name is Kelli Hooker and I am the new Ray of Hope Coordinator for Mental Health America. I am excited to be working alongside each and every one of you.

As for a little background on myself, I am originally from San Diego, California. I've lived all over the United States as my step-father was a marine. Our family finally settled in Greensburg in 2003. So while I might not be from this area, I certainly consider this area to be my home.

I graduated from Greensburg Salem High School in 2013. After graduating, I enrolled in Saint Vincent College where I was able to obtain my Bachelor's and Master's Degrees in 2017 and 2018, respectively. Since graduating college, I have worked for several human service agencies such as: CASA of Westmoreland, Juvenile Probation, and Westmoreland Casemanagement and Supports, Inc.

Currently, I reside in Greensburg with my husband Patrick, our dog Skully, and our cat Jade. I am so fortunate to serve as the Ray of Hope Coordinator, and I look forward to our collaboration!

If you need to contact me, I can be reached at [khooker@mhaswpa.org](mailto:khooker@mhaswpa.org), 724-834-6351 x122 (office), or 724-875-2415 (cell).

# THE IMPORTANCE OF GUN SAFETY

The information below comes from the article, *Firearm Suicide Prevention & Lethal Means Safety, U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs*.

Lethal means are objects like guns, medications, alcohol, opioids or other substances, ropes, cords, or sharp objects that can be used during a suicidal crisis. If a Veteran is in crisis or having suicidal thoughts, these items can become deadly when they are accessible. **For example, nearly 7 out of 10 Veteran deaths by suicide are the result of firearm injuries (Dept. of Veteran Affairs, 2018).**

Increasing the time and distance between someone in a suicidal crisis and access to lethal means can reduce suicide risk and save lives. There are simple steps you can take to protect yourself and your family.

Here are some tips on safe gun storage.

- **Cable lock:** Use cable locks to secure guns in your home.

**PLEASE NOTE:** Organizations can request a bundle of cable locks (50-100) by contacting **Kelli Hooker** at the Ray of Hope. These cable locks are provided by **Bree Piper** from the VA Pittsburgh Healthcare System. Thank you so much, Bree!

- **Lockbox or gun case:** For those looking to conceal or protect guns. Be sure to lock with an external device for added security.
- **Electronic lockbox:** Only the person with the code can access contents. Some are designed for quick access to stored guns.
- **Biometric safes:** These can only be unlocked with a fingerprint, eye scan, or voice recognition.



To read the full article and learn how to identify and handle a suicidal crisis; helpful tips for storing guns, medications, and other lethal means; and additional resources about safe storage, [click here](#).

## 2022 DATES FOR FREE YOUTH MENTAL HEALTH FIRST AID TRAINING (\$170 VALUE)



Provided by the PCCD Grant, the Westmoreland Intermediate Unit (WIU) is offering **FREE** 8-hour Youth Mental Health First Aid certification training at the WIU Admin. Building, 102 Equity Drive, Greensburg, PA. Training includes a manual and lunch.

[Click here to see the flyer with the 2022 dates and links to registration.](#)

Youth Mental Health First Aid is a comprehensive training specifically designed to equip educators, family members, and caregivers (18 years or older) with the skills and knowledge to identify, understand, and respond to the signs or risk factors of mental health concerns in youth. Just as CPR helps you assist an individual having a heart attack, Youth Mental Health First Aid helps you assist someone experiencing a mental health or substance use-related crisis.

# RAY OF HOPE WINTER 2021 OUTREACH & TRAINING EVENTS

**We supported the following community events:**

**02/18/22:** Westmoreland 2022 Youth Summit at the Westmoreland County Community College ~ sponsored by Council on Substance Abuse and Youth (CSAY) and Westmoreland Drug & Alcohol Commission

**02/19/22:** Celebrating Black History & American Heart Month at the New Creation Family Worship Center in Greensburg, PA ~ sponsored by Unity in the Community and the Western Pennsylvania Diaper Bank



Ronel Baccus getting ready for her event on Feb. 19, 2022.

**We conducted QPR Gatekeeper Training (Question, Persuade, Refer) for the following agencies:**

**12/22/21:** PIC-After School Program staff  
**01/10/22:** Beacon Health Options staff  
**01/12/22:** PIC-DADS MATTER staff  
**02/25/22:** Wesley Family Services staff

We are always happy to come to any agency or group and conduct this **FREE** 1-2 hour training, which can be delivered in person or virtually. Just like CPR, QPR is an emergency response to someone in crisis and can save lives. QPR is the most widely taught Gatekeeper training in the world.

The key components of QPR Training include how to question, persuade, and refer someone who may be suicidal; how to get help for yourself or learn more about preventing suicide; the common causes of suicidal behavior; the warning signs of suicide; and how to get help for someone in crisis.

To schedule a **FREE** QPR Gatekeeper Training, contact Kelli Hooker at [khooker@mhaswpa.org](mailto:khooker@mhaswpa.org) or 724-834-6351 x122.



John Herrmann, Bobby Tanyer, and Sara Stenger speaking at the Feb. 19, 2022 event.



Bishop Johnson receiving a community award from Ronel Baccus on Feb. 19, 2022 for his work with youth in the community.

# UPCOMING EVENTS

Contact Ronel Baccus for more information.  
 412-219-8313 or [RonelB724@gmail.com](mailto:RonelB724@gmail.com)

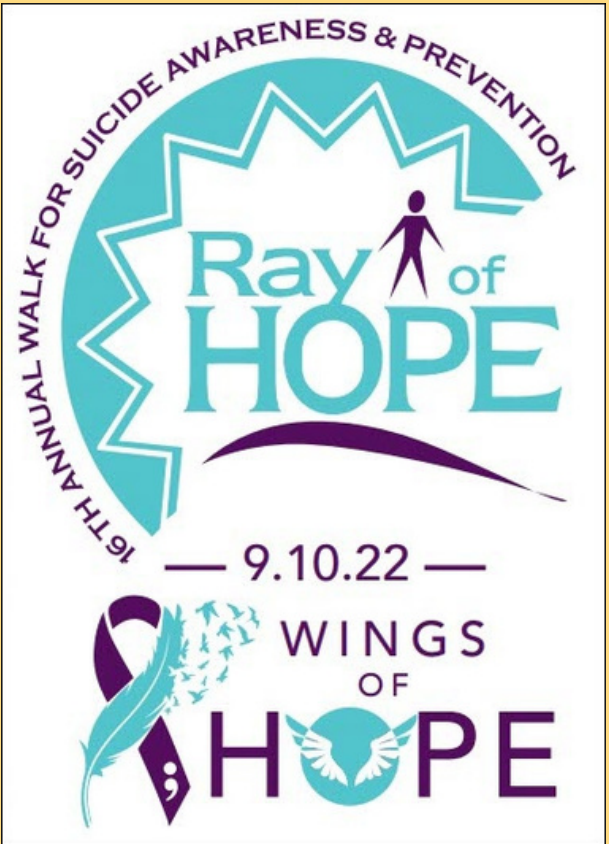
Save the date for our 16th Annual Walk for Suicide Awareness & Prevention!

**Unity in the Community  
 Crisis/De-Escalation/Recovery Forum**

**Friday, April 22nd, 2022 / 5-7pm**  
 YWCA. 424 N. Main St. Greensburg, PA 15601

**Presentations with Community Leaders, Food Resource Tables, and Black Leaders Recognitions**

Please Contact Ronel Baccus at (412) 219-8313  
[Ronelb724@gmail.com](mailto:Ronelb724@gmail.com) for questions and further details.

**16TH ANNUAL WALK FOR SUICIDE AWARENESS & PREVENTION**

**Ray of HOPE**

— 9.10.22 —

**WINGS OF HOPE**

To register for CSAY's Paws for Prevention Walk, go to:  
<https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/PAWSforPreventionRegistration2022>



*Pet First Aid with Rodney Little*

- Contests
- Food Trucks
- Animal Shelters
- Pet Related Vendors
- Nail and Rabies Clinic
- Prizes
- Resources
- Photos with your Best Friend

**Paws for Prevention Walk**

  
**Register Here**  
<https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/PAWSforPreventionRegistration2022>

Benefits Council on Substance Abuse and Youth (CSAY)...helping to create positive change in our communities.

**Saturday, May 21, 2022**  
**Mammoth Park**  
**Pavilions 11,12,&13**  
**11:00 AM to 2:00PM**

**Online Registration: \$18**  
**At the Event: \$20**

**PRIZES**

**T-shirt, Bandana, Water Bowl, Treats and Raffle Ticket included with registration**

**WOOF**

**FUN**


# MENTAL HEALTH RESOURCES

## CRISIS RESOURCES

<b>Westmoreland County Crisis Hotline</b>	1-800-836-6010
<b>Crisis Text Line</b>	Text HOME to 741741
<b>National Suicide Prevention Lifeline</b>	1-800-273-8255
<b>Trevor Lifeline (LGBTQ)</b>	1-866-488-7386
<b>Trevor Project Text Line (LGBTQ)</b>	Text START to 678678
<b>Veteran's Crisis Line</b>	1-800-273-8255 Press 1
<b>Veteran's Crisis Line Chat/Text</b>	Text 838255



## LOCAL SUPPORT GROUPS

### Mental Health America of Southwestern PA (MHA-SWPA) *Virtual Support Groups*

Contact Heather McLean at 724-433-1359 or [hmclean@mhaswpa.org](mailto:hmclean@mhaswpa.org) for more info.

- **Aging Up Support Group (transitional ages 18-26):** Meets 2nd & 4th Monday, 4-5 pm
- **Mental Health Support Group:** Meets 2nd & 4th Tuesday, 1-2 pm
- **LGBTQIA+ Support Group:** Meets 2nd & 4th Tuesday, 6-7 pm
- **The "Anyone" Support Group (for anyone wanting to talk):** Meets 1st & 3rd Wed., 6-7 pm
- **Caring Ones Support Group:** For those supporting a loved one with a mental health illness. Meets 2nd Monday, 6-7:30 pm, Contact Heather McLean: 724-433-1359 (*Starts Jan. 2022*)
- **L.O.S.S. (Loved Ones Stolen by Suicide):** Informal open support group for those who have lost a loved one to suicide. Meets 1st Tuesday, 6:30-8 pm, Contact Beth Crofutt: 724-834-6351

### *In-Person Support Groups*

**PLEASE NOTE: Due to high transmission rates of COVID, in-person groups may not be meeting. Please call first to see if the group is meeting in person or has been cancelled.**

- **Mon Valley Hospital LOSS Support Group:** For anyone touched by suicide. Meets 2nd & 4th Monday, 1-2:30 pm, 1163 Country Club Rd., Monongahela, PA 15063, Contact Sam Lonich: 724-678-3601, [splonich@gmail.com](mailto:splonich@gmail.com)
- **NAMI Family Support Meetings:** Meets 2nd Tuesday, 7-8:30 pm, West Hempfield Presbyterian Church, 8 W. Hempfield Dr., Irwin, PA 15642, Contact Harriett Hetrick: 724-596-5071

### *Resource Center*

**Come, Talk Inc.:** Resource center for anyone affected by suicide. 321 Main Street, Irwin, PA 15642, Contact Amanda Morrison: Call/Text: 724-978-1330, [come.talk15642@gmail.com](mailto:come.talk15642@gmail.com)

# TASK FORCE MEMBERSHIP LIST

## STEERING COMMITTEE

Heather McLean - Chair  
 Laurie Barnett Levine - Vice Chair  
 Beth Crofutt - Treasurer  
 Nina D'Antonio - Secretary  
 Kelli Hooker - Task Force Coordinator  
 Sherry Anderson - Walk Chair  
 Carla Colello - *new*  
 Jessica Carns  
 John Herrmann  
 Samantha Kindelberger  
 Gayle Pamerleau  
 Sue Soltis - *new*  
 Bobby Tanyer  
 Clare Vaill

## THANK YOU, RICK!

We would like to thank **Rick Yaksic** for his dedication and passion while he served on the Ray of Hope Steering Committee! Rick has stepped down from the Steering Committee and will continue to remain an active member of the Ray of Hope. We value his creative ideas and contributions!

Welcome to our new Steering Committee members ~ **Carla Colello** and **Sue Soltis!**

## COMMEMORATIVE BRICK AT TWIN LAKES PARK



The Ray of Hope has donated to the Westmoreland County Parks Commemorative Brick Program. Our brick will be placed at the site of our annual walk to commemorate all those we have lost to suicide. Here is the text that will be engraved on the brick.

**IN LOVING MEMORY OF  
 THOSE WE HAVE LOST  
 RAY OF HOPE  
 WESTMORELAND COUNTY  
 SUICIDE AWARENESS &  
 PREVENTION TASK FORCE**

To learn more about the Westmoreland County Parks Commemorative Brick Program, [click here](#).

## MEMBERS AT LARGE

Ronel Baccus	Linda Parker
Brandi Brukner	Bree Piper
Shanea Clancy	Jackie Rider
Rachel Cunningham	Maria Rock
Kevin Daly	Michelle Seaman
Beth Deni	Katie Sheridan
Cassie Ellson	Patrick Showman
Ariel James	Sara Stenger
Bill Kemerer	Barb Tomko
Sam Lonich	Stephanie Turin
Julie Lovis	Lee Wagner
Rita McWilliams	Michele Wentzel
Joni Michalski	Richard Yaksic
Monica Minyon	Susan Yaksic
Amanda Morrison	

## CONTACT US

409 Coulter Avenue, Greensburg, PA 15601  
 Phone: 724-834-6351  
 Website: [www.rayofhopewestmoreland.org](http://www.rayofhopewestmoreland.org)  
 Membership Questions: [ndantonio@wsci.org](mailto:ndantonio@wsci.org)  
 Newsletter Suggestions: [ssoltis@wiu7.org](mailto:ssoltis@wiu7.org)