

# A Word From the Executive Director



Dear Third Way Center's friends and family,

Happy Fall! Happy Harvest!

Wow, does time fly. School has started, it is the end of summer, the beginning of autumn, peaches are in season, days are getting slightly shorter, and September has more birthdays than any other month. We have 6 Third Way Center residents headed to college!

September is ***National Suicide Awareness Prevention Month***.

According to Colorado Health Institute's "Suicide in Colorado" report; Suicide is the leading cause of death for Colorado's youth and young adults. We know that mental health issues are a risk factor for suicide and that many do not have access to or seek out treatment. It is often about isolation, disconnection, and severe hopelessness about the future. Thoughts of suicide are generally complex and sometimes prevalent, especially with the kids who are referred to the Third Way Center. There is a very high percentage of our population that have attempted, continue to attempt, have thoughts of suicide, self-harm, and/or have a friend or family member who has committed suicide. It can be dismal; however, suicide is preventable. That is the good news. It is important to be aware and pay attention. Is it possible for our society to be responsive to the needs of all people? Especially those with few resources and incredibly complex mental health issues? If we truly want to be preventive, the needs of these kids and their families need to be addressed way before the suicidal ideation starts. Suicide is a last resort.

Is it possible to have empathy for someone else if you have no empathy for yourself? This is something we often discuss with our clients. They usually say they have more empathy for others than for themselves, but that is because they don't understand what empathy is. It is difficult to get beyond the behavior because it is so outrageous. The acting-out behavior is connected to how they feel. The behavior has meaning. Suicidal ideation is a behavior; it serves a purpose. When kids have been mistreated, they seek punishment. They expect it, and it gives them

something to then act out about. It is all related to their trauma. Whatever that trauma is, and it is complicated. If they trust us enough, they will begin the work. It is a team effort; they need us all. They are consumed by the emotional effort it takes to keep everyone at bay. They have no capacity for empathy. Our youth feel damaged and unlovable, and play that out over and over. Empathy is a major ingredient for relationships. Connection and trusted adults are often what is missing when it comes to kids with suicidal ideation. Resolution frees people to begin to have empathy for themselves. Resolution is about getting justice for what happened to them. Doing this work, if done right, serves everyone.

*"The highest form of knowledge is empathy, for it requires us to suspend our egos and live in another's world." Plato*

It was wonderful to see Dr. Hildegard Messenbaugh, our Founder, awarded her **Lifetime Achievement Award** at the CAFCA Conference on 8/29/24. Well deserved!

*With Gratitude and Appreciation,*

*Renee*