

# Despite millions of calls, Suicide and Crisis Hotline 988 still unfamiliar by some

Published 9:00 am Saturday, July 22, 2023

By Olivia Johnson

Since its launch in July 2022, Suicide and Crisis Hotline 988 has received almost 5 million calls. However according to 988 Lifeline, four out of five people aren't familiar with it.

988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline — formerly known as the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline — is a 24/7 call, text and chat line that gives users access to trained crisis counselors who can help people experiencing suicidal, substance use, or a mental health crisis. Before the change the hotline number used to be 1-800-273-TALK(8255).

Tracy Halcrombe, creator of Joy Inside Tears, said she's not surprised that everyone does not know about 988.

"People do know about 911 because that would just be in a pure emergency. But with the change in the number being just a few years ago, it has only expanded it and helped it reach a broader range and more efficiently through the use of live chat and social media," Halcrombe said.

"The stigma with everything that has to do with crisis concerning mental health or with suicide prevention is what's keeping people from getting the help that they need. 988 isn't as promoted than other topics, for example lupus or breast cancer but we're getting to a point where it is going to become more popular as we go on with the need and crisis's that continues to stem in our communities and in this nation."

In her work with Joy Inside Tears, Halcrombe provides resources, advocacy, support and educational training in mental health and suicide prevention to local communities and organizations.

"Last year, I created a community support group that meets on the fourth Tuesday of every month. We meet right in the Bank of America building in the United Way conference room," Halcrombe said. "I added this to the community as a resource to come out and talk about topics like this. Let's talk about why we have these cultural and societal norms that pertain to mental health and why we can't end the stigma around mental health."

Halcrombe said the passion for providing a safe place to talk about mental health comes from her son, Noah Christopher Lockhart, who died by suicide in 2021.

"These are the conversations people don't want to have but once it's done, you won't have to seek a permanent solution to a temporary problem like my son did," Halcrombe said. "When you don't know, you don't understand and I think that's most of our fear is human. We always fear what we don't seem to understand, instead of going ahead and reaching out and doing the research about it."

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LPD Officer Bryant Mosley said that with mental health at the forefront nowadays, erasing stigma around seeking help in mental health and crises is important.

“We have ample support here from local resources, such as Pathways, the police department, community outreach, and even with 988 users have a plethora of things that they can use from a warm support line for those in need,” Mosley said. “One of the best things, I found out as a counselor working in crisis is that they’ll send out a mobile crisis team for you that will assess you and get you resources. They look at you holistically to make sure that you’re okay and then work on that long term solution for you.”

Mosley said education of local resources and support systems are vital in showing people who fall into mental health issues or crisis’s that they aren’t alone.

“A lot of times in the worst moments in your life you don’t want to look for help but it’s important to know that we have it. By having those resources and continuing to educate the community on them I think is the best way to help them understand that there’s support for anybody with any mental health conditions,” Mosley said.

“We need to normalize mental health and people need to know that their well-being is important mentally, physically and spiritually. I know there is some hesitations because of cultural beliefs, but we have those resources from a law enforcement standpoint to clinical standpoint. They’re there and we have to make sure that we keep educating our community on it,” Mosely said.