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About Yellow Ribbon

Our Mission

The Light for Life Foundation Int'l/Yellow Ribbon Suicide Prevention Program® is dedicated to preventing suicide and attempts by Making Suicide Prevention Accessible to Everyone and Removing Barriers to Help by:

- Empowering individuals and communities through leadership, awareness and education; and
- By collaborating and partnering with support networks to reduce stigma and help save lives.

Our Story

Legacy of the Yellow Mustang



The Yellow Ribbon program was founded in 1994 by the parents and friends of a bright, funny, loving teen, Mike Emme, who took his life when he did not know the words to say, or how to let someone know he was in trouble and needed help.

“Don’t blame yourselves, Mom and Dad, I love you.” It was signed, “Love, Mike 11:45pm”. In a move that totally stunned all who knew him, Mike died-by-suicide at the time of his deepest despair. At 11:52pm his parents pulled into the driveway behind that bright yellow Mustang, – seven minutes too late!

The legacy started when Mike rescued a 1968 Ford Mustang from a field where it sat neglected. He bought it, rebuilt it (as he had others) and painted it bright yellow. As Mike, with his mustangs, became more and more known for his mechanical ability and for helping other teens and friends – he became known as “Mustang Mike”.

Streams of stories began emerging of the help Mike had given to people. A young mother’s car had broken down late one night, leaving her and her two small children stranded on the side of the road. Mike stopped and showed her his driver’s license to assure her he would not harm them, got her car started, then accompanied them home to ensure they arrived safely.

A classmate told of how Mike had canceled his order for a new transmission and bought two used ones from the salvage yard instead so that his classmate could get his car running too.

As the teens gathered to comfort the family, and each other, they discussed the tragedy of losing Mike. Mike’s mom talked with the teens about creating mementos that others could have to remember him with, and they decided that yellow would be used in honor of the cherished yellow mustang. In response to teens asking what can we do?, – she told them, ‘don’t do this, don’t attempt suicide’. ‘If you are ever at this point of pain/despair, please ask for help’! Kids took notes, and cards were made with the message to reach out for help, that It’s OK to Ask4Help!

The night before Mike’s memorial services, his friends shared their grief and tears as they pinned 500 ribbons on the cards. They were placed in a basket at his services. At the end of the services, all the ribbon cards were gone, and it could have ended then, but it did not, thanks to teens with the courage to make a difference and a family who cares about helping others.

Three weeks after Mike’s services – **just** three weeks! – a call came from a teacher in Wyoming who had been given one of those bright yellow messages of hope by a student who was at a time of her own need. The girl had received the card from a friend. The teacher called because she wanted to get help for teens in her area. Other calls began to come in from throughout the U.S. – New Jersey – Arizona – everywhere. Then the letters began to flood in – teens were sending those cards to ‘everyone’ they said and **The Ripple Effect had begun!**

The ribbon became the symbol of the program when the teens began tying them in their hair and pinning them to their clothes and hats on the day Mike died. Yellow in memory of Mike and his cherished ’68 Yellow Mustang, and how he helped so many people.

The HEART in the middle of the ribbon is the symbol of the survivors. Our hearts go on, forever broken, but nurtured and surrounded by the Yellow Ribbon family to help others, to save lives and to work in memory of our loved ones. Our voices will speak for those who cannot.

Dale and Dar Emme are available for Trainings, Presentations and as Keynote and Inspirational Speakers. Call 303.429.3530 or demme@yellowribbon.org for more information.

How it all began

The Spirit of Yellow Ribbon is its people. The program began in 1994 in response to heartfelt pleas from teens and adults after the death of a friend and loved one. Words of help and hope said by the teen's family were put on bright yellow paper and shared at the services, 500 of those messages and at the end, all were gone. Teens shared the messages locally and began to mail them to friends and loved ones – mailed them 'everywhere'. Within three weeks came word of a girl who got help when she gave the hallmark of the program – the Ask 4 Help!® Card (that bright yellow message) to her teacher – and received help. **The ripple effect had begun** - a bright yellow bridge was built that connects those in need to those who help.



The Ripple Effect

WHAT CAME NEXT...after the start of the program that day?

People and communities began to call, wanting the program and we began to travel, teach and share. From the beginning, 95% of our work is responding to requests asking for help. Most of the time, they were/are in the Postvention time (after suicide loss/es) and they ask 'what do we do, how and where do we start...our community needs help'. (Our pilot site, Hawarden, Iowa in October 1995, three towns and 17 churches, local schools, mental/ public health agencies, first responders came together to launch their program).

This led to many activities for us:

- » Giving Inspirational and Motivational Presentations*.
- » Providing [support for Survivors and Survivors-in-Action](#)
- » Encouraging communities, families & individuals to engage in *suicide prevention at all levels*.
- [Consulting and technical assistance:](#)
 - States and communities for developing/updating strategic plans and coalitions.
 - Schools and districts to (1) develop suicide prevention plans that are supported by community professionals and advocates, and (2) train staff, parents and students

in basic suicide prevention. Teaching the community HOW to be involved, at the levels they are comfortable with, will open the door to more suicide prevention awareness and support.

- **Community Development**: building community based programs by teaching the How and Where to begin, using previously unrecognized/unrealized community resources, and involving, engaging and empowering all community members.
- **Suicide Prevention Trainings**: Collaborating with local agencies, and giving suicide prevention trainings. Be A Link!® (Adult) and Ask 4 Help! (Youth) are Listed on the Best Practices Registry (sprc.org).
- **Giving Yellow Ribbon Presentations** (to all-school assemblies and small groups – adults and youth) of the Yellow Ribbon story for awareness (how it started) and education (How to Ask for Help!®, and How to Be A Link!® for others). These events are often a kick-off of a launch of programs/projects that are continued and sustained by local collaborative partners with ongoing training and activities. Yellow Ribbon does NOT advocate for a one-time presentation/training. To date, collectively, Yellow Ribbon speakers have spoken to, and trained, over 1,500,000 youth in America. Internationally, the numbers are

» Creating and growing **Chapters** throughout the U.S. and globally, and Program Sites in over 5,000 schools & churches in U.S., & multiple locations in 47 countries. (Public, Private, Tribal and Faith-based).

* **Motivational Speaking**: Sharing the story of how this program began, from the first kids making 500 yellow ribbon messages, to what people of all ages, from all walks of life, have done and are doing is inspiring and empowering. We have found that so many people want to help, but don't think they have a place in suicide prevention because they are not professionally trained. We show them how they can effectively be involved in suicide prevention. We invite you to join with us and be a Yellow Ribbon suicide prevention advocate. YOU matter! Your voice, and your efforts can and do make a difference. If you want to be involved, please contact us.

To learn more about, or to schedule, speaking engagements, workshops and trainings, please contact: ask4help@yellowribbon.org.