

NEWS RELEASE

For immediate release

For more information, contact Kim Engel, 308-487-3600

ALLIANCE – They walked arm-in-arm for more than a mile. They laughed, they cried, they prayed, they cursed.

Nearly 150 people came together Saturday to remember those who have been victims of suicide -- both those who have died and those left behind -- at the Out of the Darkness community walk in Alliance. This was the first of what organizers hope will become an annual event for the Panhandle, one of nearly 200 walks nationwide to help promote awareness of suicide prevention.

Those walking included families honoring their loved ones with T-shirts emblazoned with the victim's names and the date they died. Others wore bracelets, with the name of a young man who took his life this spring. All were there to remember.

Despite chilling rain the crowd started to swell by 9 a.m. Just before the walk commenced, emcee Tony Amill led the group in a prayer written by local minister Bill Graham. The launch of nearly 150 blue balloons, gave the dreary gray sky its only touch of blue throughout the day as mist continued to dog the walkers throughout the morning.

The community awareness walk was initiated by Donna Jones, who lost her son Logan Anderson to suicide in March 2009. Many members of Jones' family joined in the walk, including members of her church. Jones thanked the walk's supporters from the event's Facebook site. She called the event "a big step to bring suicide 'out of the darkness.'"

With more than \$8,500 raised locally for the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention, Kim Engel of Panhandle Public Health District said she was very pleased by the turnout. "We thought the weather might slow people down," she said. "But the turnout was amazing and exceeded our expectations." Sponsors for the event were the Panhandle Suicide Prevention Coalition, Western Heritage Credit Union, Bank of the West, Box Butte General Hospital, Panhandle Public Health District and the City of Alliance.

Region I Prevention Coordinator Faith Mills said there can be verbal clues when someone is considering suicide, either direct or indirect, ranging from statements such as, "I wish I were dead," to "I just want out." There may also be behavioral clues: when someone stockpiles pills, buys a weapon, starts putting their personal affairs in order or giving away prized possessions.

Depression, manifesting itself in withdrawal, sleeping a lot and eating poorly, is another major risk factor for suicide, Mills said. Region I, in cooperation with PPHD, offers a free training called *QPR* for *Question, Persuade and Refer* to any group that may be interested. *QPR*, like CPR, gives the common person a way to step in when they confront someone who may be considering suicide. To schedule *QPR* training, you may also call PPHD.

Risk factors for suicide also include a family history of suicide or child maltreatment, previous suicide attempts, a history of mental disorders (particularly depression) or substance abuse, feelings of hopelessness, impulsive or aggressive tendencies, cultural and religious beliefs (that suicide is a noble resolution of a personal dilemma), local epidemics of suicide, isolation, barriers to accessing mental health, loss (relationships, social, work or financial), physical illness, easy access to lethal methods such as firearms or prescription drugs and the unwillingness to seek help because of the stigma attached to mental health, substance abuse disorders or suicidal thoughts.

Earlier in the week, KCOW radio aired a two-hour special, *“Out of the Darkness – Creating Suicide Prevention Awareness.”* Copies of the interviews for the special are available for download on the radio station’s website at www.kcowradio.com.

Donations may still be given at outofthedarkness.org through December 31, 2010. A few *Out of the Darkness* T-shirts are still available, by calling PPHD at 308-487-3600.