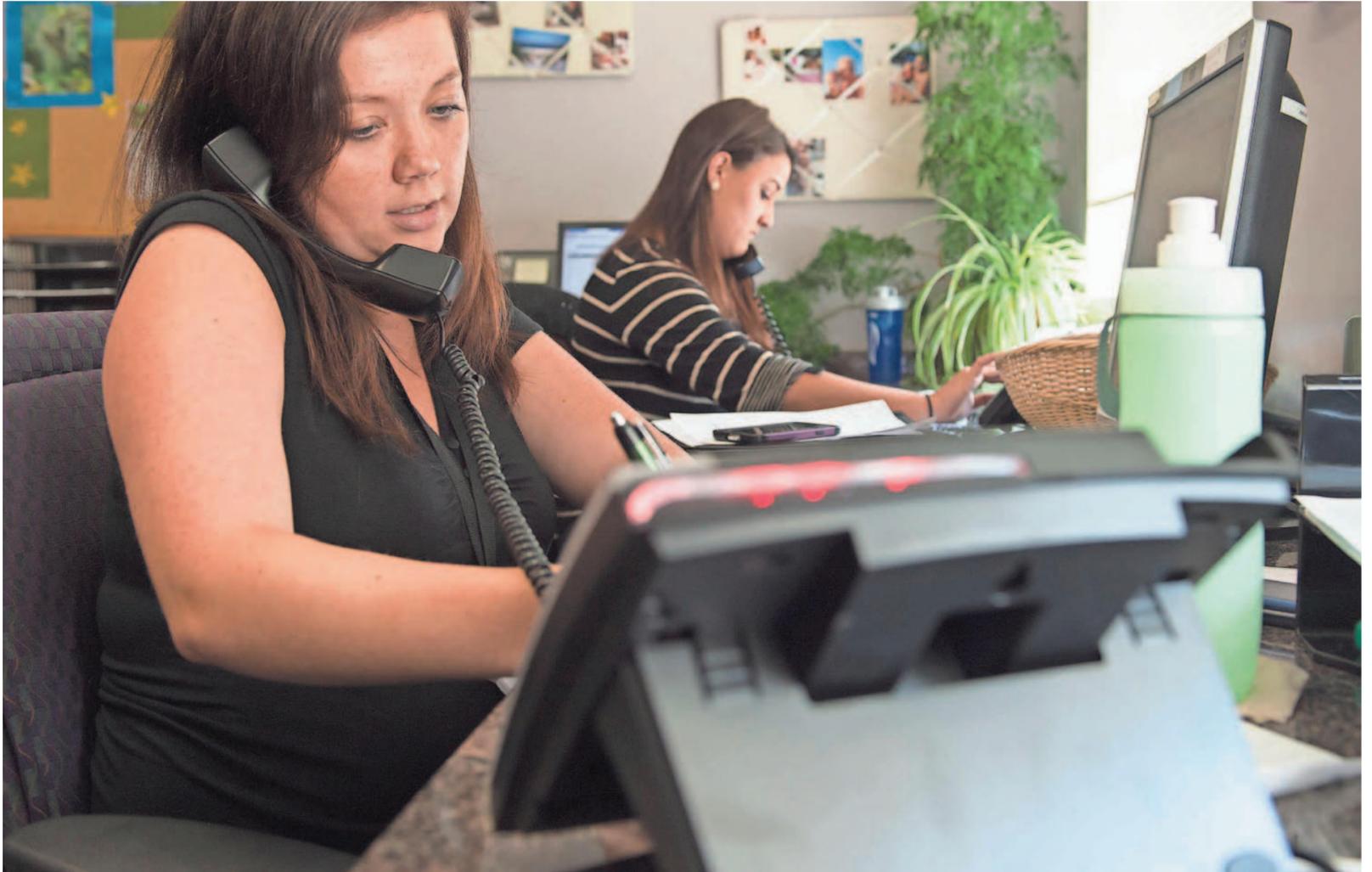


“Sometimes just asking someone if they’re OK makes everything OK.”

JAYNE WILDASIN

CRISIS INTERVENTION MANAGER AT TRUENORTH WELLNESS SERVICES



JASON PLOTKIN/YORK DAILY RECORD

Katie Draiss, a crisis intervention specialist with TrueNorth Wellness Services, speaks with a young woman who had been cutting herself and was thinking about suicide.

SUICIDE

TAKE TOPIC OFF THE TABOO LIST

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Suicide. Just the word is enough to overwhelm, to cause panic. So we don’t say the word, don’t ask if a co-worker is O.K., don’t take the time to listen. Jayne Wildasin thinks we can do better.

The crisis intervention manager at TrueNorth Wellness Services says suicide is a community health problem — one that we can all play a part in addressing. She and Sabrina Valente train community members in Applied Suicide Intervention Safety Training, or ASIST.

“The idea is that you have to connect with people in order to help them,” Wildasin said.

Anyone could benefit from this training, Wildasin said, but she thinks it would be especially useful to teachers, clergy and youth leaders. Even without the training though, she said there are small things anyone can do to help reduce the number of suicides in the area.

Take suicide off the taboo list.

“Asking someone about suicide is not going to make them suicidal if they’re not already,” Wildasin said. We tend not to pose the question directly, but we should.

Making the topic more approachable lets people know its O.K. to talk about

RESOURCES

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline 1-800-273-TALK (8255)
Crisis Intervention direct line at TrueNorth Wellness Services 717-637-7633

TRAINING

There is a two-day Applied Suicide Intervention Safety Training course Nov. 8 and Nov. 9, from 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. at 1195 Roosevelt Ave. in York. Details and registration are available at truenorthwellness.org/events

suicide. And if the question is posed to a person who isn’t contemplating suicide, it just shows them you care about them, said Catya Gilbert, who went through ASIST training last month.

Don’t dance around the subject. Ask specific questions and hit the subject head-on, Gilbert said.

“If you have an inkling of even the tiniest thought that someone is edging towards suicidal thoughts, just ask,” Gilbert said. “Have that courage.”

Some people give subtle clues that they’re feeling suicidal. Any shift from normal behavior for an individual should be seen as invitation to check in with them, Wildasin said.

Listen.

“As a society, we stopped caring about the people around us because

we’re so busy,” Wildasin said. She says we need to slow down and take the time to really listen to a person’s story.

“Sometimes just asking someone if they’re ok makes everything ok,” Wildasin said.

Sabrina Valente, who answered calls for the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline for six years, said when you’re talking with someone who’s suicidal there’s a tendency to get anxious, a desire to pull that person to safety and quickly move on to how to fix the problem.

Sometimes what a person in crisis needs is not a fix though, but someone to sit with them through their pain and despair and uncertainty, Valente said. “That is so hard,” Gilbert said. “We are a society of fixers.”

You’re not on the hook.

You don’t have to be an expert on suicide prevention to pay attention, ask questions and be aware of the people around you, Wildasin said. Taking that first step — asking if a person is O.K. — does not make you responsible for fixing all their problems.

“You don’t have to be the end all be all for that person,” Wildasin said. But if you’re a neighbor, friend, co-worker, teacher, spouse or mentor, you’re the first line of defense.

If a person says they’re feeling suicidal don’t leave them alone, Valente said, and get them in touch with someone else who can help if you can’t.

“There’s nothing wrong with saying ‘I’m going to connect you with someone else who I think can better help you.’” Valente said.

Safe for now.

The ASIST program stresses the idea of making sure a person is safe in the moment. For one person, that might mean staying on the phone until someone else comes home. For another, it could be emergency services should be called.

Before, Valente said, it felt like she was responsible for talking a person off the ledge and then making sure they never felt like that again. Now, success might just mean making sure a person makes it through the night.

These strategies aren’t the fix, Wildasin said, they’re the intervention.

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