

Prevent teen suicide, expert says at Astor Services breakfast in Poughkeepsie

EMILY STEWART • POUGHKEEPSIE JOURNAL • MARCH 3, 2011

Suicide is preventable.

That was the message of M. David Rudd's speech on suicide prevention among children and youths at the Astor Services for Children and Families eighth annual Public Policy Breakfast.

Astor Services and the Dutchess County Regional Chamber of Commerce co-hosted the event Wednesday at the Poughkeepsie Grand Hotel.

Rudd spoke about the prevalence of suicide among people younger than 25. Ten out of every 100,000 youths commit suicide each year, or 11.3 every day, he said.

"Today we will lose 11 young men and women," he said.

Warning signs of suicide for youths include talking about death, increased use of alcohol and impulsive or aggressive behavior. Teens are more impulsive than adults and much more likely to kill themselves on the day of a crisis, rather than wait and think about it, Rudd said.

"They simply aren't able to process information the same way," he said.

Many people don't know what to say to troubled teens, Rudd said, but the important thing is to say anything; just expressing concern can help.

Rudd recommended that parents use gun locks and other methods to keep firearms secure and away from children. About half of all youths who commit suicide shoot themselves, he said, and overdosing on medication and hanging are common methods of suicide among teens.

Rudd said taxpayers foot the bill for suicide and suicidal behavior, including emergency room care and police investigations. He said the cost of suicide in the U.S. in 2005 amounted to \$16 billion, and the cost of suicide attempts was \$4.7 billion.

He said it's better to "invest directly" in suicide prevention rather than "shift the cost."

Rudd is dean of the College of Social and Behavioral Sciences at the University of Utah and scientific director for the National Center for Veterans Studies there.

Astor Services Executive Director James McGuirk, who introduced Rudd, also spoke about suicide.

"It's the third-leading cause of death for kids between 15 and 24, a statistic we should want to change," he said. "There are more children suffering from psychiatric problems than with autism, leukemia and HIV combined."

The breakfast was preceeded by a daylong training session Tuesday for Astor employees and other professionals who work with children. About 200 people attended the training, McGuirk said.

The Dutchess County 24-hour crisis counseling information and referral help line is 845-485-9700 or 1-877-485-9700.

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James McGuirk, right, executive director of Astor Services for Children and Families, and keynote speaker M. David Rudd, dean of the University of Utah's College of Social and Behavioral Sciences, talk at Wednesday's Public Policy Breakfast at the Poughkeepsie Grand Hotel. **See more photos at**

poughkeepsiejournal.com. (Karl Rabe/Poughkeepsie Journal)