



THE URGENT NEED FOR SUICIDE PREVENTION - WE MUST ACT NOW!

Written by Francine Sumner, Founder & CEO, Kid in the Corner

On June 13, 2017, my world shattered. I lost my youngest son, Zachary, to suicide. He was just 16 years old; a high school student here in the Valley. Words cannot capture the depth of my grief, but in the aftermath of this unimaginable tragedy, I knew I couldn't let Zach's story end in silence. From the deepest pain emerged a vow to make sure no other family would have to endure what mine had. Three months later, that promise took shape in the form of Kid in the Corner, an organization founded with a singular mission: to shatter the stigma around mental illness and ensure no one feels alone in their struggle.

Zachary's story is not unique. It is tragically common. According to the CDC, suicide was the second leading cause of death in 2023 for people aged 10-14 and 25-34. This startling fact reveals not only a societal failure to protect the youngest members of our population but also a gap in resources dedicated to mental health support. In Arizona, where we call home, youth face particularly high rates of mental illness but struggle to access the care they need. We must face these alarming statistics head-on. Youth suicide is a growing crisis, yet it remains an under-addressed issue. The time has come for this issue to become a national priority because the stakes could not be higher: it's a matter of life and death for thousands of young people every year.

When I lost Zachary, I was consumed with grief and self-doubt. But with the support of my family, friends, and community, I slowly found my way forward. I realized that Zach's legacy should be one of hope, not despair. That's why I've chosen to share our story publicly—not to dwell on the sadness but to inspire change. I know firsthand that stigma can be deadly. It played a starring role in my son's battle with mental illness, and while I couldn't change his story, I can help change the stories of others.

Kid in the Corner was born out of love and loss, but today, it stands as a beacon of hope and action for the countless young people who are silently battling mental illness. Through our programs, we reach students and young adults, teaching them the Penny Pledge—an individual commitment to support those who might be struggling as well as themselves. Our focus is not only on education but on building a culture of kindness, encouraging our community to open up and talk about the hard things. We believe that through awareness, empathy, and connection, we can change—and save—lives.

We are in a crisis, but it's one we can address together. As Kid in the Corner enters its seventh year, we've seen the power of community, kindness, and open dialogue. We've seen lives transformed and saved because people were willing to listen, support, and stand up for those in need. But there is still so much more to be done. One of our three pillars of focus is connecting the community to resources. Two years ago, I founded the [Mental Health Matters Arizona](#) coalition alongside numerous other community organizations and leaders in the industry. On September 28th, we are hosting our second annual [Mental Health Matters Arizona Conference](#). This insightful and impactful event aims to foster a supportive and inclusive environment where attendees can learn, network, and collaborate with like-minded individuals. It will provide a platform for attendees to exchange ideas, share best practices, and explore innovative strategies for promoting mental wellness and resilience in their communities. The conference will bring together a diverse group of professionals, experts, advocates, and individuals who are passionate about mental health and will feature breakout sessions, panel discussions, and keynote speeches covering a broad spectrum of mental health topics.

Suicide is preventable. Mental illness is treatable. Stigma, however, is a choice—a choice we can refuse to make. By supporting Kid in the Corner, you are helping us shatter that stigma and offer hope and resources to those who need it most. Please join us in this critical work. Together, we can make a difference.

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About Kid in the Corner

Kid in the Corner is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization with the mission to shatter the stigma that surrounds mental illness and to support the kid in the corner, whoever that may be. Our vision is to live in a world where no family suffers the loss of a loved one to suicide. We plan to accomplish this by using a three-pronged approach: educate & spread awareness, promote kindness & community connection, and connect the community with resources.

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