

How Tallahassee's Bluebird Run provides me community in suicide support

Jaclyn Tipton Your Turn article for the Tallahassee Democrat

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My name is Jaclyn Tipton, and I regularly have thoughts of suicide.

In 2012, Bill and Mary Bowers found their daughter, Brook, had died by suicide in their own home here in Tallahassee. In her life, Brook dealt with depression, frequent suicidal thoughts, and trauma in her teenage years. And though she has been gone for over 10 years, her story resonates with me. I have been in her shoes.

In 2018, I was in my senior year at Florida State University, but during what my family said was supposed to be the “happiest time of my life,” my depression was spiraling in a way it never had before. My friend group was scarce, and my support group was almost non-existent. This was the first time I contemplated suicide. As I sat on my bed, listening to my roommate talk in the living room about how “annoying” I was, I couldn’t see a future for myself. I felt so incredibly alone, and I didn’t know where to turn.

And from 2018 forward, I have been plagued with thoughts of killing myself. Sometimes it’s only once or twice a week. But other times, when I’m in a major episode, it’s closer to once or twice an hour. And as a person with mental health conditions who is in “recovery,” these thoughts are something I’ve learned to live with and make peace with. Even though my risk of suicide is now very low, the thoughts remain, and my support group cheers me on every step of the way.

But many aren’t as lucky as I am. According to the Suicide Awareness Voices of Education (SAVE), approximately 1.2 million Americans attempt suicide each year. That’s just shy of everyone who lives in Dallas, Texas. Suicide is a tragedy, and their loved ones are left with insurmountable grief.



Participants in previous Bluebird Run and Walk in Tallahassee *Supplied Photo*

Brook Bowers' death shook our community, and with it, the annual Labor Day Bluebird Run & Walk was launched in 2015 in dedication to her. This year's timed and untimed races will begin at 7:30 - 8 a.m., Monday, September 4, at the J. R. Alford Greenway, 2500 Pedrick Road, Tallahassee. (There is a \$25 registration fee to participate in the timed 5k race; \$15 registration for 5K without timing, and \$5 registration for the separate 1-mile walk or run course.)



Participants in previous Bluebird Run and Walk in Tallahassee *Supplied Photo*

The first year I attended Bluebird, I was blown away at the safe, loving community of people who came: loved ones, those with mental health conditions, suicide attempt survivors, and so many more supporters. To be seen and heard in a place of high energy and support is something I had never experienced before.

This is the purpose of NAMI (National Alliance on Mental Illness) Tallahassee's Bluebird Run: to raise awareness of suicide and create a community of those affected by suicide, including those who have had suicidal ideations or attempts themselves.

Come and walk through Memory Lane to remember our loved ones who have passed and remind ourselves of the resilience of survivors. Come enjoy music with our DJ, as well as shady tents, plenty of iced coffee, and all you can eat watermelon. Come and commemorate our loved ones as you run or walk one of Brook's favorite trails, and find resources from our tabling sponsors, Apalachee Center (ACI), Tallahassee Memorial Healthcare (TMH), and HCA Florida Capital Hospital.

We hope to see you there.



Jaclyn Tipton Supplied Photo

Jaclyn Tipton, who serves as program coordinator for NAMI Tallahassee, is a peer in recovery living with Persistent Depressive Disorder with Major Episodes and Generalized Anxiety Disorder.