

NEWS RELEASE

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For immediate release

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[Editor, please note: Included with this news article is a list of the risk factors for suicide. These would make a great sidebar to this article.]

ALLIANCE -- Many people know about the way Brock Mai died. The Alliance man committed suicide near Alliance in December 2009. However, this past weekend, a larger group gathered to remember how Mai lived – to celebrate the young man’s 26th birthday and help raise money for other families suffering a similar loss.

Cassie Zurn, Mai’s older sister, said his family speaks openly of their brother, son and friend’s death, but this past weekend was a time for remembering his life and the many friends he gathered during more than 21 years in Alliance and 25 years in the Panhandle of Nebraska.

About 100 people attended a horseshoe tournament at Knight Park near Emerson School in Alliance Saturday morning, the youngest among them Mai’s son Emric, 1. The family played games, shed a few tears, remembered good times, sang *Happy Birthday* and released balloons. They raised \$1,500 including donations to give to the emergency room at Regional West Medical Center. “The staff there were so good to us,” Zurn said. “We wanted to help in some small way.”

Two close friends developed “memory boards” for the event with photos of the young man as he grew up here, but others who barely knew him were there to honor his memory, too. The winning tournament team of Alex and Dominic DuBray said they met Mai when the young man stopped to offer a complete stranger a ride in cold weather. “‘Get in,’ he said,” DuBray told Zurn Saturday. “Out of nowhere, and we did. I wanted to say ‘thank you’ again.”

A reporter asked Zurn if the family noticed any warning signs Mai might be suicidal. “We knew Brock was depressed,” Zurn said Monday, speaking from her home in Rapid City, So. Dak. “We did everything we could for months before his death,” Family members watched Mai 24/7, even sleeping in the same room with the young man for two weeks. “His illness seemed to come on quickly and he was gone so fast, but the warning signs were there. There was nothing we could (legally) do.”

Zurn said Mai had lost weight; he missed work and time with his family often and had suffered a recent loss with the suicide of a close friend. Zurn traveled to Alliance on several occasions to take him to see a doctor, but he refused treatment.

Zurn said her family consulted law enforcement and mental health professionals, but because Mai was more than 21 years old he could not be committed against his will. Zurn asked her brother if he was suicidal and he denied it. “But we knew,” she said.

A suicide prevention class for nonprofessionals will be in Alliance and Hemingford. The QPR – Question, Persuade and Refer – training is designed to help the average person learn to react confidently to someone who may be suicidal. There is not fee for the two-hour course, presented twice in Alliance at 1:30 and 6 p.m. on June 30 at the Alliance Library-Learning Center, 1750 Sweetwater Avenue and at 1:30 p.m. on July 9 at Panhandle Public Health District, 806 Box Butte Avenue, Hemingford. Registration is online at www.trainingacademy.info

For additional information about suicide prevention, visit www.pphd.org.

Risk Factors for Suicide

A combination of individual, relational, community and societal factors contribute to the risk of suicide. Risk factors are those characteristics associated with suicide – they may or may not be direct causes.

- Family history of suicide
- Family history of child maltreatment
- Previous suicide attempt(s)
- History of mental disorders, particularly depression
- History of alcohol and substance abuse
- Feelings of hopelessness
- Impulsive or aggressive tendencies
- Cultural and religious beliefs (e.g., belief that suicide is a noble resolution of a personal dilemma)
- Local epidemics of suicide
- Isolation, a feeling of being cut off from other people
- Barriers to accessing mental health treatment
- Loss (relational, social, work or financial)
- Physical illness
- Easy access to lethal methods
- Unwillingness to seek help because of the stigma attached to mental health and substance abuse disorders or to suicidal thoughts