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Youth Coalition Receives Healthy Community Award

Monroe, WA – Monroe Youth Coalition members were recently honored with the Snohomish Health District's "Healthy Communities Award" for turning their loss into action raising awareness on youth suicide awareness and prevention.

"One of our best friends committed suicide in our freshman year," said Samantha Johnson, one of the founding members of the group. For a year, the friends got together with their counselor and grieved. "After that year our counselor suggested that we'd gone through the grieving process and it was time to help other people," she remembered.

The award recognizes organizations in the county that go 'above and beyond' minimum requirements to promote the health and well-being of employees and the community they serve.

The Coalition formed during the 2014-15 school year at Monroe High School as a working subcommittee of the Monroe Community Coalition. The community group is committed to addressing the co-occurring issues of substance abuse and mental health.

After learning about the research showing teens who cannot name a person to help them in their school tend to fare worse across virtually all behavioral areas, members of the Monroe Youth Coalition launched their 'You Are Not Alone' campaign during National Suicide Prevention Week last September. Their goal was to connect struggling peers with people who can help.

Featuring a powerful video put together by the teens, the campaign included public service announcements on social media platforms, as well as a recurring ad playing at the Galaxy 12 Theater in Monroe. Monroe Public Schools also featured the public service announcement during district-wide, mandatory all-staff school and student safety training.

"'You are not alone' is the main message we want to send out," said Zuzu Hamel, daughter of Randy and Sally Hamel. "For those who feel like they are alone in their struggle, there are other people who've been in similar situations and there are people who want to help."

"We focused on the risk factor of connectedness because we know that when young people in our community are connected to the resources they need, there are people available to help them," explained Samantha Johnson, daughter of Mark and Sharon Johnson.

The group also won a \$20,000 grant from Sources of Strength, another suicide prevention group, which funded suicide prevention training for more than 50 local students.

The students who started the group are graduating this year, and preparing to 'pass the torch' to newer members. "I see the coalition growing and reaching more people," said Johnson. "I just hope to see our community become healthier because of the work I've done and the future work of the people I'm working with right now."

- 30 -