

To: The Bethel Library Board of Directors

From: Deb Clelland, Naam Yoga Community Class Teacher

RE: The Friendship Bench Project

Date: January 17, 2021

Objective: To gain permission for the first Friendship Bench to be installed on the 4 Corners side of the property in order to create awareness and encourage excitement in the community, especially among young people.

Purpose: To educate and build awareness of ways to recognize depression in teens and to encourage ways to implement prevention by building community via communication and friendship.

Introduction by Deb Clelland, events leading up to the this idea.

In speaking with Amy Davenport, we discussed possible programming to include...

1. Discussion of the history of teen suicide in Connecticut.
2. Invite a specialist to teach about warning signs and where one might go for help.
3. A parent who's child committed suicide.
4. Guidance Counselor from the Bethel School District.

Perhaps be part of a Mental Health Series?

Plan events for Teens that can take place around the bench. Music? Meet and Greet? Share a meal together?

Please find attached a picture of the Friendship Bench (we can choose the words) and an introduction of the events that led me to this project idea.

I thank you for your consideration of my proposal and look forward to meeting you via Zoom in February.

Kindest regards,

Deb Clelland

Special Educator and Naam Yoga Teacher

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Natural Awakenings, Community Class Article, Jan. 12, 2020 (1).pdf

Submission for Natural Awakenings, January 12, 2020 Community is the Solution Last year I had a young neighborhood girl, 11 or 12 years old, walk my dog after school. She does this for the whole school year. One day in June, I get a text from her, "I cannot walk Oscar any more." I text back, "Is everything okay?" She texts, "My best friend committed suicide and I'm too sad to work." The summer passed and I hear from her again in September, "Hi Deb! I'm feeling better. I can walk Oscar again." Great! I text her mother to see if I can send texts to her as well. (I'm feeling that she needs to be monitored by her mom.) Mom says, "Yes." She starts again. One Friday in October, she doesn't show up. I text her several times, "Are you okay? On Sunday I hear back, "I'm sorry I didn't let you know I couldn't walk Oscar on Friday, but they took my phone away from me when I was in the hospital." "What is wrong?" "Just my depression." Another month passes. Again, one Friday, no show. I text her and her mother. No answer. I call several times, no answer for the weekend or ever. I feel that I would have heard if something tragic had happened, but there has been no neighborhood news. And so I pray. On TEDx, I heard a psychiatrist from Zimbabwe, Dixon Chibanda: Why I train grandmothers to treat depression. He speaks about the increase in depression and suicide in his country, that 300 million people in the world suffer from depression, and every 40 seconds, someone commits suicide. The biggest increase has occurred in people ages 15 to 29. In Zimbabwe, there are only 12 psychiatrists for 14 million people. So he starts to think about how he can help. He comes up with the idea of training grandmothers (grandmothers never leave their communities) to sit on community benches in the uniform, yellow apron and red beret, available to talk to people. They call the program, The Friendship Bench. The grandmothers are trained in Evidence Based Talk Therapy, Cognitive Behavioral Therapy, Activity Therapy and they are supported with technology. The first group of grandmothers went to work in 2006. Since then, 30,000 people received treatment, and 6 months after receiving treatment, it has proven more successful than doctors at treating depression. In the United States, the rate of suicide has tripled

for 10-24 year old people, it is up 27% between 2007-2017. The cause of this increase is abuse in the home, substance abuse and lack of community (community provides social support). Early intervention can be lifetime intervention. Children need to be taught coping strategies. In September, the founder of Naam Yoga, Dr. Joseph Michael Levry, visited NYC. He spoke about the epidemic of suicide for young people and that it will get worse before it gets better. He said the reason is lack of community. He encouraged us all to do whatever we can to build community. What can I do to help? I reached out to Eileen Earle at Bethel Parks and Recreation and pitched this idea. I'd like to have a Naam Yoga Community Class on Sundays where the proceeds of the class go to the community. She enthusiastically replied, "YES!" and guided me on how to get everything rolling. The class takes place at the Bethel Municipal Center, 1 School Street, Bethel, CT, in the General Purpose Room, every second Sunday of the month. The class dates are as follows: February 9, March 8, April 19, (Easter is the second Sunday), May 10, and June 14. The time is 11:00 AM to 12:15 PM. A donation of \$10 per person or \$20 per family is suggested. All donations go towards the community. Any questions or suggestions, please contact teacher: Deb Clelland, 203-994-5815. Perhaps we can donate a friendship bench or two!



An idea for the bench from Barcoproducts.com. In the Memorial Bench section. We could say, Friendship Bench, or Make a Friend Here?