

EVERYDAY HEROES FINALIST

ANDREA NADOLNY

Supports suicide prevention after a friend's tragic death

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Andrea Nadolny was struggling to find a project for her Girl Scout Gold Award, the organization's highest-level service project. "I wanted it to be something I was passionate about," she said. "I wanted to push myself."

She was 16 when she first started thinking about her project, but she already was comfortable pushing herself to take on new challenges. During her years at Thomas Worthington High School, Nadolny would become involved in the school's theater program, band, Latin club, student council and varsity trivia team, in addition to Girl Scouts.

Then, her world was shattered by tragedy: a good friend died by suicide. He was one of the 40,000-plus people in the United States who die by suicide annually, numbers that have been on the rise the past few years.

"It's still not easy to talk about," said Nadolny, who was 14 at the time of her friend's suicide. She is now 18 and a recent Thomas Worthington graduate. "You never get over the grieving process, and you never get over someone's death."

The tragedy led to action. Nadolny had found the topic for her Gold Award project. "I wanted to share my story," she said. "I wanted to help others."

She immediately went online to research the information already available for high school students. "What I found was overwhelming," she said. "It was a lot of numbers and statistics about suicide that weren't really accessible or very helpful."

So, for her Gold Award project, Nadolny decided to create You Are Not Alone, an infographic designed for teenagers grappling with thoughts of suicide or dealing with the loss of a friend. "I wanted to connect with other people, to let them know they weren't alone," she said. "I wanted to provide resources that were easy to find and understand, for it to be more of a conversation starter to create the kind of dialogue I think was missing."

The infographic includes sections on recognizing suicidal behavior, how to support those left behind, resources for grieving, how to create and join conversations and how to promote mental health in your community.

Nadolny emailed You Are Not Alone to local organizations connected to suicide prevention and education. It was the equivalent of a cold call. A lot of cold calls. "I contacted over 500 mental health agencies and got a lot of no's," she said. "I did get a few yeses, places that said they'd use my infographics."

Andrea Nadolny with her mural she did as part of her suicide prevention project.

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