



ARMY RESILIENCE DIRECTORATE

Stories of Hope

By Antwaun J. Parrish, Army Resilience Directorate

ARLINGTON, Va. – The Army continues to focus on suicide prevention by developing a podcast series aimed to increase understanding of the factors that lead to suicide and the importance of seeking help.

The Stories of Hope podcast was created to inform key audiences on the Army's efforts to address suicides by increasing awareness and emphasizing prevention efforts.

"We're building resilient, cohesive teams with engaged leaders who foster a culture of trust and intervention," said Dr. James Helis, Director, Army Resilience Directorate. "The Army uses a multidisciplinary, holistic approach that includes awareness, research, and clinical/non-clinical initiatives. A collaborative community response that focuses on enhancing connections is critical to reducing harmful behaviors and suicide."

The podcast series will address suicide through the interviewees sharing their first-hand experiences of dealing with mental health challenges, suicidal thoughts and their journey to healing.

Sgt. 1st Class Chelsea Porterfield, was interviewed for the podcast and shared some of her personal struggles and how she managed to overcome.

"When I came out of inpatient care and started another program, a lightbulb went off and I thought that I cannot be the only person that feels this way," said Porterfield. "There's no way I'm the only person that has these terrible feelings, I can't be the only one."

She went on to state that once she started talking candidly about what she was going through she discovered that she in fact wasn't the only one having those feelings.

"Even though asking for help is the first step, it's the scariest one," said Porterfield. "But the only way out is through."

Chaplain (Col.) Khalliad Shabazz, also shared his story of being at one of his lowest moments and a leader coming to save him.

"It was over for me, I was an hour away from suicide," said Shabazz. "A sergeant major, that I am still in touch with today, brought me into his office and he said you are more than your pain. You are more than your low self-esteem and self-worth- and I'm going to make you my mentee and I am going to get you where you need to be.

Recently, Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin, announced the establishment of the Suicide Prevention and Response Independent Review Committee (SPRIRC) which will address and prevent suicide in the military, pursuant to the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2022.

The SPRIRC will review relevant suicide prevention and response activities, as well as actions underway to address sexual assault and the recommendations of the Independent Review Commission on Sexual Assault in the Military. The intent is to ensure SPRIRC recommendations are synchronized with current prevention activities and capabilities.

"It is imperative that we take care of all our teammates and continue to reinforce that mental health and suicide prevention remain a key priority," Austin wrote to the Pentagon's senior leadership. "One death by suicide is one too many. And suicide rates among our service members are still too high."

While addressing suicide and providing listeners with the opportunity to hear first-hand experiences, this podcast is one of the many efforts aimed at suicide prevention.