



CONTACT:

Sally Spencer-Thomas, Psy.D., President  
United Suicide Survivors International  
720-244-6535 |SallySpencerThomas@gmail.com  
[www.UniteSurvivors.org](http://www.UniteSurvivors.org)

ANNOUNCEMENT

## Am I Ready to Tell My Story about Suicide? New On-Line Course Helps People with Lived Experience with Suicide Prepare Themselves for Storytelling

“Neither revolution nor reformation can ultimately change a society, rather you must tell a more powerful tale, one so persuasive that it sweeps away the old myths and becomes the preferred story...” ~Ivan Illich

Denver, Colorado. April 22, 2019. Storytelling is becoming a powerful tool in the suicide prevention advocate’s toolbox as we cultivate more powerful tales of resilience and healing that sweep away the old myths that have perpetuated fear and hopelessness. Knowing that storytelling can be empowering for the storyteller, influential for the listener and transformational in systems and culture, United Suicide Survivors International (United Survivors) is helping people with lived experience consider whether or not storytelling is right for them and prepare themselves for sharing their story. Today, United Survivors launches an on-line course called “Am I ready?” — a three-hour workshop that guides individuals through a series of exercises designed to assist them in discerning their motivation, in weighing the benefits and consequences of sharing, and in developing a self-care plan BEFORE engaging in crafting and disclosing a personal narrative about their experiences. Those interested in the “Am I Ready?” course can learn more and register for this preliminary on-line workshop here: [www.UniteSurvivors.org](http://www.UniteSurvivors.org). More advanced on-line courses on how to craft safe and effective narratives and how to leverage stories for social change will be released by United Survivors later in the year.



United Survivors defines “lived experience” broadly including suicide attempt survivors, suicide loss survivors, people living with suicidal intensity, their friends and family — even allies and caregivers. Emerging stories involve a range of narratives such as those about finding one’s way through the grief and trauma left in the wake of a suicide death, or the stories expressing rage felt by being treated inhumanely by overly fearful mental health systems, or the narratives that express compassion experienced between peers supporting one another on their journey toward well-being, or the transformational tales about a spiritual awakening experienced in the aftermath of an attempt.

“We believe by developing skilled speakers with lived experience, we can challenge the misinformation and silence that embodies the misperceptions and drives the actions leading to isolation and discrimination,” said Dr. Ursula Whiteside, founding board member of United Survivors.

Suicide prevention change agents with lived experience often find themselves faced with making a decision to cross the line from a purely private life, full of the safety and non-responsibility it can provide, to a life that blends their personal passion with the public domain and a vision of ever-spreading positive change. With more suicide recovery stories being told, many more people find themselves at the chasm of the safety of privacy into a public platform; some boldly step into the unknown — maybe regretting later the backlash they experience after their story was told — while others look across the chasm wonder, “Is sharing my story the right thing to do?”

“Many people can feel a sense of freedom from releasing their untold story,” said Dr. Sally Spencer-Thomas, President of United Survivors. “This new on-line course gives them space to reflect on this decision and to build a plan before publicly disclosing so they are more likely to share in a way that is safe and effective for them and for others.”

In the beginning of the storytelling process some people may find that they only want to craft a narrative to keep to themselves or to share in therapy. Other suicide prevention advocates find ways to integrate suicide stories into everyday conversations around the dinner table and with friends and acquaintances. Still others think creatively about how to integrate their lived experiences into their classrooms, workplaces, and faith communities to advocate for change.

More vocal advocates may sign up to present to larger town hall-style meetings, to speak to local and national media, and to influence the hearts and minds of many other influencers such



as policy makers and funders. When done safely and effectively, the process of storytelling can offer unparalleled ways to inspire hope and galvanize change in the individual, among the listeners and throughout the wider circles of society. The "Am I Ready?" course can help prepare people with lived experience to consider these options and make a decision that is best for them.

###

About United Suicide Survivors International. (United Survivors) is an independent international organization that serves as a home for people who have experienced suicide loss, people who have attempted suicide or who live with suicidal intensity (i.e., thoughts or feelings), and their friends and families -- collectively known as people with lived experience with suicide. United Survivors empowers people with lived experience to move from survivors to change agents by developing their ability to deliver safe and effective storytelling and to leverage their expertise for large scale change through advocacy and community engagement. [www.UniteSurvivors.org](http://www.UniteSurvivors.org)  
@UniteSurvivors Video: <https://youtu.be/oe50RnEdHt0>