

# Hands-on Mental Health

You may have seen the story on your social media feed: “Schoolboys grabbed suicidal man and refused to let him jump” blared the UK Daily Mail. That headline accompanied a picture of a serious Shawn Young, Davonte Cafferkey, and Sammy Farah, ages 12, 13, and 14 respectively, at the time.



The boys had been “loitering” on the way home from school, recalled Young’s mother, and as they were about to cross an overpass in Hertfordshire—about 30 miles North of London—a passing adult told them to go another way because a disturbed man was on the bridge.

Their sense of mischief and curiosity aroused, they proceeded across anyway. There they found a distraught 21-year old man with a rope. His face was red and he was crying quietly, but sweating and breathing heavily. He tied the rope around part of the bridge, tossed his keys and phone to the boys and told them not to answer if anyone called. He put the rope around his neck and climbed over the railing.

This pressed the boys into smart and aggressive “textbook” action,” said Carol Young. Cafferkey and Farah clutched the man for dear life while Shawn ran for help. The young man became dead weight there on top of that bridge, over the busy highway. He slipped in and out of consciousness while the boys yelled at him: “Don’t do this! Think of your family! You’re too young to die!”

**Grateful Family**

Ultimately, two other passerby assisted the boys in bringing the man to safety and averting the loss of life.

"A few weeks after," Shawn told *Message* recently, "he came to Devontae's house to meet us. He brought us flowers and cards. He said he was grateful; he wasn't really thinking properly."

The kernel of truth buried in this story with a happy ending is what support for people living with mental illness is all about. That's because when you rewind, you realize that it was an adult who told the boys to avoid crossing the bridge where a "crazy man" was up there doing some strange things.

Instead, like the Bible's "Good Samaritan" who risked his life to come to the aid of a person in need—all while other, qualified and seemingly spiritual people passed by—the boys stepped in anyway.

"Shawn was brought up as a child to attend church. His belief is there. He's had training," said his mother who took her children to work in the community "religiously," and taught them to look after people who need looking after.

### **Wholistic Health**

As a Seventh-day Adventist, for whom belief in the wholistic health message of the Bible is critical, I was taught early to "Trust in Divine Power," a helpful, hopeful approach to well-being that most certainly includes mental wellness.

"Trust in divine power boosts positive emotions and helps neutralize negative emotions, serving both to enhance life and increase coping skills as negative life events are put into proper context," writes Lillian Kent, in an article "The Adventist "Health Message" Unpacked, [www.ministrymagazine.org](http://www.ministrymagazine.org).

"Individuals with these beliefs have greater well-being, happiness, hope, optimism, and gratefulness and are less likely to experience depression, suicide, anxiety, psychosis, substance abuse, delinquency, crime, and marital instability."

Yet, traditionally communities of faith and the faithful struggle with incorporating psychological and psychiatric support with religious or spiritual belief and practice. Longstanding suspicions widened the gulf between science and faith. That left many to struggle alone in stigma, or in anonymity, or in abuse.

"Most services of worship are silent about the mental and emotional problems among those present," according to [an article](#) by Clark Aist, Ph.D, a former director of Chaplain Services and Rehabilitation Services Supervisor of Clinical Pastoral Education, for Saint Elizabeth's Hospital, Washington, D.C. "They are not lifted in prayer or sermons, nor mentioned in social hour conversations. This conspiracy of silence serves to perpetuate the stigma associated with mental health conditions."

With mental illness affecting "tens of millions" of people in the United States, and only an estimated half of the people affected getting treatment, according to the National Institute of Mental Health, there is room for more discussion, education, and intervention. In our houses of worship, cited Aist, it is estimated that one in four families has someone living with a mental illness. At that rate, we can no longer afford to stigmatize mental illness, or simply pray it away, but actually use a hands-on effort to look after people who need looking after.



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