



# MENTAL HEALTH ON CAMPUS

A NATIONAL CRISIS

GARRETT LEE SMITH WAS THE SON OF FORMER UNITED STATES SENATOR, GORDON SMITH AND HIS WIFE SHARON. AS DEVOUT MORMONS, WELL CONNECTED IN THE COMMUNITY, WITH ACCESS TO MEDICAL CARE AND RESOURCES, IT WAS A SHOCK FOR GARRETT'S PARENTS TO LEARN THAT THEIR SON SAID HE HAD BEEN SUFFERING FROM DEPRESSION SINCE THE AGE OF 10. HAVING BEEN DIAGNOSED WITH DYSLEXIA AND OTHER LEARNING DISABILITIES FROM A YOUNG AGE, GARRETT'S ROUTE TO ADULTHOOD WAS NOT EASY.

After high school graduation, Garrett embarked on a two-year mission to England where his family reported that his mental state was generally positive, but that it rapidly deteriorated when Garrett returned to the United States to attend college in Utah. During his time in college, Garrett began to see a psychiatrist and take antidepressants hoping to stabilize, but by September 2003, he had stopped answering the phone and interacting with friends and family. One evening, Garrett fed his dog, wrote a note to his parents, unlocked the door and swallowed a large dose of pills after placing a noose around his neck. A friend found his body the next afternoon.

Following Garrett's suicide, Gordon and Sharon Smith endured the unspeakable pain that no parent should experience, and through it, they were faced with a choice: would they retreat into their own grief or would they use their pain to help others and raise awareness?

"I didn't volunteer to become a champion of this issue, but it arose out of the personal experience of being a parent who lost a child to mental illness and suicide," said Gordon Smith, during the introduction of the Garrett Lee Smith Memorial Act on the Senate floor 13 years ago. The Act, which is now a federally-funded suicide prevention program, was signed into law by President George W. Bush on October 21, 2004.

Today, the act provides funding for mental health care, counseling services and suicide prevention programming on college campuses. Grants are distributed through Substance Abuse and Mental Health

*"Many of us forget most of the situations [college students] will be facing are new to them; they are bombarded with situations and experiences they have never faced before and are not sure how to deal with them. All of this results in stress."*

**Susan Lechliter, director of counseling center**

Services Administration (SAMHSA), an agency within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Donnelly College received one of these grants in 2013 to expand campus counseling services with the college's first full-time licensed professional counselor.

## A NATIONAL CRISIS

Unfortunately, Garrett Smith's story is not uncommon. While most cases of mental illness do not result in suicide, his story highlights an issue that is prevalent on college campuses nationally. In a 2014

article published by Psychology Today, the author wrote, "it is neither an exaggeration nor is it alarmist to claim that there is a mental health care crisis facing America's college students." Donnelly College students are not exempt from this crisis; in fact many are more at-risk given their demographics.

Susan Lechliter, TLPC, director of counseling center at Donnelly College, says that college students have a tremendous amount of stress to juggle.

"They are not only attempting to get an education but at the same time they are learning about the world of work, relationships, and earning a living," she said. "Many of us forget most of the situations they will be facing are new to them; they are bombarded with situations and experiences they have never faced before and are not sure how to deal with them. All of this results in stress."

## ADDRESSING MENTAL HEALTH AT DONNELLY

College students on campuses across the country, including Donnelly, seek assistance and referrals for a variety of mental health issues, including depression, bipolar and mood disorders, attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder, developmental disabilities, domestic and family violence, obsessive compulsive disorder, generalized

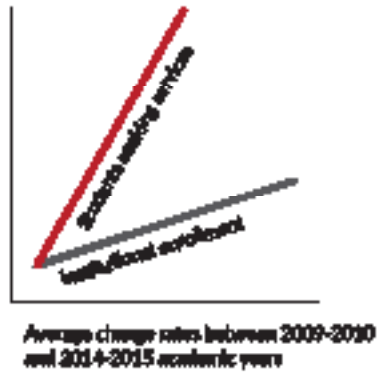
## MENTAL HEALTH ON CAMPUS NATIONWIDE



Suicide is the 2nd leading cause of death for individuals age 15-34<sup>2</sup>



**Nationally, on college campuses, the demand for counseling services has risen five times faster than enrollment growth?**



anxiety disorder, substance-related and addictive disorders, trauma, and post-traumatic stress disorder.

Garrett came from a family of financial means. His parents were well connected to resources and medical professionals. While some Donnelly students come from similar circumstances, most do not. Many Donnelly students come from very low-income and/or immigrant families where mental health issues are often exacerbated by housing and food insecurity, cultural challenges, childcare and transportation problems, relationship/family problems and issues of trauma, grief and loss. On top of that, many of our students have been exposed to substance abuse, domestic violence, divorce and other adverse childhood experiences. Some have family members that have been incarcerated and many have been victims of physical, emotional or sexual abuse.

To address our students' unique needs, Donnelly College's Counseling Center was established in 2010 with two-year funding from the Health Care Foundation of Greater Kansas City. With those funds, Donnelly hired a part-time licensed professional counselor. Initial program goals included 1) assessing Donnelly student mental health needs, 2) improving campus-wide understanding of mental illnesses, symptoms and benefits of treatment, 3) increasing help-seeking behaviors for students with mental health needs and 4) improving coping skills for those living with mental illness.

In 2013, the three-year grant from SAMHSA allowed Donnelly to grow the LPC position to full-time and to support a part-time intern. Under

the SAMHSA grant, the Counseling Center implemented a general wellness and suicide prevention initiative called "Wellness for Life" designed to 1) create a climate of wellness for all students, 2) train "gatekeeper" faculty and staff, as well as peer helpers, to identify and refer students with mental health problems, and 3) strengthen and formalize the College's networking infrastructure with area treatment and recovery support services, as well as other agencies/institutions dealing with mental health issues.

In 2016, the Health Care Foundation of Greater Kansas City provided funding to sustain our general wellness and suicide prevention services as well as to expand clinical mental health and social work referral services to better meet students' mental health and social service needs. With the help of two years of funding from the HCF, the counseling center has continued efforts to reduce stigma surrounding mental health issues as well as to expand general wellness programming and provide Donnelly students with crisis and drop-in counseling, social service referrals and ongoing clinical mental health treatment.

In addition to the services offered by the counseling center, as a faith-based institution with an active campus ministry, Donnelly also encourages students to seek assistance with their spiritual needs - which can play a role in their overall mental health. Regardless of what assistance Donnelly students choose to receive, our goal remains the same—to help each student on their journey to become the best version of themselves.

**SUSAN LECHLITER, MS, TLPC**  
DIRECTOR OF COUNSELING CENTER

**Tell us about your educational preparation.**

I earned a Master's in Counseling Psychology from Avila University, a Master's in Human Resources and a Master's in Business Administration from Ottawa University.

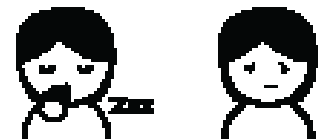
**What is your professional background?**

I have taught at Donnelly for several years and fell in love with the culture. Everyone here is passionate about providing the best education and support services possible to the students so I knew this was where I wanted to be. I also worked for the Missouri Division of Youth Services for 14 years.

**What are your goals as the new director?**

Very simply I want to help Donnelly to be the best that it can be. Toward that end I hope to continue the work to reduce the stigma regarding mental health and to bring a healthy dose of positivity anywhere I can.

**SLEEP DEPRIVATION**



**Sleep deprivation can mimic the symptoms of depression.<sup>9</sup>**



Sources: 1-6 National Alliance on Mental Illness, 7 Centers for Disease Control, 8-10 Center for Collegiate Mental Health at Penn State University