

Coalition keys on the mental side of ‘paradise’

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If you live in a town like Driggs, and an area like the Teton Valley, what possibly could go wrong?

It fits the definition of paradise with its abundance of outdoor recreation. The Teton and Snake River mountain ranges are the backdrop to skiing, hiking and mountain biking. And there are few better places for fly fishing. With a population of just over 1,600, Driggs is as far away as one can get from the rat race of the rapidly growing cities.

But Sara White, executive director of the nonprofit Mental Health Coalition of Teton Valley, sees a darker side. It’s a place where suicides have occurred all-too-often.

The coalition was formed in 2009 after 19 suicides. But White says the need for mental health has not gone away, and the suicide threat remains.

“Idaho always has been in the top 10 with suicides, and it isn’t just one thing,” she says. “The cost of living is high, housing is hard to find and there are limited resources. And in communities such as this, people don’t think they need help.”

That’s a barrier that White and members of the coalition are trying to break. More than 20 mental health providers, and as many as six free counseling sessions, are available for those who live or work in the Teton Valley or Alta, Wyo.



A few years ago, Lindsay Nohl needed help in a big way, and she credits the coalition for saving her life. Her story started six years ago while mountain biking. Her foot slipped off a pedal, and she landed squarely on her chin.

Lindsay, who once considered playing professional soccer, thought nothing about the incident. She had taken more than a few spills in her life, but this one was different.

“Within a month, I started experiencing anxiety and suicidal thoughts. It got worse – insomnia, memory loss and inability to concentrate. I couldn’t drive, I was unable to work and I had digestive issues.”

That wasn’t the Lindsay Nohl that her friends knew. She’s 47 now, but much younger in terms of athletic skills. She’s a mountain bike coach, works as a strength and conditioning coach at a local gym and recently she landed a part-time job with the coalition. Her personality is upbeat, but during her ordeal she struggled with getting out of bed and showering.

She moved to the Teton Valley full-time in 2020 and connected with a coalition counselor, Jenn Carter, who asked the right question.

“She asked me about head injuries, and the bike crash kind of flashed before my eyes. Nobody had asked that,” Lindsay said. From there, Lindsay was able to get the treatments, medications and physical therapy she needed, and by June of 2020 she was participating in a bike race.

“It took a full year to get functional, and I still have issues with focus and short-term memory,” she said. “But with the correct diagnosis, I was able to understand what was wrong with me.”

And through her part-time work with the coalition today, she knows she’s not alone in dealing with life’s challenges in the Teton Valley’s version of “paradise.”

“This is a great place to live, but it’s really hard to survive financially. I’m having trouble paying my rent now, and then there are groceries. I can barely make it work right now. At least I can work, drive and cook,” she said.

“In rural Idaho, people will say they don’t need help, but it’s OK to see a therapist,” she said. “It’s not because you are weak, but it’s because you are strong.”

And Lindsay is convinced that people can be even stronger if they take advantage of the counseling sessions and the variety of other activities offered by the coalition – such as school-based counseling, and workshops on a multitude of mental-health topics. The coalition’s website includes information about suicide prevention.

“Not all mountain communities have mental health coalitions, but every mountain community should,” Lindsay says.

She’s lucky to be living in a place that does.

Chuck Malloy, a long-time Idaho journalist and columnist, is a writer with the Nonprofit Center, a program of The Idaho Community Foundation. He may be reached at ctmalloy@outlook.com.