

A month before Christmas in 2015, I decided I'd had enough. I was tired. I was tired of going on. So, I planned this suicide attempt. I scouted out locations, bought a good insurance policy, even did a practice run. January 7th was the day. That Christmas, we went overboard on gifts and had a lot of parties. January 7th came and I got up at my normal time. I was not sad or upset. I was totally at peace. I kissed my wife goodbye, drove my son to school, and off I went, pulling into the parking lot at a park. I sat there having my last cigarette and thought "Okay, let's do this."

I opened the car door but for some reason I could not get out of the car. I could hear this voice in my head saying "It's okay, I got you, make that call!" and I could feel these hands on my shoulder. I started to cry because I was thinking "Who would walk my daughter down the aisle or be there for my two sons and my wife?"

In my despair, I made a deal with myself. I was going to call my doctor and, if someone answered the phone, I would go for help. If I must leave a message, I would walk in the forest. The phone rang once and a nurse picked up, and I thought "When does that happen? When do you ever call your doctor and they pick up the phone?" After telling the nurse that I was suicidal, my doctor came on the phone and told me to come to his office right away. After an hour of talking, I went for tests and I was diagnosed with severe depression and PTSD.

FUNERAL PROFESSIONALS PEER SUPPORT

From that point on, I decided to not be quiet, but to be very open about my diagnosis. When I told my colleagues what I was dealing with, many of them said "Man, I am going through the same thing. I am tired, frustrated, and burnt out and I am thinking of leaving." So, instead of staying quiet and only worrying about me, I reached out to a few friends and we decided to come together and organize the very first funeral service peer support group in the world.

Ottawa Funeral Peer Support was born. Our profession finally had a place where people could meet and share their personal struggles and get the support and encouragement to get help. In January of the following year, we started to get press coverage from local newspapers, which other news outlets from across Canada picked up. We then started to get requests to do radio and TV interviews both locally and internationally.

Once that happened, we started to hear from funeral directors across Canada saying "We need this in our communities. We need support." We realized quickly that our long-term goal had to be our *right now* goal, and Canadian Funeral Peer Support was born. Within a year, support groups have come up in New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, not to mention Ottawa, Hamilton, and Winnipeg all in Ontario. There is also serious interest in Alberta, British Columbia, Toronto, and Windsor.

Then COVID hit. Our peer support groups met in person so, when everything shut down, we had to come up with a plan to stay connected with our people. It was then decided that each group would host Zoom meetings, which opened us up to funeral professionals from around the world. We started to have people connect with us from throughout the United States as well as England, Italy, Australia, and Kenya. We started to hear from people everywhere that this is something they needed and wanted to be part of.

Our management team got together and we realized we are no longer just a Canadian company. We had to go international. In February of 2021 we started an international support line for licenced and non-licenced funeral staff, along with their families. With a phone call or text, you can speak to a counselor with funeral service experience that will listen and help guide you through any issue you have—for both work or non-work-related issues. We became Funeral Professionals Peer Support (FPPS).