

METRO

Suicide survivor sharing his story in S.A.

By **Caroline Tien**
STAFF WRITER

Teetering on a ledge as a crowd materialized behind him, Mark Henick felt the damp metal of the bridge railing pressing into his back and adjusted his footing slightly. Jolted loose, several pebbles tumbled the indeterminate distance to the earth below.

Right as the 15-year-old stepped off the concrete and into thin air, a man in a light brown jacket wrapped his arms around Henick's chest and pulled him back to safety.

Nearly two decades have passed since a stranger's random act of kindness saved Henick's life. In the interim, Henick has made a career out of raising awareness of mental illness and suicide prevention.

To this day, "I get messages fairly frequently ... from young people who tell me that I have been their man in the light brown jacket," he said.

Henick will be the keynote speaker Friday at the Clarity Child Guidance Center's ninth annual Claritycon, a conference that spotlights children's mental health. Based on the Northwest Side of San Antonio, Clarity Child Guidance Center is a nonprofit mental health treatment facility that specializes in treating children.

In addition to Henick, psychiatrist Candace Romo; clinical social workers Rachael Sherman and Michelli Ramon; and Connie



Matthew Busch / Contributor file photo

A child receiving services at the Clarity Child Guidance Center draws a heart with his mom and dad in the middle.

Soria, San Antonio Metropolitan Health District's adverse childhood experiences coordinator, will be speaking at the upcoming session. Discussion topics include the effects of trauma on the adolescent brain and the signs and symptoms of an impending psychotic episode, according to Jessica Knudsen, the center's President and CEO.

Henick will discuss his recently published book, "So-Called Normal: A Memoir of Family, Depression and Resilience." While Henick's suicide attempts figure prominently in "So-Called Normal," they are not its focal point.

"My story isn't really about how I tried to kill myself. My story is about how I didn't," Henick

said.

Henick's work differs from many of his peers in that it is informed by firsthand experience.

The product of a broken home, Henick suffered from anxiety and depression. His father abandoned the family when Henick was 4, and his mother took up with another man. However, her new partner emotionally abused her and her children to the point that Henick's older siblings moved out.

"I felt completely hopeless and helpless," Henick said.

To make matters worse, he had been taught speaking openly about mental health was taboo.

"There was a sense that you had to be a man and suck it up.

'Boys don't cry,' all of that kind of stuff. So it turns out if you don't express your emotions, they don't just go away. They come out in more creative ways, often more troubling ways. And that's exactly what happened to me," Henick said.

After that fateful night on the bridge, he began sharing his story far and wide to inspire kids and adults in similarly dire circumstances to reach out for help. He has made television appearances, spoken at TEDxToronto and written for CNN and the Chicago Tribune.

His message may be especially pertinent in the wake of a pandemic that has devastated the economy, fueled widespread social isolation and killed and disabled millions worldwide.

Rates of pediatric anxiety and depression have soared over the last 20 or so months. Research published by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention indicates mental health-related emergency department visits increased by about 24 percent among children ages 5 to 11 and about 31 percent among children ages 12 to 17 between March and October 2020.

In Bexar County, 20 children, six 18-year-olds and two 19-year-olds died by suicide in 2020. Fifteen children, one 18-year-old and three 19-year-olds have died by suicide in 2021 so far, according to the local medical examiner's office.

Clarity Child Guidance Center

itself has recorded a spike in the number of teenagers suffering from anxiety and depression and even considering taking their own lives. Knudsen said the demand for inpatient services, which are typically reserved for "kids in imminent danger," has risen "exponentially." She hopes teens will find solace in Henick's story of recovery.

"I think it is always really powerful when someone's willing to stand up and share their own story because one of the terrible things about these disorders is they're very isolating. For whatever reason, people don't feel comfortable talking about it, (which) makes you feel like you're the only one going through it," Knudsen said.

"So having someone stand up and say, 'I've been there. I've been suicidal - this is how I changed direction; this is how I got there in the first place,' can be really empowering to people because it tells you you're not alone."

Knudsen said it is especially important to discuss mental health with children and adolescents because the majority of mental illnesses first manifest during what she calls "this very vital window of time."

"We should be talking about that just like we talk about our blood pressure and our cholesterol level. We have to normalize that these are issues that kids go through and adults go through," Knudsen said.

Hill Country legislator seen at Capitol riot won't run

By **Timothy Fanning**
STAFF WRITER

State Rep. Kyle Biedermann, a Fredericksburg Republican who was seen on video standing near the steps of the U.S. Capitol on Jan. 6 as rioters clashed with Capitol police officers, has decided not to seek re-election.

Biedermann said on Facebook that he will instead spend more time with family and focus on growing his Ace Hardware business. The District 73 Republican



Biedermann

was elected in 2016 to represent Comal, Gillespie and Kendall counties.

His decision not to run opens the door for GOP candidates in Districts 19 and 73, which were redrawn by state lawmakers last month. The new district maps redraw District 73 to include Comal County and a sliver of Hays County. Kendall and Gillespie counties

are now in District 19.

Biedermann previously said he would run for District 19 but said he changed his mind after speaking to his wife, Barbi, and close friends.

"I have been honored to represent Comal, Gillespie, and Kendall Counties these past 3 sessions and I will support a true conservative candidate to represent the new HD19," Biedermann said in his post.

As of Wednesday, former Austin City Council Member Ellen

Troxclair and Austin police officer Justin Berry have said they will run for District 19. District 73 candidates include New Braunfels City Council Member George Green and former Mayor Barron Casteel. Carrie Isaac, who lost in 2020 to Democratic state Rep. Erin Zwiener in District 45, also is running.

During his tenure in Austin, Biedermann filed legislation to bring forward a statewide referendum to start a movement to secede from the United States. The

effort failed.

Biedermann was also one of three Texas Republicans who attended the Trump rally outside the U.S. Capitol on Jan. 6.

Biedermann, who was captured on video standing and smiling at the Trump rally, has described the event as thousands of people who "peacefully marched on our nation's Capitol to make our voices heard."

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