

<https://www.henricocitizen.com/articles/toolkit-provides-strategies-for-supporting-youth/>

# ‘Toolkit’ provides strategies for supporting youth

Local woman works to keep late son's memory alive while educating others about suicide risks

By [Patty Kruszewski](#) | on October 09, 2021

***Editor’s note: The National Suicide Prevention Lifeline may be reached by calling 1-800-273-TALK (8255). Free 24/7 support is also available by texting HOME to 741741, the crisis text line.***

As Anne Moss Rogers opened her presentation at an Innsbrook Rotary meeting with the story of her son’s suicide, one Rotarian turned to another and said, “Wow. How can she say that so calmly?”

But while Rogers seemed matter-of-fact as she recited the facts of Charles’ death in 2015, that purposeful, no-nonsense exterior conceals an ocean of upheaval and churning emotions within.

One reason she is able to keep her emotions at bay, she said, is the therapeutic effect of telling his story. In the six years that Charles has been gone, Rogers has made hundreds of such presentations; over time, the repetition has had a desensitizing effect.

“Talking about it has helped me heal,” she said. “The more I get used to saying it to people, the less likely it is that it will remain raw and painful in a way that’s hard to live with.”

She also believes that talking openly about taboo topics like depression and suicide, and teaching others to spot the warning signs of a teen in trouble, is helping to prevent the loss of more lives.

“It normalizes the conversation,” Rogers said of her program’s themes, which center around Charles’ struggles with addiction and suicidal thoughts – thoughts that began as early as fifth grade, she learned after his death.

Finally – and perhaps most importantly – speaking to groups helps her feel close to Charles.

“When I am on stage or in front of people, I feel my son beside me,” Rogers said. “He was amazing on stage; this was where he shined, and I am with him in a space where he loved to be.

“What’s not to love about that?”

## **Lives saved**

In addition to speaking out on mental health topics, Rogers has written two books about the issues. Her latest book, she told her audience, came about after an employee at a publishing company lost a best friend to suicide.

*Emotionally Naked: A Teacher’s Guide to Preventing Suicide and Recognizing Students at Risk*, is co-authored with a clinical social worker and designed to provide a toolkit of helpful strategies for parents and teachers working with troubled youth.

Released in late August, the book already had topped the list of books for educators on Amazon by the time she spoke to the Innsbrook Rotary Sept. 13. The states of Utah and Alaska, she told her audience, have purchased copies for every teacher in the state.

What's more, Rogers believes, the book has already saved lives.

After a related podcast "blew up" online, one teacher listened to it and was moved to contact Rogers about the result.

"Last night my son called from college," the teacher told Rogers. "It's his first year; he was distressed."

Initially, as she listened to her son complain about his workload and frustrations, his mother was not that concerned. But alarm bells went off when her son spoke the words, "I can't do this any more."

It was one of the warning signs of suicide that she had heard about on the podcast.

"Within 12 hours he was with a counselor at the college," his mother told Rogers. "But I would've never picked up on those words if I hadn't just heard that podcast."

### **Check-ins and sticky notes**

Among the simple-yet-successful wellness measures in the book's toolkit are Post-It notes, weekly mental health check-ins, and "life-experience" movies that students are assigned for a Kansas Spanish class.

The Kansas teacher has found that having to film a movie about their lives in Spanish not only motivates kids to learn a foreign language, but also helps the students bond over shared experiences.

The teacher who pauses for "Hello Monday" check-ins found that having students start their week by rating their emotional state on a scale of one to five not only helps self-awareness, but promotes bonding among the students. After the first few Mondays, when students begin adding the reasons behind their ratings, she guides the conversation into problem-solving techniques.

In the same way, when students open up by posting sticky notes describing "what I struggled with in the last few months," it shows them that they are not alone and may be facing similar challenges as their classmates.

"Some kids cry when they read [the notes]," Rogers said. "They realize their struggles are the same."

These exercises and more can go a long way toward creating a community, Rogers said, "where people feel connected and feel they belong. And kids contemplating suicide get help."

### **'Not on my radar'**

Her son was the "funniest and most popular kid in school," Rogers said, as a photo flashed on the screen of a broadly-grinning Charles.

"Here's a picture of my beautiful boy on homecoming court as a sophomore, escorting one of his favorite teachers."

Once his unsuspecting parents learned of Charles' heroin addiction, they went to great lengths – and expense – to get him treatment.

“We had to kidnap our son to wilderness camp,” she told the Rotarians. “You don’t do that because your kid gets caught with a beer and a joint.”

But they had yet to realize the extent of his illness. After 22 months at camp and therapeutic boarding school, Charles returned home seemingly stable and sound of mind – at least outwardly, a success story.

Rogers now knows, however, that he immediately slipped back into despair and self-medication.

“Teenagers are absolute experts at covering depression,” she said. “My son was a master at hiding it; he’d deny it if I asked him about it.”

Paradoxically, the same teens who struggle with thoughts of suicide and are so good at hiding it, she added, “want desperately to tell someone.”

But Charles’ buried his suicidal thoughts in rap lyrics and writing fragments, found later by his grieving mother – who contends that another reason she was blindsided by Charles’ death was the conspiracy of silence and societal stigma that surround topics of mental illness.

“Suicide was not on my radar,” she said in a 2019 TEDx talk, “because no one was talking about it.”

Even after Charles’ death, Rogers said, “I would talk about my son, and people would cut me off mid-sentence.”

#### **‘Ahead of the curve’**

Since that darkest of days when a police officer delivered the news to Rogers and her husband, she has single-mindedly pursued twin goals of shining a spotlight on mental health issues and working to prevent suicides – a top killer of teen-agers and young adults.

After an essay of hers in the *Richmond Times-Dispatch* went viral, Rogers’ writing and advocacy snowballed; today, her *Emotionally Naked* blog has reached more than a million people. She has been featured in the *New York Times* and was the first suicide loss survivor ever invited to speak at the National Institute of Mental Health.

As for her numerous speaking engagements – which keep her constantly on the road, in front of audiences across the U.S. – she is quick to credit local Rotary clubs for propelling her into the public eye.

When she began talking about youth mental health prior to Charles’ death, Roger said, most organizations were reluctant to schedule a speaker who delved into such uncomfortable, unappealing themes as mental illness and teen depression.

But in 2010, 2011, and 2012, she pointed out, Rotary clubs welcomed her.

“After my son died [in 2015],” she continued, “again, Rotary invited me in.”

Today, with depression pervasive and suicide a critical public health problem, Rogers’ themes resonate with a larger audience, and she is in demand as a speaker.

But she hasn’t forgotten that Rotary first opened the door. “It wasn’t till I’d been speaking at Rotary clubs for seven years,” she told her audience appreciatively, “that others invited me.”

“You all are seven years ahead of the curve.”

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*For details about Anne Moss Rogers and a full list of publications and resources, visit [annemoss.com](http://annemoss.com).*

*Henrico County Public Schools’ Bridge Builders Academy will host on Oct. 12, the workshop “More Than SAD: Mental Health and Your Child,” in-person at 6 p.m. at New Bridge Learning Center Auditorium. “The Signs of Suicide (SOS),” a virtual workshop, will be held online Nov. 9 at 6 p.m. Sessions are moderated by the HCPS Department of Family and Community Engagement, in conjunction with the session hosts. To register or for a full list of workshops, visit [henricoschools.us/bridgebuildersacademy](http://henricoschools.us/bridgebuildersacademy). Questions about workshops can be directed to [ansimms@henrico.k12.va.us](mailto:ansimms@henrico.k12.va.us). Many workshops are recorded for later viewing; past workshops also may be viewed on the Bridge Builders Academy page.*

<https://www.henricocitizen.com/articles/nonprofit-helps-couples-get-from-striving-to-thriving/>

# Nonprofit helps couples get from striving to thriving

By [Patty Kruszewski](#) | on March 16, 2021

Forced togetherness. . . job loss. . . financial strain. . . disrupted routines. . . parents playing teachers. . . frayed nerves. . . loss of child care. . .

Did we mention 24/7 togetherness?

Considering all the stress brought on by the pandemic – not to mention the loss of normal recreational outlets to relieve that stress – is it any wonder that marital harmony is suffering along with everything else? Hand-in-hand with the depressing news of disease, death and unemployment are statistics indicating a climbing divorce rate. Attorneys have noted a spike in inquiries about divorce, and many find themselves overwhelmed with cases.

But marital friction doesn't have to end in a break-up, says Chris Beach of the Relationship Foundation of Virginia. A nonprofit dedicated to building healthy relationships and families, RFVA is seeing some success with an alternative approach: marriage coaching.

Coaching? Isn't that just another way of saying counseling?

"There's a difference," Beach says with a shake of the head. "Coaching is looking forward, while counseling is more about past problems.

"Coaching looks toward the future. It's giving you the skills necessary to move the marriage forward."

## Accessible and affordable

But despite the almost universal strains on relationships these days, couples often hesitate to seek help.

Old attitudes die hard, and even younger couples may have been raised in households where there's a stigma associated with psychological help – or with talking to an outsider about family matters.

In other cases, Beach says, people are simply "afraid to get coached – because it means something is wrong."

For most couples, however, the primary obstacle to signing up for marriage coaching is financial. While some are able to obtain free or low-cost counseling through their church, and others may be able to afford private coaching (through a private group like the Marriage & Relationship Center), the majority of families are struggling to pay bills.

"They can't afford \$100 or \$200 a session," Beach says.

And that's where RFVA comes in. The non-profit offers up to six 90-minute virtual coaching sessions at just \$25 apiece.

During the session, couples delve into personal communication styles and their relationship's strengths and weaknesses, as well as discussing relationship "triggers" – both good and bad. Each may be asked, for instance, 'What is something your partner does that irritates you?' – then move on to more positive or romantic topics with questions such as, "What smell triggers your senses?" or "What's something your partner could help you with that you'd appreciate?"

With its underlying theme of looking to the future and equipping partners with the tools to improve the relationship, coaching can be just as appropriate for just-starting-out couples or for solid, long-married types as well.

"It's not just for people hitting bumps in the marriage," Beach emphasizes, noting that premarital coaching can help new couples get off on the right foot, or help a good marriage become a great one — taking a couple "from striving to thriving."

At the "Shot through the Heart" date night, couples challenged themselves at the Colonial Shooting Academy in Henrico. (Courtesy RFVA)

### **Date nights**

RFVA has also been working with local businesses to create affordable date nights, some of which incorporate coaching mini-sessions along with opportunities to unwind and relax.

Among the recreational partners are local establishments such as Colonial Shooting Academy, which offered a "Shot through the Heart" date night, and others like Belle Isle Moonshine, Tang & Biscuit, and Fine Creek Brewery. Fine Creek hosted a weekend getaway in February at its "Cottages at the Creek," where couples were able to enjoy an overnight escape, dinner-for-two, and some virtual coaching and relationship games (take-offs on Family Feud and The Newlywed Game).

Beach says he tries to arrange at least one date night a month, with additional dates in February to celebrate Valentine's Day. Some couples sign up for the dates to supplement coaching sessions, while others view them as a break from routine, or a chance to sample a bit of informal coaching.

Like most non-profits, RFVA (which began as First Things First of Greater Richmond, and still operates its popular boot camps for new dads – virtually) has had to undergo some cost-cutting during the pandemic. As a result, Beach is also working to organize safe, socially-distanced fundraising events, such as golf tournaments and an online auction. The auction, tagged "He Shed, She Shed," will feature as a prize a shed that can be adapted for use as a backyard office or other handy amenity.

Fortunately, donors have stepped up to help RFVA as well. Beach was particularly grateful – and surprised – to receive a sizable donation recently from the parent of a former fourth grader, almost 10 years after he taught the student at Maybeury E.S. Apparently Beach had been one of the fourth grader's favorite teachers ever – and when the family became aware of his new role at RFV, they wanted to let him know he was remembered and appreciated.

### **'Things that last forever'**

Beach is quick to say that RFVA's mission of strengthening families tends to be an easy sell – a cause that just about anyone can embrace and support.

The challenge, he admits, is getting people to understand the direct connection between strong families

and individual health and well-being.

As a married, working-from-home father of four boys (nicknamed, of course, “The Beach Boys”), he can attest to the importance of marital harmony when it comes to getting his work done, and notes that happy marriages lead to more productive employees — whether those employees work remotely or on-site at an office.

“Marriage is a part of wellness, but people don’t see it that way,” Beach says, pointing out that employer-sponsored insurance tends to cover counseling and other mental health support, or even individual coaching — but not couples coaching.

Nobody thinks twice, he adds, about seeking a coach’s help to enhance athletic skills – or seeking a financial planner or a business coach to help build a business or an investment portfolio.

“But you won’t always be an athlete,” Beach says. “You won’t always work.”

Considering the ease with which people consult coaches for the less permanent things in life like sports and careers, Beach believes it only makes sense to do the same for “things that are supposed to last forever” – like marriage and relationships.

“The bottom line is, the happier you are at home, the more productive you are at work,” he sums up. “And in a time when everyone is working from home, that is even more relevant.”

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*For details about marriage coaching, date nights and other RFVA programs, visit [www.RFVA.org](http://www.RFVA.org).*

*For couples with the financial resources to seek private coaching, visit Marriage & Relationship Coaching Center at [www.marriagecounselorrichmond.com](http://www.marriagecounselorrichmond.com).*

<https://www.henricocitizen.com/articles/cycling-advocate-vye-recognized-as-richmond-history-maker/>

# Cycling advocate Vye recognized as Richmond History Maker

By [Patty Kruszewski](#) | on April 07, 2021

Henrico resident Lloyd “Bud” Vye was 51 years old and working at Best Products when his boss invited him along on a weekend bike trip.

Vye had never had any interest in cycling before. He didn’t even own a bike.

But he found an old 10-speed of his son’s that had been destined for a yard sale, and asked a colleague to teach him how to shift.

He came back from that weekend ride a changed man.

Before long he was heading out on 30-mile evening and weekend excursions with Richmond Area Bicycling Association – a group that likes to cycle together from Henrico to Ashland for Saturday morning breakfasts.

After a decade or so of recreational riding, Vye – now working for Circuit City, but approaching retirement – expanded into activism.

No longer simply a way to relax with friends or to enjoy a workout, cycling had become a passion and a way of life.

So when RABA’s advocacy director needed to step down, Vye was “inspired” – as he says now – to step up.

By then, he’d had years to observe the lack of bike-friendly infrastructure in Central Va., and the general apathy toward issues of cyclist and pedestrian safety.

What’s more, he wasn’t the least bit shy about sharing his opinions on the subject.

As Vye told a reporter in 2012, he worked early in his career with the city of Philadelphia’s recreation department, and served for a time as a deputy commissioner and manager of Veterans Stadium.

“I knew my way around City Hall,” he recalled. “I had no compunction about standing up and speaking.”

## **Landmark laws and a top-notch trail**

Fast forward 20-odd years to the present, and Lloyd “Bud” Vye has become a familiar face at General Assembly meetings and committee hearings. Along with the Virginia Bicycling Federation and numerous traffic safety groups, he has lobbied for bike-friendly, safe-driving legislation, such as a mandate for motorists to pass cyclists at a minimum distance of three feet, and a law banning texting while driving.

“In 2015,” he says, “we finally got a law passed to stop vehicles from following cyclists closely. Motorists can now cross a double line to pass cyclists; we pushed for that for years.

“And we pushed numerous bills to restrict cell phone usage while driving.”

Among the most significant legislative achievements for Vye, VBF and various safe-driving groups is a landmark anti-distracted-driving law that took effect Jan. 1. Long at the top of the wish list for bike advocacy and traffic safety organizations, the new hands-free law prohibits all hand-held phone use while driving – not simply texting.

Vye also worked with Greater Richmond Transit Company to get bike racks placed on every bus, served on a committee that guided the development of a regional bike and pedestrian study, and spearheaded the local effort to get applications for a “Share the Road” license plate, first issued by DMV in 2005.

What’s more, he was instrumental in the planning and development of the Virginia Capital Trail, from attending some of the initial hearings for the trail in 1992, to working with VDOT to help design the trail route for final construction around the I-295/Route 5 interchange.

Today, Vye calls his involvement in the now-completed trail the volunteer effort of which he most proud.

“Twenty-five years of work,” he says, “and to see the finished product and all the use it gets is special.”

### **Accolades**

To no one’s surprise, Vye has racked up an impressive list of awards in addition to accomplishments.

In 2009, he was named national “Advocate of the Year” by the Alliance for Biking and Walking.

In 2012, the Virginia Capital Trail Foundation installed a bench in Vye’s honor along the trail near Great Shiplock Park; the bench was sponsored by VBF and RABA, in addition to VCTF.

Upon his retirement from bicycle advocacy last year, Vye was recognized with dual commendations from the General Assembly and the Senate of Virginia. He has also been honored with a lifetime achievement award as part of the Governor’s Transportation Safety Awards.

And in a virtual ceremony last month, Vye was celebrated by the Valentine Museum – not to mention an online audience of hundreds of ardent fans – as one of six Richmond History Makers for 2021, for his achievement in the category of improving regional transportation.

Asked if any honors stood out as having special meaning for him, Vye cited four that he treasures most: the 2020 awards from Virginia legislators, the national recognition from Alliance of Biking and Walking, and the recent History Makers designation.

“History Makers was fun,” he said, “as I was able to share the event with my family, and have a nice party in our living room to celebrate.”

### **Progress continues**

Sadly, his wife of 61 years was missing from the celebration, having died only a few months earlier.

Her husband noted, however, that Dottie Vye would have been delighted to see the History Makers

award presentation.

“Dot had a long history of civic activism going back to our days in Philadelphia,” he said. “She was very much into local advocacy herself, and was very proud of what we accomplished.”

And while he may have transitioned into a less-active phase of advocacy, Bud Vye has no plans to abandon his unofficial promotion of cycling and bicycle safety. He believes it is a wholesome way to enjoy physical activity in the great outdoors, and that getting exercise is more important than ever in light of the incidence of obesity and increasingly sedentary lifestyles. Cycling is also an inexpensive way for many people to commute, which benefits the population as due to the corresponding reduction in traffic, air pollution, and wear and tear on roads.

In his home county of Henrico, he will continue to push for measures that make the community less car-centric and more friendly to cyclists and pedestrians.

“If you notice,” he says, “Henrico does not have hardly any sidewalks, crosswalks, benches at bus stops or shelters at bus stops. I fought for years to get the county to approve money for these things, and met with a lot of resistance.”

Citing police and fire departments, schools, libraries, and parks among Henrico’s many exemplary programs, Vye has often expressed disappointment that the county lags other localities in bike amenities. He believes that legions more would walk or ride if conditions were improved, and has criticized the walkability around Short Pump Town Center as “laughable” — because crossing Broad Street traffic is impractical and unsafe in anything but a car.

(Henrico recently has begun investing in more bike- and pedestrian-friendly measures, with several miles of new sidewalks completed recently or targeted for completion in the coming year, and the addition of bike lanes on a number of streets.)

On the other hand, he says, Richmond and its suburbs have come a long way since the “almost zero” level of bike friendliness that existed when he first climbed aboard a 10-speed in 1984.

He is grateful for the progress that’s been made, and – judging from the growing popularity of the Capital Trail and expanding trail and bike lane networks — anticipates that ridership, tourism, and recreational opportunities will continue to expand.

If the congratulatory messages Vye received during the History Makers celebration are any indication, that gratitude goes both ways. It’s clear from recent feedback that hundreds of cyclists, pedestrians, and motorists appreciate his contributions to their safety and enjoyment in the great outdoors.

For those who have yet to express their appreciation, Vye doesn’t mind; he didn’t volunteer for the acclaim.

But as fun-lovers and commuters alike hop on their bikes, lace up their skates and walking shoes, hitch their wheels to bus racks – or simply drive in the company of more focused fellow motorists – they would not be out of line if they took a moment to offer silent thanks to one Lloyd “Bud” Vye.