

Mission: To prevent suicide through education, advocacy, connection to resources, and support for those impacted by suicide.

Barb Smith Honored with 2024 Health Angel Award

On Tuesday, May 21, 2024, Barb Smith received the **2024 Health Angel Award** at the SCMS Annual Membership Meeting. Barb was also the first Award recipient to receive a standing ovation from the nearly 100 members in attendance. Established in 2009 by **Dr. Debasish Mridha**, the Health Angel Award is awarded to a non-physician who lives and/or works in Saginaw County and has added to the improvement of the health care field in Saginaw County.

Nomination

Barb is the founder and President of the **Barb Smith Suicide Resource & Response Network**, recognized at the state and national level for its advocacy work in suicide prevention. She founded and facilitated one of the first and longest survivors of suicide loss support groups in Michigan for the past 34 years. She was a voice, when there was silence and stigma around suicide survivors in honor of her brother, John.

As a **Victims Advocate** coordinator for the **Saginaw County Sheriff's Dept.**, Barb has responded with first responders to support hundreds of families following a tragic death. Barb started the regional LOSS team (Local Outreach for Suicide Survivors) to meet with families as a follow up to deaths by suicide to bring hope, resources and connections to workplaces, homes and community spaces.

A trainer for **LivingWorks**, she is recognized as a gold level trainer in **safeTALK** and **ASIST**, delivering suicide awareness and after care trainings both locally and nationally, training thousands of people every year.

In 2020, Barb was appointed to the **Governor's Suicide Prevention Commission**, and most recently, she was honored with the **Saving A Life Award** from **Kevin's Song**- a statewide advocacy organization- and was presented the **Michigan Special Honoree Award** from the **National Alliance for Mental Illness (NAMI)**. Locally, her advocacy awarded her the **WAVE Award** for Saginaw County in 2021.

Barb has devoted her life to helping prevent suicide through education, advocacy, connection to resources, and support for those impacted by suicide. Her team of expert trainers deliver evidence-based prevention trainings with the hope of destigmatizing suicide, increasing help-seeking behaviors, and caring for those impacted by suicide. The purpose of her Network is to help people understand the nature of suicide,



Barb and her family - sister Mary Walkowiak, daughter Heather Goldenbogen and husband Frank

how to respond to someone with thoughts of suicide, and how to walk family and loved ones through the aftermath of a suicide.

The Saginaw County Medical Society is proud to present Barb Smith with this year's Health Angel Award.

Acceptance

I am honored to accept this award. There are many deserving people; being selected is meaningful. Starting as grassroots, in my home, my family was my staff (volunteers). Thirty-four years ago, no one talked about mental illness or suicide. It was challenging to get through the doors of many organizations and schools because of the fear that talking about "suicide or mental illness" would trigger someone.

About six years ago, I was at a meeting with **Dr. George Kikano** and others, and he asked where my office was. I was taken aback...I said it is in our home! He and others looked at me a bit confused. I added "so I can work 24/7 jokingly" and save money on bricks and mortar.

Dr. Kikano invited me to come to **CMU College of Medicine** in Saginaw to see how we might partner. He not only opened the doors to the College of Medicine, he opened the doors to opportunities. We received our first "large" grant, allowing me to hire additional staff to meet the needs of the community. Being connected to a well respected medical school was helpful.

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If you are interested in taking a training, please visit our website <https://srrn.net/> for more information and to register. Questions? Contact Holly at holly.kelley@srrn.net or call 989-781-5260 ext. 3.

What a beautiful partnership! Since then, the medical students, residents, faculty and our Network have collaborated on many projects and programs- from Mental Health Awareness Night at the Saginaw SPIRIT game, WNEM Phone Bank, Great Lakes Bay Region Suicide Prevention Coalition (Thank you, Dr. Bala), speaking engagements, and our medical students attending our support group to learn better how to care for people impacted by suicide.

I work closely with **Joan Cramer** who represents the SCMS on our Board. In 2018, she and a team of medical students wrote a "recommendation" to the **Michigan State Medical Society** that all medical schools in the state of Michigan have suicide awareness trainings in their curriculum. It passed unanimously to "encourage" the trainings. It then went to the AMA and was passed again but with edited verbiage- "strongly encouraged" in both the medical schools and for current healthcare providers. Forty-eight percent of people who die by suicide will see some type of health care provider within weeks of their suicide.

What I am most proud of is **Dr. Kikano** and **Dr. Millie Willy** supporting our 1st and 2nd year medical students receiving suicide awareness training, and our 3rd and 4th year students receiving suicide intervention training. I sit on multiple committees around the state including the **Governor's Suicide Prevention Commission**. One of my goals before my term ended was to **REQUIRE** suicide prevention in our medical schools. I was shot down a couple times and told that would **NEVER HAPPEN**. I proudly said **CMU College of**

Medicine has been doing it for six years! We became a model program and finally other medical schools are catching up.

Two weeks ago, I was at a **State Suicide Prevention Conference** with 200 leaders, and someone stood up and proudly said they delivered their first training at a medical school to 80 students and wanted to encourage others to follow suit. She said it was the first school she was aware of doing this. I tried to restrain myself but proudly talked a bit of my other work then said... I had just delivered a suicide prevention training to 120 1st year medical students for the sixth year in a row the week prior to the conference, and that CMU College of Medicine offers ASIST intervention training with ACE's offered to our 3rd and 4th year medical students. I/we got a nice round of applause! Many people came to me afterwards and asked how we got the buy-in. I said it comes from the leaders who "believe" in the importance.

I look forward to continuing our partnership and growing as a community to be one of the most recognized mental health facilities/universities as you work toward opening the **MEDICAL DIAMOND PROJECT**. Six years ago, I remember sitting in the Mental Health Partnership community meeting when it was announced that "the need" to have a central location for mental health care and learning was not only a dream, but a goal. And here we are! Our suicide rates in 2023 were at the highest in history. I know locally the rates are surpassing in 2024.

We need to be the **LEAD** in the State; to set the **STANDARD** on caring for those who struggle with their mental health if we are going to prevent suicide and support quality of life for the people in this region/state. **I HAVE HOPE FOR OUR FUTURE.**

Thank You Key Providers!



The SCMS would like to thank our dedicated Key Providers for continuing to provide support for SCMS Membership Meetings!

Creating a safety network for our community

BARB SMITH
SUICIDE RESOURCE & RESPONSE NETWORK

Our goal is to save lives through **prevention, intervention, and aftercare.**

Our Network trains individuals in evidence-based suicide prevention with the hope of destigmatizing suicide, increasing help-seeking behaviors, and caring for those impacted by suicide.

To request trainings or resources, contact info@srrn.net | www.srrn.net | 989.781.5260