



# Thao Nguyen Foundation Inc. Newsletter

10<sup>th</sup> Issue  
July 2017

TOGETHER, WE BRING LIGHT TO MENTAL HEALTH AWARENESS

IN THIS ISSUE

## Greetings from the President

Nhung Hendy

I hope this Newsletter finds all of you in good mental health and enjoying the sun and warm weather summer brings. In this issue, you will find a moving reflection of our Board member, James Manley, who lost his childhood friend, Lindsay Lightfoot, to suicide in March of this year. James shared with me that he wanted to write a letter to her parents and asked me about what to say to them after he had heard the news. I said that if he did not know what to say, not saying anything would be best as sometimes words can come across to someone losing their child as offensive. I cried when I read James' letter to Lindsay's parents. His feelings are so sincere and his words so thoughtful. I hope you will all agree that the letter makes you feel hopeful and is uplifting to those who are survivors of suicide. Thank you, James, for sharing your letter with us.

I am glad to announce that we awarded our 5<sup>th</sup> Thao Nguyen Memorial Scholarship to Miss Kyra O'Donnell, Vice-President of the 2017 class at Loch Raven High school on May 25<sup>th</sup> 2017. Kyra will attend Bryn Mawr

as a Music Education major. We wish Kyra best of luck as she embarks on her next educational journey. I am hopeful that she will help many people find comfort and heal their loss through music and music education.

In this issue, continuing with our tradition to serve as a research repository, you will find an article that summarizes research on how social media affects our mental health.

As many of you know, we had to cancel our signature event, the Thao's Into the Light Race 5K run and 1 Mile walk scheduled for May 7<sup>th</sup> this year due to low registration. We are in the process of evaluating our options for a future signature event. We welcome your ideas and suggestions. Please email your thoughts and comments to me at [nhung@tnscholarshipsforthearts.org](mailto:nhung@tnscholarshipsforthearts.org). Thank you in advance for your time.

I hope you'll enjoy this newsletter and don't forget to make a tax-deductible donation to TN Foundation. Donations can be made securely on our web site [www.tnscholarshipforthearts.org](http://www.tnscholarshipforthearts.org) or using the smile.amazon.com link when you shop at Amazon. When you first shop using this link, please choose TN Foundation as the charity of your choice. Each time you shop, Amazon will donate .5% of the proceeds to our foundation. Thanks for your unwavering support to TN Foundation.

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### TN Foundation Board of Directors

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James Manley, Secretary & Social Media Manager



*Phil Hall, Director, spoke at the Senior Award Night – Loch Raven High school on 5/27/2017*

## A Letter to Lindsay's Parents

By James Manley, Director

I am still in shock after the horrible announcement of a few days ago, and I know it must be so much harder for you. When depression takes someone, it hurts so much. I don't know all the details, but I do know that she loved you so much! As a social worker she helped people with various struggles, and she did so much to help both individuals and in the fight to get good policy made.

I don't even know when I saw her last- most likely many years ago. Still, I had enjoyed keeping track of her the past year or two as she struck out on her own; yet again, doing things her own way, but this time perhaps in an even bigger way. She was so pleased to get her own little place. Also, it was exciting to see her thrill to find new relationships as well as becoming even closer to you two. The pictures she posted always brought a smile to my face: the love they show between you two and the obvious joy with which she shared them made me really happy. As someone who lives far away from his own parents, I felt so good about seeing you well-taken care of by children remaining nearby. I think it helps me feel less bad about working where I do, far away....

Since it's just so clear how much she loved and cared about you, and one reason I wanted to write is to beg of you to not question that, regardless of how she went. I have known a few people who lost battles with depression. Mental illness is a disease like cancer, shingles, or any other physical ailment: it's basically a chemical imbalance. It's a lot more than just an emotional state, and it has nothing to do with how much friends and family try to help. When I lost a different friend to it, my friend's wife took it so personally. I know it must be hard to make that distinction, but I'm 100% sure it wasn't about her or anyone else: the disease took my friend's life in spite of the love he had around him, not because there wasn't enough of it there.

I hope this doesn't sound preachy, and I'm sorry if it does. I've lost friends, but I know that's not the same as losing a child.

I can't imagine what this shock must be like for you, particularly just after she had moved nearby.

I don't know if she'd agree, but I think she and I have a lot in common: we both can have temper issues, and neither of us could ever succeed in politics due to our shared inability to hold our tongues. She used her vehemence and occasional belligerence in her work as a forceful advocate for good causes, due no doubt in part to seeing all of your great work over the years. She and I didn't always get along- actually, I'll bet pretty much everyone can say that about her, no? but I am so impressed with all that she accomplished and the good fights that she fought. She was a fierce warrior who chose her battles wisely (well, for the most part!). She is a real loss to the community, to the world, and of course most of all to you, her family. I wish I could do something to take some of that pain from you.

Since I can't do that, I instead took her story to my classrooms. In each of my three classes yesterday (March 29<sup>th</sup>) I told my students about the friend I had lost, a friend who worked to help people around her, who struggled to advance important social causes and who fought her own battle against mental illness. I asked them to stand up for what's important in their own lives, and to be willing to speak out and get help if they or anyone they know is fighting to maintain his or her own mental health.

I am proud to call her my friend, and I just can't believe that she's gone: I will continue to hold up her example as best I can. Thinking of you often and sending love and prayers- take care of yourselves!

In the end, she became more than she expected. She became the journey, and like all journeys, she did not end. She simply changed direction and kept going.

- r.m. drake

fb/theidealists

one of Lindsay's last posts



Lindsay Lightfoot, Social Worker  
(1974-2017)

### IF YOU WANT TO CONTRIBUTE AN ARTICLE

Contact Nhung Henny,  
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Philip Hall and TNF scholarship recipient  
Kyra O'Donnell

## Social Media and Mental Health

By James Manley, Director

The explosive growth of social media over the past ten years has benefited many, from Mark Zuckerberg's making a fortune to older folks (like myself) reconnecting with old friends. In particular, social media is a big part of teens' world. A few years ago, a survey of teens aged 13-17 found that 57% of teens have met a new friend online, mostly via social media such as Facebook or Instagram or through networked video games. 72% of teens spend time with friends on social media, and 23% do so daily. This is a good thing:

83% say social media helps them feel more connected to friends and during tough times, 68% have felt supported by friends over social media (Lenhart et al.).

At the same time, the prevalence of depression in adolescents and young adults has increased in recent years (Mojtabai, Olfson, and Han) and some attribute part of this burden to social media. Where before the home was something of a refuge from drama at school or at the mall, now connections with others are even more pervasive. Shakya & Christakis find a negative correlation between activity on social media and self-reported mental health, though their research relies on longitudinal data, so it's unclear whether social media causes issues or if it's the opposite: that people suffering from mental health issues are more likely to seek out social media.

Howley & Boyce write that social media affects different people differently: more extraverted people don't see much change in their mental health status when they use social media, but people who are more introverted and conscientious may be more likely to become obsessive.

Finally, Manikonda & Choudhury see how people use social media to address challenges. "[I]ndividuals were appropriating photo-sharing affordances of Instagram to vent their discontentment around mental health challenges, seek support, and to disclose sensitive and vulnerable information about their emotional distress." A new place to express yourself sounds like a good thing!

What I get out of this information: (and I'm NOT a doctor, so this isn't medical advice!)

- 1) Social media is a window into other people's lives, and a chance to let people know you care. Keep an eye on folks, but don't go overboard! No one else's mental health is your responsibility.
- 2) Enjoy the technology, and ensure you continue to enjoy it.



That means avoiding addictive or obsessive behaviors, which we all can slip into from time to time.

- 3) Be real and break the illusion. Some pretend that everything is great with them, and while it's good to share highlights it's also important to share the lows. Be grateful (and share that gratitude!) when good things happen, but know that people who care want to hear about tough times too.

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