

PRESIDENT'S Letter

Spring 2009



AIMEE GARN

A few summers ago, our family spent a week in Maine with a friend and her extended family. When I called my friend in the autumn, she answered the phone in a whisper; Abby, her cousin's teenage daughter, had committed suicide. My image of the lively girl who swam and cooked lobster dinners with us dissolved into an image of a sixteen-year-old alone in her room, going from chatting on the Internet to ending her life by hanging.

I had read stories about teenage suicide, but this was the first time I had known the child and her family. I was devastated, and my daughters were shocked. We wrote condolence letters and made a donation in Abby's memory—but there seemed little else we could do, which added to our sorrow.

Suicide is often described as “a permanent solution to a temporary problem,” and is particularly heartbreaking when chosen by teenagers who are not able to understand the long-term consequences of their actions. This year four families in New York schools lost a child by suicide or sudden accident. We feel grief for each incident. While details come to light as families and friends deal with such tragedies, a mystery remains at the core. Some of the teenagers may have suffered from depression or other emotional issues, may have been in treatment or exhibited warning signs—but not all of them. Their parents, like the rest of us in the community, are left with one despairing question: “Why?”

In spite of the joys and possibilities of youth, few of us would return to adolescence. Teenagers, in discovering whom they are and what they want to do, are challenged by physical and emotional changes. They feel the weight of great expectations and the pressure to please not only themselves but also their community of parents, teachers, coaches or friends. Adolescence can be fraught with the pain of disappointment and the consequences of poor judgment. From an adult perspective, we know that sad feelings change, obstacles can be overcome and difficult times pass. Our

wish is that our children will gain this perspective by learning over time and through experience.

As supportive parents, we can provide empathy and guidance. We can help our children build resilience by listening and sharing our vantage point with them. For children who have experienced loss in their immediate communities we can seek added counseling. Talk to your teenagers about issues of mental health, and let them know that if they do experience difficulty there are tremendous resources available in this city. On the NYC-Parents in Action Web site we have added to the list of resources. For more information on mental health issues, please go to www.parentsinaction.org. There are also many helpful video clips and articles on the subject at www.aboutourkids.org. While offering these resources is a small step to take in the face of great losses, we hope it will provide support to parents in our community. ●

Thank you ... to the members of the Board of NYC-Parents in Action, the Facilitators and School Representatives, for devoting their time and talents to the organization. Special thanks to the board members who are retiring this year: Barbara Brennan (8 years), Georgia Ford Griscom (1 year), Beaumont Lett (1 year), Pamela Weinberg (2 years), and Margot Ziegler (5 years).

In the 2009-10 school year, NYC-PIA will celebrate its 30th Anniversary of bringing information and services to New York independent school parents. Mary Beth Harvey will take over as President of the board, bringing commitment and vision to her new role. We appreciate the continued guidance of Chairman Emeritus and founder Lynn Manger, and Celeste Rault, who will continue to serve on the board.

Thank you to our supporters, and best wishes for a lovely summer and for success in the transitions to school and college next fall.

—Aimee Garn