

Behind the Scenes begins development of a Mental Health and Suicide Prevention initiative



BEHIND THE SCENES was created so industry members could look after each other in times of crisis. The charity originally defined crisis as entertainment technology professionals, or their immediate dependent family members, who are seriously ill or injured.

In 2016, Behind the Scenes was approached by a concerned individual, Karen Sherman, who was seeing too many of her colleagues dealing with depression and substance misuse. She wanted to find a way to encourage individuals to seek counseling at the start of problems, before they became a crisis and, in an expansion of its mission, the BTS Counseling Fund was created to help ease the financial burdens associated with seeking treatment.

Over the last few years, the conversation about mental health has increased dramatically within our industry. Entertainment professionals are realizing, and openly discussing, the toll that working in the entertainment industry can take on people's emotional wellbeing in addition to their physical health.

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In response to these concerns about the rising number of suicides and the prevalence of alcohol/substance misuse within the entertainment industry, Behind the Scenes is beginning work on a Mental Health and Suicide Prevention initiative.

The goal is to provide easily accessible information, tools, and resources to members of the entertainment technology industry that will offer:

- Resources for individuals to make it easier to self-identify issues and seek help in early stage as well as crisis situations
- Tools and training that will increase industry members' confidence about how to reach out and provide assistance to

individuals in need of support

- Employers and supervisors with tools and resources to become effective leaders in
 - Changing the culture regarding mental health
 - Identifying and supporting at-risk individuals
 - Responding to a mental health crisis such as suicide or accidental overdose
 - Reintegrating individuals who have been impacted by a mental health or substance misuse crisis back into the workplace

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BTS has engaged Vibrant Emotional Health (www.vibrant.org) to assist in the development of this initiative. Vibrant is a non-profit organization that is a national leader in suicide prevention and promoting mental health awareness and emotional wellness. They administer the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline (NSPL) and the National Disaster Distress Helpline along with several other industry/sector specific crisis lines. The NSPL's division of Standards, Training, and Practice disseminates best practices to the 170 crisis centers that comprise the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline throughout the country. Dr. John Draper, Executive Director of the NSPL, spoke at the 2019 New World Rigging Symposium and the USITT Conference in Louisville. Vibrant's Center for Policy, Advocacy, and Education offers state of the art training in suicide prevention, workplace wellness and mental health, and substance use awareness.

The BTS Foundation has created a steering committee composed of individuals with expertise and knowledge in health and safety, suicide prevention, mental health, and substance misuse which will

guide the development of the program. Joining BTS in developing this initiative are representatives of major stakeholder groups such as IATSE, The Broadway League, NBCUniversal, and MusiCares.

The first phase in developing the program is to learn from you, the industry, how prevalent you believe these issues are and what tools and resources would be helpful to you personally or in assisting someone you are concerned about.

Step one was to conduct an industry-wide online survey to get a sense of how many people in the industry are experiencing anxiety, depression, thoughts of suicide, problems with alcohol/substance misuse, or reactions to traumatic events themselves, or are seeing signs of it in co-workers or colleagues. We also wanted to know what resources are currently available, what might keep people from taking advantage of them, and what they would like to see developed.

The second step will be to conduct a more in-depth needs assessment through the use of focus groups to further define what resources and tools are needed. Possible toolkit items may include:

- Materials that assist in identifying warning signs that someone may be struggling with a mental health condition or substance misuse
- Tools for starting conversations and offering support to individuals you are concerned about
- Social media content dealing with suicide prevention and substance misuse
- Guidance about how to respond to a mental health crisis such as suicide or accidental overdose in the workplace
- Tips for reintegrating a worker who has been impacted by a mental health or substance misuse crisis back into the workplace
- Materials or sample scripting for “toolbox talks”
- Resource listings for information about mental health and substance misuse

It is you, the industry, which will determine what this initiative looks like. Your input is what will identify the tools and resources that are needed and how they should be accessed. It is your support in getting the word out—about the initiative and the tools and resources that will be available—that will impact its success and allow us all to bring help and hope to our colleagues in need. If you have questions or comments, please email mh@btshelp.org. ■



Lori Rubinstein is Executive Director of the Behind the Scenes Foundation.

Reflections of the LRLR 2019 “Altimeter” fundraising ride

BY JON KIRCHHOFFER

*Amazing Grace, how sweet the sound,
That saved a wretch like me.
I once was lost, but now am found,
Was blind but now I see.*

On the last night of the Long Reach Long Riders’ “Altimeter” tour, we found ourselves, as is our habit during the ride, sitting in the hotel lobby with Greg Williams and Eddie Raymond on guitars, with many at various points both singing along and listening intently. As the evening was winding down, Greg requested a repeat performance of “Amazing Grace,” which had come up earlier in the ride on one of our nightly gatherings. It was an absolutely beautiful rendition with Eddie on guitar, and the whole group joining in on the lyrics.

That particular moment stuck with me. It played on repeat in my head for the two days I spent meandering my way along the back roads to get home. I found myself humming along for days. I had certainly

experienced grace on the ride this year, and I was left contemplating the ways. While I am not particularly religious, this song has always resonated with me.

As I contemplated the ride, and the way that moment had stayed with me, my first reaction was the grace of sheer luck that we had on the road during the week: The car ahead of me that was driving slowly turning off to leave a clear road ahead as we were pulling into a fun section of road. Having just a trace of light snow on Mount Evans, when every time I have been there previously I have been soaked to the bone. The deep green and lush growth on the mountains from the heavy snows replenishing the previous year’s drought conditions. A rainstorm that had been threatening all morning clearing out over lunch. Random happenstance making the inevitable moments of frustration on the road fall away.

Luck is not the most amazing grace.



The LRLR “Altimeter” tour featured breathtaking vistas throughout Colorado. The riders are pictured here at Independence Pass with an elevation of 12,095’ on the Continental Divide in the Sawatch Range of the Rocky Mountains.

My next thought was about the fellowship of the riders. Even at the most difficult moments of the ride, that a combination of careful planning and sheer luck kept few and far between, the spirit and kinship of the riders was a grace that kept me focused and looking ahead to the moment when the challenge would be clear. That is the most powerful thing I have felt in this group, from my first ride six years ago. I first joined the ride when I was at a difficult point in my life, looking for something larger to connect with. I was feeling particularly alone, and the community of the ride was exactly the connection that I needed to move forward with a new purpose in my own life. I have never looked back. The ride has, without question, gone on my calendar as a fixture.

As amazing as that fellowship is, it is not the most amazing grace.



In these troubled times, with the division and mistrust that is running rampant in our society, and even being cynically encouraged by some, the best urge that we have seems to be on thin ground. The most amazing grace is that which we can provide when we come together to support those who have fallen on misfortune. Without even knowing who we will be helping, without expectation of anything in return. It is the best, and most amazing expression of the grace of our humanity when we come together to grant relief to those who are struggling. Every story I read of how the grants that Behind the Scenes makes, and the real difference that even small kindnesses can make, only strengthen my resolve to continue to make a difference.

*'Twas grace that taught my heart to fear,
And Grace, my fears relieved;
How precious did that grace appear
The hour I first believed.*

What, is Grace? It is the power we have when we act together as one. We can use that power for good or for ill. When we gather to help those in need, we show the most Amazing Grace that humanity has to offer.



That is the thing that I believe above all else.

This year's ride raised over \$42,000 and still counting. Thank you. If you haven't donated yet, please go to www.LRLR.org to make a donation today.

Jon Kirchhofer served as Ride Marshall for the "Altimeter" tour, with special thanks to: chase vehicle support provided by Joe Aldridge, Cris Dopher, and Bill and Jocelyn Ellis; corporate sponsors including 4Wall DC, Aramark, Candela Controls, Columbus McKinnon Entertainment Technology, Creative Conners, H & H Specialties, PSAV, Reed Rigging, Sapsis Rigging, SMG, and Westview Productions; and, Westview Productions for hosting the opening day breakfast held at the Denver Performing Arts Complex.

In 2020, the LRLR will gather in St. Paul, MN on June 20th, for a ride tentatively titled: "A River Runs through It." From Ride Marshal Paul Sannerud, "Come join us for a lyrical ride along rivers and lakes, through forests and prairies. A ride to relax into: sweeping curves, river valley vistas, and a bit of time on historic Highway 61 for all you Dylan fans." Details will be available soon on www.LRLR.org.

Each year, the Long Reach Long Riders ride to raise money and awareness for Behind the Scenes, www.btshelp.org/lrlr and Broadway Cares/Equity Fights AIDS, <http://estalink.us/broadwaycareslrlr>. You don't need to be a motorcycle rider to support the LRLR. All the riders and crew pay 100% of their expenses—your full contribution goes to the charity you select. Your support makes a difference to a colleague in need. ■



Jon Kirchhofer is the Lighting Supervisor for the McGuire Theatre at The Walker Art Center in Minneapolis, MN. He has been riding with the Long Reach Long Riders since the 10th ride in 2013, and served as the Ride Marshall for the "Altimeter" ride.