

Suicide railings on bridges do save lives

This is in response to the recent News-Press article "Suicide barriers on bridge reviewed." UCSB Professor Garrett Glasgow says the "claim" of saving lives by way of a suicide barrier is unfounded.

He is mistaken. Studies have proven that after most suicide railings (barriers make it sound like a cement wall) are put up, lives have been saved — countless lives. The railings usually are designed by top architects to ensure they are aesthetically agreeable.

In New York at the Brooklyn Bridge (it was way ahead of the game); in Toronto at the Blue Street Viaduct Bridge (second in deaths only to San Francisco's Golden Gate Bridge); in Japan at what's been called the "Death Volcano;" and in Paris at the Eiffel Tower railings were put up to end suicide.

Not only did suicides end there, but they were significantly reduced in the metropolitan counties near or around those areas, from 20 percent to 23 percent. That means they not only dropped to zero at the iconic site-for suicide, but went down due to awareness in the surrounding areas.

It has been tested and proven that when you take away lethal means of suicide, you save lives.

I tried to end my life by jumping off the Golden Gate Bridge in 2000, but by the grace of God I survived. However, I represent less than 1 percent of people who make that jump.

Mr. Glasgow's displacement theory already has been disproved. In the 1970s, Dr. Richard Seiden, who sits on the Glendon Association Board as one of the foremost authorities on suicide prevention, completed a 25-year study of those who had tried to take their own lives by

jumping off the Golden Gate Bridge and who were thwarted in their attempts. He followed their existence from a distance for 25 years. He studied some 500 attempters and, after 25 years, 96 percent of those people went on to heal from their depression to become productive members of society. They are either alive or died of natural causes. Each of them was so glad to be alive. The other 4 percent were people who were chronically suicidal and, sadly, did attempt again. But the vast majority lived and never attempted again.

If more suicide railings were put up in iconic places of suicides, such as the Cold Spring Bridge, lives would be saved on a continual basis.

Mr. Glasgow says he is only interested in the scientific perspective, but he is ignoring statistics that refute his argument. His effort to stray Caltrans and the public from doing what is morally right and proper makes me cringe. It is unfortunate that some people will hear his plea and believe him on face value.

I give you my plea today from a man who beat the odds, and resisted becoming another statistic: Erect the railing/barrier and save lives. It could be someone you love and someone you care about whose life is spared.

Santa Barbara, do it because it is the right thing to do. Eighty-90 percent of people who die by suicide are found to have some traces of mental illness in themselves or in their families. They know not what they do. It is ethically up to us to save them.

COMMENTARY

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John Kevin Hines is on San Francisco's Board of Mental Health and the board of Northern California's American Foundation for Suicide Prevention.