

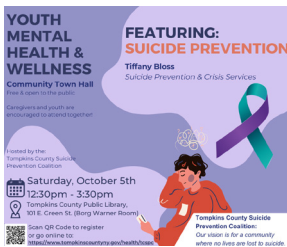
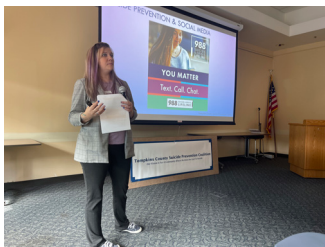
The Sophie Fund

Newsletter 1/2025



“Supporting mental health initiatives aiding young people in the greater Ithaca, New York community”

Safeguarding Youth Mental Health



Tiffany Bloss speaking at youth town hall

America is experiencing a youth mental health and suicide crisis, as kids grow up in a world that is increasingly stressful and scary for them, according to Tiffany Bloss, executive director of the Suicide Prevention & Crisis Service of Tompkins County.

Bloss was a featured speaker at “Youth Mental Health & Wellness,” a community town hall hosted by the Tompkins County Suicide Prevention Coalition and supported by The Sophie Fund at the Tompkins County Public Library on October 5.

Bloss said that a quarter of the young people who die in the United States today take their own lives. She pointed to stress factors such as academic pressures, addictive social media, poor family relationships, and financial anxiety.

“They are trying to navigate so many things in their world, and it is a scary place to be right now. And, with social media, there is no escape,” she said.

Bloss and other speakers provided attendees with knowledge about risk factors and warning signs to help prevent youth suicide deaths.

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Email: thesophiefund2016@gmail.com



Winning Cupcake Recipe: Pistachio, Pomegranate, Sunshine

Sadie Hays won 1st Place and the Grand Prize with her “Orange Pomegranate Cupcakes” in the 9th Annual Ithaca Cupcake Baking Contest organized by The Sophie Fund on October 19.



Sadie Hays and her orange pomegranate cupcakes

Her sumptuously moist olive oil orange cakes with a hint of pistachio, almond, and cardamom and a piquant pomegranate curd center were topped with a white chocolate, labneh, and cream cheese frosting with notes of rose water and pistachio.

“There is a lot of struggle in the world these days,” Hays said. “Through it all, I am looking for the sun rays, the lightness, the freshness, the optimism, and above all, the harmony.”

Marina Mahashin captured 2nd Place with her “Rasmalai Tres Leches Cupcakes,” vanilla cakes soaked in a three-milk syrup infused with saffron and cardamom and a whipped cream frosting dusted with crushed pistachios.

Mahashin’s Bengali and Dominican flavors were inspired by her childhood in Bangladesh and her enjoyment of a friend’s tres leches birthday cake after arriving in America.

The judges awarded Grace Qi 3rd Place for “Harvest Caramel Apple Cupcakes” inspired by memories of the state fair back home in Oklahoma. They consisted of cakes made with Fiji, Honeycrisp, and Granny Smith apples with spiced apple pie filling and topped with salted buttercream frosting drizzled with caramel.

Twenty-nine bakers entered the contest, displaying a range of themes including: fall colors, autumn tea parties, campfires, Halloween, Greek mythology, birthdays, Persian delights, Cayuga Lake swims, creatures known as cats, and empathy and understanding.

Friends of The Sophie Fund

The Sophie Fund extends our sincere thanks to the dozens of volunteers from across the community who support the Annual Ithaca Cupcake Baking Contest, designed to spread joy while raising awareness about mental health.



Cornell students at the October 19 cupcake contest

Twenty-six students from Cornell University began arriving in the Ithaca Commons after dawn to help set up the 2024 contest site, register and inventory the cupcake entrees, participate in early judging rounds, design awards certificates, and clean up the venue afterwards. Once again, the student organizations supporting the contest were Cornell Circle K, Pre-Professional Association Toward Careers in Health (PATCH), Alpha Phi Omega–Gamma Chapter, and Cornell Minds Matter.

We're grateful for our finalist judges, who also brought 500 cookies to the contest to pass out free of charge to contestants, volunteers, audience members, and curious onlookers: Yuko Jingu of Akemi Food; Ashley Case of Case Sera Sera; Racquel Riccardi of the Sinfully Delicious Baking Co.; Melissa Kenny of Sweet Melissa's Ice Cream Shop; and Via Carpenter of Via's Cookies.

It wouldn't be a Sophie Fund event without the sounds of our favorite musicians: SingTrece & Kenneth McLaurin, Rachel Beverly, and Joe Gibson & Dan Collins. Thank you for always lending your voices to the mental health mission in our community!

We are incredibly proud of the partnership with many mental health organizations who join the contest to publicize critically important local support services.

Finally, thank you to the 300 amateur bakers who have entered the Ithaca Cupcake Baking Contest over the last nine years! It's been sweet!

The Sophie Fund in the news...



The Sophie Fund attended the 2024 New York State Suicide Prevention Conference in Albany on November 13. The theme was “Coalitions: Maximizing Connections Amplifying Impact.” Ann Sullivan, Commissioner of Mental Health, introduced the conference, which included sessions on faith-based partnerships, lethal means safety, and postvention best practices. Pictured: Scott MacLeod, The Sophie Fund; Jay Carruthers, director of the Suicide Prevention Center of New York; and Tiffany Bloss, executive director of the Suicide Prevention & Crisis Service of Tompkins County.

The Sophie Fund partnered with local organizations to design a self-help pocket guide for navigating a mental health crisis. The five simple steps are: Be Aware; Distract Yourself; Reach Out; Call or Text 988; and Stay Safe. The guide is the brainchild of the Suicide Prevention & Crisis Service of Tompkins County; National Alliance on Mental Illness Finger Lakes; Mental Health Association in Tompkins County; American Foundation for Suicide Prevention Greater Central New York; and The Sophie Fund.

DOWNLOAD: www.thesophiefund.org/my-mental-health-resources



The Sophie Fund joined 200 participants in the 12th Annual Greater Ithaca Out of the Darkness Walk on September 7 organized by the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention Greater Central New York. The event in Meyers Park in Lansing, among 400 AFSP walks held across the country every year, collected more than \$35,000 for research, training, and educational programming. The walks also raise awareness and support survivors of suicide loss. “When we come together, we are letting everyone know you are not alone, and we are here to support each other,” said Walk Chair Crystal Howser.

The Tompkins County Bullying Prevention Task Force organized United in Kindness, a series of community events held every October to mark National Bullying Prevention Month and National Domestic Violence Awareness and Prevention Month. The 12 events included an art show, story time for kids, Huddle Together mental health awareness programming around sporting activities, and a play about grooming. The series also featured educational presentations for school staff and parents about youth mental health. The Sophie Fund serves as the task force coordinator.



Community-Level Youth Development Evaluation



More than one-third of middle and high school students surveyed in Tompkins County said they feel depressed or sad on most days and that “sometimes I think life is not worth it.” Large numbers of Tompkins youth also feel that they are a “failure” and “no good at all.” More than a quarter of students reported being bullied at school and 20 percent reported being cyberbullied. The Sophie Fund published these and other findings on its website from the Community-Level Youth Development Evaluation (CLYDE) survey of 3,496 students in grades 7-12 in Tompkins County’s six school districts in October 2023.

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