Elliot Sutton: This is your official heads up that suicide is discussed throughout this episode. Nothing too intense or graphic in any way, but we’re talking through the process of seeking help and addressing some signs and symptoms of suicidality. If you or someone you love is affected by this topic and you need support today, there are options. The UNC counseling center offers drop-in crisis appointments which can be scheduled on their website or by calling their office at 970-351-2496. That number can also be used at any time to access after-hours crisis support. The Colorado Crisis Line is also a great resource. You can get help from them by calling 1-844-493-8255. North Range Behavioral Health offers a wide range of supportive services which we’ll discuss later in the episode. You can find more information about utilizing those on their website, northrange.org.

[intro music begins]

E: Hello, and welcome back to Sex, Drugs, & Self Care! This podcast is brought to you by the University of Northern Colorado’s Center for Peer Education, and it’s hosted by me, Elliot.

Can you believe it? Finals are almost over, summer is almost here, and at this point, we’ve basically done it! As much as the end of the semester means like, joy and relief and celebration, it can also cause some new problems. Like, any sort of readjustment after a big change can be tricky. Feelings we’ve been pushing down, ignoring, avoiding through school work can come back to the surface once we have more time to process them. And, in general, the big routine change of switching from being in school versus not being in school or even just a different schedule can leave a lot of people feeling restless or aimless.

Our social support structures also change. We are transitioning between classes, jobs, homes. And depending on your circumstances, like, your ability to access UNC supports might change. That’s why today, we are highlighting an off-campus community resource and brushing up on one of the most essential pieces of mental health crisis management, which is suicide prevention.

Suicide rates in America tend to spike in the summer, along with higher incidence of other risk factors that can contribute to suicide, like experimenting with new substances or just going through any of the other changes we talked about

I feel so grateful that our guest, Logan Shaw, made the time to talk with me about suicide prevention, what to expect when seeking help, and how to support your loved ones through these circumstances. Logan uses she/her pronouns, is a UNC alum, and currently works as the program coordinator of suicide education and support services at North Range here in Greeley. Without further ado, let’s get into it!

[intro music fades, end of introduction]

*Elliot: Well, welcome Logan! We’re so excited to have you here. With summer break coming up, we were hoping to highlight more community resources for students who might not have student stuff anymore, so thanks so much for coming.*

Logan Shaw: Yeah, you’re welcome, thank you for having me! It’s an honor to be here and be talking, hopefully, with a lot of UNC students today.

*E: Yeah, totally! So, can you tell me a little bit more about your organizations, like North Range Behavioral Health and Imagine Zero?*

LS: Yeah, absolutely. So Imagine Zero Weld County is a coalition that we run. It’s a collaboration of government agencies, community-based organizations, non-profit organizations, and community members. And we all work to provide outreach, education, and suicide prevention resources. Many of the individuals in the agencies that work to make this coalition happen are individuals that have had personal loss of loved ones to suicide, so there’s a lot of passion behind what they do. Imagine Zero, really the goal of it is to build a wider and stronger safety net of suicide prevention resources within the Northern Colorado community and normalize the conversation around mental health care, suicide, and all of that good stuff.

LS: So I actually work for North Range Behavioral Health, and we are the community mental health center that serves Weld County. So the collaboration between North Range and Imagine Zero really just feels like a natural fit. North Range is the backbone agency of Imagine Zero. We kind of provide the administrative stuff and host and facilitate some of that. My direct position is the program coordinator for Suicide Education & Support Services. So kind of all lumped together in one big mental health group of a lot of different agencies trying to work together towards the same common goal.

*E: Yeah. That’s exciting, that’s really important work. Like, what kind of… I guess, what does that look like? What kind of services do you provide for education and stuff?*

LS: Yeah, absolutely. Um, so my entire position really focuses on education and prevention and support. So within our SES department, we do a lot of community trainings. Those include mental health first aid trainings, QPR trainings, which stands for “question, persuade, refer.” We even go into all of the high schools, or the majority of the high schools in the Weld County area, and do Safe Teen programs. It’s just an opportunity to get into the community, get into schools, and talk about suicide and talk about mental health and talk about these signs and symptoms that we all could notice and potentially make a difference in someone’s life.

*E: Yeah, absolutely. Cool! Well, most people listening to this podcast are going to be UNC students. I was curious about if there’s anything unique you see with college populations, or what you’d want college students to know about suicide prevention.*

LS: Yeah, absolutely. Um, I am actually a UNC alum, so go bears! It’s pretty cool to be having the opportunity to talk to UNC students. Really with college students right now, you know, the typical college experience is pretty stressful anyways. But you add finals going on right now, you add COVID into the mix, you add all the other craziness that’s going on in the world right now and that really can add onto the stressors of everyday life, for sure.

LS: So, I guess the biggest thing we want college students to know about their mental health and suicide and suicide prevention is that you all are not alone in working through your mental health. We really want to push talking about your mental health, make it as simple as talking about your physical health. Make it as important as talking about your physical health, and taking care of your mental wellness as much as you take care of your physical wellness. So um, we really just want to ensure the community that you’re not alone in feeling what you’re feeling and that if you need help coping through what you’re feeling, there’s a whole toolbox, a whole resource book that is out there and available to you to help you work through some of those mental health challenges.

*E: Thank you. So yeah, I think you’re right. I think that’s so important and it is so hard to talk about, especially if people are feeling suicidal. It can be so scary to sort of come forward and speak those feelings out loud.*

LS: Absolutely.

*E: Um, I’ve known some people who, like, will sort of keep those feelings a secret because they don’t know a lot about what happens in treatment and recovery. Can you tell people like, what their rights are when they go to seek help, and what that initial process looks like?*

LS: Yeah, absolutely. You’ll probably hear me a lot throughout our conversation compare our mental health to our physical health. Similar to when you go to a doctor’s appointment, your privacy is always protected. You’re protected under the HIPAA law, so your information cannot be shared. Mental health is the same thing, it falls under that HIPAA law the same way those medical records are protected. So it always is completely confidential, dependent on the situation of course and where someone does talk about these feelings or where they go to seek help. Every situation can be a little bit different, but at the end of the day, mental health providers are really just trying to help and keep those individuals that are feeling suicidal in the safest possible situation that they can be.

LS: So it totally just depends on a case-by-case scenario, but I think it’s really important to stress that privacy is always protected. It won’t be something that’s blasted out to a lot of people, or even blasted out to family or friends because that falls under a HIPAA law, so.

*E: Yeah, definitely. Cool. Um, so on a one-on-one basis, what can people do to support friends who are maybe suicidal? And on the flip side, when is it necessary to seek outside help instead of just trying to support one to one?*

LS: Yeah, that’s a great question. Um, oftentimes people don’t understand that we are so capable of supporting our loved ones in a mental health journey and challenges that arise. So the biggest thing that we encourage is really to educate yourself on what some of these signs and symptoms are of mental health distress. And we encourage that by the trainings I kind of mentioned with you earlier, the mental health first aid and QPR and the Safe Teens. It really just sets us up on a platform of what’s the right terminology to use, what are some of these signs and symptoms we’re looking out for, and gives us a good base for that.

LS: On the support piece, it really comes down to listening nonjudgmentally and sharing that sense of hope. We really don’t want to shame people, we don’t want to “should” on people. People do not need someone to fix their problems, they need a safe and non-judgmental space to express how they’re feeling. So I think that’s really important to remember, is you really just have to show your support and love to someone and be that listening ear.

LS: And then to kind of wrap that all around, you really want to know about the resources and professional help that’s available within your communities, within your schools, so that you can know where to go and where to refer people to if they need further help than you. I think sometimes we think that we can fix everyone and we hope that our loved ones stay in a little bubble of wellness and we would do anything we can to protect them, but sometimes we’re not qualified for that. And so it’s nice to have kind of a pocketbook of references that we’re able to turn to when it’s needed.

*E: Absolutely, yeah. Connecting people to outside resources is always so, so helpful. Just to know that you don’t have to be the person to fix everything. [laughs] I’m curious, could you tell us a little bit more about what those signs and symptoms are that people should know and look out for?*

LS: Yeah, absolutely. Um, in a lot of our trainings that we do, we really just talk about being aware. I think, sometimes we think a lot of teenagers being moody and angry and having kind of irregular patterns of things. But if that’s their normal behavior, then that’s their normal behavior. But if we’re aware of, you know, “So and so seems to be going through this and they’ve been going through it for a little while now, and that just is not how they normally act, it seems like something’s going on,” I think really trusting your gut and being aware of what it’s telling you goes a really long way. In turn to that, irregular sleeping patterns and eating patterns, mood shifts, sense of hopelessness are some really big signs and symptoms that you can pick up on. But again, it’s just noticing those and not pushing them past and ignoring them. It’s really tuning up on them and making sure that we do something about them.

*E: Right, yeah. So, in this profession, talking about this all the time, how do you practice self care? And what makes you feel hopeful in the work that you do?*

LS: Yeah, absolutely. Self care is a big deal, especially in helping professions. If we are not taking care of ourselves, then we cannot take care of others. I really, I’m a Colorado local, born and raised here, and feel very fortunate that we can walk outside – except for right now, when it’s pouring rain – but we can walk outside and enjoy so much sunshine and mountains in this playground that we get to live in. I just feel really fortunate that that’s a resource for us. So I try to enjoy my time outside, I’m lucky enough to have somewhat of a little farm that I live on, so that brings me a lot of joy. And just stepping out of this role and being able to enjoy those little things, I pride myself on my self care routine.

LS: As far as what makes me feel hopeful, I really feel hopeful for this generation that’s coming up. Um, there’s so much resiliency being shown in our nation right now of people beyond all odds rising to the top of occasions and really this generation is so open about talking through things, talking through their feelings, talking through what they believe in. And that wasn’t the case 20 years ago. People did not enjoy talking about their mental health, they didn’t enjoy talking about their opinions, the fear of being shut down or the stigma around it. So it makes me feel so hopeful to be able to see the amount of people that are working to break down that stigma of mental health. I really believe it’s shining more now than ever, so.

E: Definitely. That’s definitely something that we’ve noticed on our campus too, is like, it’s gotten a lot easier to talk about mental health, kind of the harder it’s gotten around us I guess.

LS: Yeah!

E: Even over COVID and stuff.

LS: Absolutely.

E: Well, my last big question for you is that, if anyone listening to this either needs help or wants to get more involved in this like, helping type of work, what resources would you recommend to them?

LS: Yeah, absolutely. So the company that I am with, North Range Behavioral Health, they provide compassionate comprehensive care for individuals who are facing a mental health or addiction challenge. So if that is the case, check out northrange.org or we also have crisis support services right here in downtown Greeley. So this is for if someone you know is experiencing a behavioral health emergency, these crisis services are available 24/7, 365 days a year. We are located in downtown Greeley, so oftentimes walking distance from campus. The address there is 928 12th St or you’re welcome to call the hotline as well, which is 844-493-8255. And again, that line is 24/7, 365 days a year.

LS: If individuals check out the North Range website as well, it has a whole list of resources available, um, dependent on situations of course. My department is the Suicide Education & Support Services, and this is for if someone here is looking to learn more about how to help with suicide prevention or if anyone has lost someone to suicide, we do a lot of support groups and post mention work as well. Our information is also listed on the North Range website, or you can call me directly at 970-313-1089. Sorry, I’m plugging lots of resources here for you guys!

E: No, it’s great!

LS: [laughs] And then as far as more in depth prevention work with Imagine Zero, we do have Facebook and Instagram, so we have socials that you guys all can check out. Our Facebook is Imagine Zero of Weld County and then our Instagram is @imaginezero\_weldcounty. And again that gives lots of resources on those social media outlets as well, to kind of get in contact and get involved.

E: Perfect. Awesome! That’s great. Well, thank you so much for sharing all of that.

LS: Yeah, you’re so welcome. I would just really encourage individuals, whether you yourself are going through a mental health crisis or you know of someone that might be struggling and going through some mental health challenges, to really just reach out and find someone to talk to. So often, as we said, we’re trying to break down the stigma of holding that all in. But to really just remember that you’re not alone, it’s okay to not be okay, and 9 times out of 10 there’s some other individuals out there that are experiencing those same feelings you are, so. Um, really just get your foot in the door and start talking about the way you’re feeling. It’s super important and I would say that’s really my biggest takeaway for anyone that’s out there listening today.

*E: Yeah, absolutely. It gets easier the more you do it.*

LS: Yeah, mm-hmm.

*E: Alright, well that is all for today I guess. Thank you!*

LS: Thank you, Elliot, for having us on here!

[outro music begins]

E: Thank you all so much for listening, and thanks again to Logan Shaw for making the time to talk with me. We have two more episodes coming out tomorrow, so stay tuned to hear about menstrual equity and mindful self-compassion. Stay up to date with everything happening at CPE by following us on our Instagram, @unco\_cpe.

This podcast is brought to you by the University of Northern Colorado’s center for Peer Education and was recorded in Greeley, Colorado, by Logan Shaw and Elliot Sutton. Our incredible theme music is by Cole Ramirez. You can listen to more of his work on soundcloud @ Cole Ramirez. Editing and mixing by Elliot Sutton.

You’re not in this alone. You have the support and solidarity of so many people, including all of us here at CPE. Stay cool, stay healthy, and stay safe out there. I love you. Bye.

[outro music fades, end of episode]