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LAURENS DISTRICT 55 HIGH SCHOOL

Ohio transgender teen's suicide sparks controversy

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Over Christmas break, a transgender teen in Ohio committed suicide after coming out; born Josh Alcorn, the teen expressed her feelings about being a girl trapped in a boy's body and stated in the suicide note released a day after her death that she wished to be known as Leelah.

"After 10 years of confusion, I finally understood who I was. I immediately told my mom, and she reacted extremely negatively, telling me that it was a phase, that I would never truly be a girl, that God doesn't make mistakes, that I am wrong," Alcorn stated in her suicide note.

Alcorn's parents seem to have met her with disregard for her feelings. In a CNN.com article, her mother said, "...we don't support that religiously."

Apparently, this attitude contributed to Alcorn's suicide.

After her parents' rejection, Alcorn sank into depression and was forced to see

various Christian psychiatrists to help her deal with and overcome what they termed her "problem." These psychiatrists, though, only told her the same things: that she was going against God's wishes

and that she was only going through a phase that would soon pass. If Alcorn's parents truly believed that her decisions were against God's

wishes, then they should not have judged their daughter based on something they inferred from the Bible. Even the Bible says not to judge others because only

God can do that.

The Bible states, "Do not grumble against one another, brothers, so that you may not be judged; behold, the Judge is standing at the door," (James 5:9).

Alcorn began contemplating suicide after being bullied and rejected by her family and peers. On Sunday, Dec. 28, Alcorn walked four miles from her home to a nearby interstate, was struck by a tractor-trailer and killed. A day later, a pre-set note from Alcorn posted on Tumblr, stating, "I want my death to mean something."

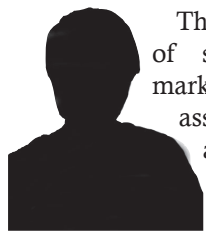
People all around the world are dealing with being transgender alone. Even here in Laurens, there are people dealing with this issue. This seems like something that is happening everywhere else but at home, but there are people struggling with finding and being who they are, even at our school.

Being a teenager, life is tough enough already: keeping up with grades while maintaining a social life, worrying about reputations, dealing with relationships, working part-time jobs and handling problems at home. Imagine not being accepted by your family and society for who you feel you are, in addition to all the problems you already have.

Some people have opened up about being transgender and are, for the most part, met with rejection and criticism. It is wrong to judge people or reject them based on who they are; transgender people are just as human as anyone else and they do not deserve to be treated any differently.



Living with stigmas of mental illness presents challenges



The definition of stigma is "a mark of disgrace associated with a particular circumstance, quality, or person."

When most people hear the words "mental illness," they hear the stigmas put on a person who lives with one. *Crazy. Insane. Freak.* In reality, one in four people is affected by a mental illness directly or indirectly.

I have been diagnosed with social anxiety and depression and am in the process of being diagnosed for my paranoia and hallucinations.

My mental illnesses are not something I am proud of, and I do not often share that I have them. Why would I? So I could be ridiculed and avoided like a leper?

People who do not have a mental disorder generally do not understand how it is difficult to live a *normal* life. Living day to day is a challenge itself.

Social anxiety by itself is not easy. Most people see it as someone's being shy, but being

quiet and introverted is different from having an anxiety attack that is triggered by having to walk through a crowd of people.

It feels as if everyone is looking directly at me, silently judging me. My chest tightens; it feels as if I will never breathe again. I begin to shake and tear up as my stomach twists. In that moment it feels as if the world is collapsing around me and I cannot do anything to save myself.

I have to force myself to walk through the mall when it is crowded. I avoid going out with friends because the thought of embarrassing myself in front of people makes me physically sick. Why having anxiety is looked down upon is a mystery to me.

Depression is more common than most people think. In 2012, 350 million people were diagnosed with depression worldwide. Depression is not, however, being sad. The medical definition says, "a mental disorder characterized by sustained depression of mood, sleep and appetite disturbances, and feelings of worthlessness,

guilt and hopelessness."

Most days, depression means a struggle to get out of bed. I used to contemplate suicide, go days without eating and cope with my depression in unhealthy ways. I felt, and still often feel, as if I have no purpose in life.

Happiness comes and goes day to day. Some days, weeks, even months can be carefree and full of joy. But depression hits like a brick wall, and I am back in a dark place that seems to have no end.

I was already at a higher risk for depression because it runs in my family, but my depression was ultimately triggered by physical and emotional abuse I went through as a child and by bullying in middle school. I was shoved against lockers and pushed down in hallways. I was called things such as "useless," "hideous," "fat" and "freak." Words do hurt as much as physical actions.

Being paranoid 99 percent of the time is my biggest obstacle. I cannot walk down the hall without feeling as if someone or something is following me. Being in a room alone is terrifying.



Even my own bedroom is hard to sleep in because feeling as if someone is watching me constantly and wanting to hurt me is petrifying. Being in a crowd is almost worse because someone could easily hide in a crowd. Going to school, even going to the store, is difficult when I am scared of people and things that are not really there.

I now see a therapist every two weeks and used to take medication for my mental disorders. It took me two years to work up the courage to tell my mother how I was feeling.

Most people are afraid to ask

for the help they need. Stigmas on mental illnesses and bullying people for something they have no control of do not encourage people to recover and learn to cope healthily with their disorders. Many people turn to unhealthy coping habits such as self-harm, smoking and drugs, among other things.

If people are feeling anxious, depressed or unsure of their mental health, they should not have to be afraid to speak up.

Having a mental disorder does not mean someone is "crazy." Living with one is hard, especially without help and support.