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To Whom it May Concern:

I'm hoping you will consider me for the **Clifford W. Beers Award**. My name is Chelise Stroud. I live in Contra Costa County in California. I have lived here in the San Francisco Bay Area for my entire life. I'm a single mother and very close to my grown son (who is now twenty years old). I'm active in my community in many different ways, including doing volunteer work and having played softball on a city league in the past few years.

I think I would be a good candidate for the award because I am very active both personally and professionally as an advocate for ending the stigma around mental illness and for suicide prevention.

On a lived experience level, I manage PTSD and an eating disorder and I am a survivor of a suicide attempt (several years ago). In addition, I am a two time survivor of suicide loss, having lost both my mother (sixteen years ago) and my boyfriend (one year ago) to suicide.

I am also an addict and alcoholic. I have been in recovery for many years. I remain very active in the recovery community and I believe that being honest about these issues contributes to the courage that others have when they need to reach out for help.

Along those lines, I am now credentialled as a drug and alcohol counselor in California. I put my personal experience to work by providing grief counseling at a chemical dependency rehab center in Hayward, California. I also work for another organization (in Oakland, California) that serves at-risk clients dealing with drug addiction. Specifically, I work with recently incarcerated clients who are diagnosed with severe mental illnesses such as schizophrenia.

Finally, I am a proactive and very involved suicide prevention advocate. Each year, over forty thousand people in the United States die by suicide. Worldwide, the number is closer to one million. When my mother died sixteen years ago, I was devastated. But, when my boyfriend also died by suicide last year, I knew that I had to do something. I realized that it was critical that people be given a voice to share their experiences so that others whose lives have been touched by suicide would know that they were not alone. I also understood that speaking up publicly is one of the most effective ways to fight the stigma around mental illness.

Suicide loss is a very complicated form of grief that is made all the more painful because of the stigma. Survivors of suicide loss and survivors of suicide attempts alike both suffer from a pressure to keep their pain secret. Secrecy however, only serves to make the pain and recovery worse. Stigma has a negative impact on every aspect of mental health recovery and suicide prevention. So, in 2017 I started a public blog to share my own story of dealing with mental illness and also of being a survivor of suicide loss.

www.SuicidePreventionNow.com

Within weeks I'd received hundreds of messages of appreciation, and they came from all over the world - most from people I didn't know. The theme of each message was the same. People were thanking me for speaking up and sharing the experience of suicide loss in an honest and straightforward way.

Over and over again, people told me that my blog made them feel hopeful. Those who did not have direct experience with suicide expressed that for the first time, they understood what the struggle around mental illness and suicide looked like. Many said they'd found a newfound compassion for those of us who'd been impacted.

Right away, I expanded the blog from sharing my own story to also including comprehensive suicide prevention and awareness topics. I began to share the stories of others whose lives have been impacted by mental illness, as well.

I've interviewed those who have lost their children, their partners, and their parents. I've interviewed those who've struggled and overcome thoughts of suicide. I shared the stories of those who'd survived suicide attempts and were now glad they'd lived. I also shared the stories of renowned psychologists working in the field of suicide prevention.

I spoke to Keith O'Neil, a former NFL player and Super Bowl champion who attempted suicide before being diagnosed with bipolar. I featured the story of Linda Diaz who successfully created Lauryn's Law, which makes a direct impact on suicide prevention in the state of Maryland. I've interviewed attempt survivors all over the country and in Europe as well as the Philippines.

Regardless of whether I'm telling my story or that of others, **the focus of the posts are always of hope and healing.**

Through word of mouth alone in the first six months since the blog went public, it's readership has exceeded **30,000 people from all over the world.**

In November of 2017, I was appointed to the Contra Costa County Mental Health Services Act Consolidated Planning Advisory Workgroup. In January 2018, part of my story was shared on the British website, stopsuicidepledge.com. Earlier this month, I participated in the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention's advocacy day, telling my story directly to legislators at the California State Capitol in Sacramento.

Everything I do is to fight stigma and support others whose lives have been touched by mental illness and suicide.

Please contact me for any other information you may need. Thank you.

Sincerely,

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