

I am honored to nominate the film *Not Alone* for MHA's 2018 Media Award.

Not Alone, a documentary recently released on Netflix, cable and numerous streaming platforms, was initiated by a teen, Jacqueline Monetta, who lost her best friend to suicide. She felt the disconnect between the suicide prevention messaging and the realities of teen life, so she created a 2 minute video of 3 teens talking about their depression while sitting on their beds. This student-made video was the genesis for a professional feature film that is sparking a much needed conversation while teaching important life-saving information.

Teens being teens and describing mental illness in their own terms was the magic that hooked Producer/Director Kiki Goshay when she saw Jacqueline's short film clip. But she was as intrigued by the creator as she was with the teens Jacqueline captured. Jacqueline's compassion and desire to understand and support is the thread that connects the stories of the dozen teens she motivated to share on camera. It took some time, but Goshay was able to convince Jacqueline that her story, her voice and passion were as vital to this film as the others'. She represents those who care. She visually supports the affirmation that you are Not Alone.

Before any principal photography, the team shot b-roll in Jacqueline's high school. They captured students hanging out, with iphones, tablets and laptops. Distracted by their technology, the students never looked at each other. They passed each other in the hallways without looking up.

Goshay's reaction to their school vibe determined the style of the interviews: "I envisioned placing the teens in a world they don't experience in their technology driven, constantly connected world. I wanted to put them in a heavenly space, void of distraction so they could see each other." The audience experiences this intimacy as well. The film crew shot two teens sitting on white benches and captured their beauty, their body language and their vulnerability.

Sitting on this ethereal white set, Jacqueline has intimate one-to-one conversations with her peers. She asks them all of the things one wants to ask someone who has died by suicide or is experiencing a mental health challenge. Their uncensored accounts are plain spoken and relatable -- especially to adolescents and teens. Jacqueline, completely engrossed and present, exemplifies active listening.

The film does not dramatize or go into details on the teens' suicide attempts. Instead, it focuses on the feelings that were behind them. It emphasizes the mental health challenges that teens face and discusses multiple ways of addressing them – not only traditional therapy and medication, but also alternatives like mindfulness meditation and connection with nature. The teens embolden the audience to speak up and get help. There is not a single adult voice in the film. The information comes directly from the experts — teens who have lived it.

As a consultant on the film, I worked with Ms. Goshay to ensure that the film's messaging is consistent with the Recovery Model of mental health, supportive of teen suicide attempt survivors, and respectful of the experiences of everyone involved. I viewed multiple iterations of the film throughout the editing process and am impressed with its recovery-focused language and commitment to the value of personal connection and sharing lived experience as a means of suicide intervention.

Throughout our conversations while the film was in post-production, Ms. Goshay was always responsive to suggestions on how to keep it focused on recovery. Her goal from the beginning was to create a film that would not only illuminate the experiences of the teens involved, but be a resource and support for teen viewers who are dealing with suicidality. Her commitment to that vision was evident throughout our collaboration and resulted in a completed film that resonates deeply with viewers.

During the consultation process, I was able to screen various edits of *Not Alone* for a variety of peer audiences across the age spectrum. The response was overwhelmingly positive. TAY viewers found that the film accurately represents their cohort, while older viewers wished something like this had been available when they were struggling as teens. The screenings prompted deep and emotionally-affecting conversations about surviving suicide attempts and supporting loved ones who are struggling with suicidal thoughts and feelings. The audiences expressed that they found their experience of viewing the film to be uplifting and shared that it helped renew their commitment to providing peer support in their personal circles and communities.

Not Alone is endorsed by the **American Association of Suicidology** for its safe and accurate messaging. AAS is encouraging parents to watch it with their adolescents and teens and supports screening "Not Alone" in schools. It has also been endorsed by Thomas Niederkrotenthaler, PhD. M.M.Sc. Co-Chair of Council of National Representatives to the International Association for Suicide Prevention (IASP) and of the Wiener Werkstatte for Suicide Research <http://www.suizidforschung.at/netflix-series-not-alone-documentary-to-prevent-youth-suicide/> The Wiener Werkstatte for Suicide Research recommends the film to its members and general audience.

Not Alone has also sparked an educational screening and curriculum for use in K-12 schools, which is available through educational distributor RoCo Films (http://www.rocoeducational.com/not_alone) . The *Not Alone* school program is available for schools in the US and Canada.

The trailer and more information on *Not Alone* can be found on the film's website, <http://not-alone.live/> .

Not Alone helps bring together those who feel isolated, opens up the eyes of those who are unaware of the severity of teen depression, and gives a sense of hope to those who feel discouraged. It goes beyond other films about teen suicide, detecting the signs and discussing prevention techniques. It is a movement started by teens to spark the conversation about the realities of mental health. It exemplifies the role media can play

in eliminating stigma and changing the way we address mental health. I encourage MHA to consider it for the 2018 Media Award.

Sincerely,

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