

After his friend's suicide, this Texas teen knew exactly what his Eagle Scout project should be

Written by Leslie Barker, Staff writer
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Dealing with death when you're 16 years old usually means a beloved pet has died, or perhaps a grandparent. That kind of loss is plenty difficult, no matter how many times you remind yourself it follows the cycle inherent with life.

But when you lose a down-the-street close friend to suicide one day in late October, and a fellow Boy Scout less than a year later—well, that's shake-your-head heartbreaking.

When that happened to cross-country runner Bradley Davis, who had already begun planning a 5K race for his Eagle Scout project, he took his proposal a step further. He decided to focus the Oct. 29 event on depression and suicide awareness, naming it [Running Over Depression](#) and, after researching several organizations, choosing the [American Foundation for Suicide Prevention](#) as beneficiary.

"The first friend back in October, that really hit me hard," says Bradley who, out of respect for the boy's family, would prefer not to identify the teen. "I had pets die and my grandfather when I was 3 or 4, but this was the first time I felt so bad. Before, I was like, 'Oh nothing that terrible can happen.' But it happened, and I hoped I'd be more aware. That was worse than anything I could imagine would happen at this point"

He had no idea the friend he'd known since seventh grade was depressed.

"He hid it well," says Bradley, who lives in Lucas and is a junior at Lovejoy High School. "We didn't talk about serious stuff, just played basketball or whatever. He was a little introverted, but he always seemed happy. He made everyone laugh."

The death, says Bradley's dad Jon, "hit me hard, too. The son was in [Bradley's] grade; he had been at our house. Bradley really took it hard for a few days or a week or whatever. He definitely did some introspection to make sure *he* wasn't depressed. It's kind of scary; no one even noticed the boy seeming depressed. They all hide it; no one

who is depressed wants to come out and say that."

To make sure the boy's family was comfortable with the run Bradley had planned, both families got together to talk about it. Doing so, Bradley says, plus moving forward with plans, has helped him deal with his own grief.

"Knowing I'm doing something that helps is helping me get past being sad a lot quicker than I might have before," he says. "We did the math and if we can get 400 people to sign up, which we think we can, the entry fee will cover the cost and also donate multi-thousands of dollars. That's pretty cool."

The money factor is one reason the race is different from other Eagle Scout projects, says Jeff Joiner, Bradley's Scoutmaster. Traditional projects tend to be along the lines of refurbishing a playground, or perhaps building picnic tables and landscaping a park. In those cases, any money the Scout raises goes toward buying plants or materials.

Raising money for a cause—suicide and depression awareness, in this case—is not a typical Eagle Scout project. It led to what Joiner calls "a little extra work to get the necessary final approvals."

"But by the end of the day," he says, "Bradley's persistence paid off. He was able to work with the key stakeholders, including Boy Scouts of America and the Plano Rotary Club, which charters Troop 1776, to present his project objectives and funding plan, and ultimately, get final approval for his project."

Another difference is just the sheer volume of work, Joiner adds. "This will be more involved in the sense of time, coordination, sponsors for drinks and shirts." Plus, there's applying for permits, mapping out the course, setting up a website.

Bradley has been working on this race, keeping his friend in his heart, since late last year. Then, a couple of weeks ago, the boy in his troop committed suicide. "I don't know what's really going on," Bradley says. "I didn't know him quite as well, but he seemed really cool. I went on a campout with him, but I definitely did not see it coming."

Bradley says that for a long time, "It was just my dad and mom and me," planning the race. "I contacted people who do the Country Run [a Lovejoy Leopards Inc. fundraiser] and we're using the same route they used. I talked to Ted Moore, superintendent of the Lovejoy school district, and he sent me what they filled out for their permits."



Bradley Davis is working on a 5K event to help foster awareness about depression and suicide.
Robert Hart/Special Contributor

The toughest part of the race has been getting sponsors, Bradley says. "I thought it'd be a little easier: You go into a place in a Boy Scout uniform and ask for help raising money for suicide prevention. But so many are strict on budget. We have no tax ID. A lot of big companies won't do it unless you're a certified charity organization, which we're not. But we're getting around that. A lot of local businesses are helping."

That's helping to "engage a lot of people outside of Scouting," Joiner says, which also makes Bradley's project stand out. "This will certainly reach a broader audience and generate awareness of the cause he's supporting. He asked for my opinion and I told him it was a worthwhile effort; if he was passionate about it, he'd make it happen, and

he's done that."

This comes as no surprise to Joiner. He has long witnessed Bradley's dedication and passion for Scouting, most recently on a 10-day canoe trip to Canada.

"You're out in the woods; the only way you get out [if something goes wrong] is a helicopter," says Joiner, whose four sons are Eagle Scouts. "Bradley was picking up rocks and somehow had his fingernail ripped off. Blood was pouring out of his hand. I had to do first aid. We talked about it, and he was committed to staying out there and finishing the trek. He said he was staying out there no matter what. That shows his commitment and persistence and his will. That was one challenge he overcame, as was getting his project approved and pushed through."



Bradley Davis and Scoutmaster Jeff Joiner carry grilling equipment to a Boy Scout picnic at Breckinridge Park recently.

Bradley, 16, is working on his Eagle Scout project.

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In an Eagle project, Bradley's dad says, "you're leaning to delegate, direct people, manage things. We're pretty proud he's taken on this big of a deal."

For Bradley's part, putting on the race is worth every permit that needs finding and filing; every turn-down from a potential sponsor; every minute spent speaking to

cross-country teammates or their parents; every email sent and every phone call made.

"Honestly, I don't think I'd ever put that much effort into something like I have putting on this run," Bradley says. "I like to think I've learned and can notice when someone might be depressed. I don't know yet, but I'm hoping I'll be able to see it more."