

# THE COMPASSION CHRONICKLES

THE TURN-A-FROWN AROUND (TAF) FOUNDATION, INC.

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## *In This Issue:*

*May is Mental  
Health Month*

*An App to  
End Loneliness*

*Marketing  
Update*

*The Modern Epidemic*

*The Smile  
Station Express*



**Joe Meany & Caitlyn Yerves**

## *May is Mental Health Month*

By Caitlyn Yerves  
Director of Marketing

There is a major meeting of the minds in the making as the Turn-a-Frown-Around Foundation works to team up with the Paramus Stigma-Free Zone to End Loneliness – one Forever Friendship at a time.

Throughout May, Bergen County will be lighting up in lime-green to support the countywide Stigma-Free Initiative. The initiative was born in an effort to create more mental health awareness and eliminate stigma surrounding mental illness.

These efforts have not gone unnoticed, and have been picking up a lot of momentum over the past year, especially in recent months. Nearly 20 towns in Bergen County have made the pledge to be stigma-free. The campaign has been brought to the

attention of Governor Christie, and consistent action is being taken to make all of New Jersey a Stigma-Free Zone.

Earlier this year, TAF) was invited to the Paramus Stigma-Free task force meeting to briefly discuss some of the volunteer opportunities that are available. The presentation was well received, and the seed was planted to involve the Stigma-Free community with the TAF) Mental Health Initiative efforts at Care Plus, NJ.

A full circle has been drawn: the very program that helped our founder dream up TAF) will also be running a pilot program utilizing the basics of Smile Stations and Coffeehouses. The program, called “Peer Mentorship and Advocacy,” will help our volunteers develop employable skills.

**(Continued on page 3)**

## An App to End Loneliness

By Allen Teplitsky

Director of Organization Development

I remember when Drew would speak about how he imagined TAFAs as a benevolent [Match.com](#) years ago. He mentioned how it could be so simple, that lonely people are found, matched up with volunteers who apply, and that is it. This beautifully simple vision from a man with a big heart and yellow shoes is just not as easy to make real.

TAFAs look for volunteers to visit facilities that house the lonely and does its best to match up someone with those with the most need. Still, I imagine Drew had a bigger vision, one that would spread TAFAs out of New Jersey and even the United States. As, from his travels to Russia and the Netherlands, he learned of loneliness being prevalent elsewhere. From working with volunteers outside the US, it has been made clear that in China there are lonely individuals too. It is not just in NJ. So how far can TAFAs go and can it end loneliness everywhere?

I think TAFAs can dig into this idea and explore different ways this is possible. My thought was that an app could be created similar to [Match.com](#), where lonely people and volunteers could make profiles, be matched up, and end loneliness. It would have the potential to go farther and faster than word of mouth as it would be available across different platforms.

The idea remains simple, but the app could entail much more by having communities, such as Smile Stations. Group visits to homes could be arranged through group chats. Photos shared and love expressed. Apps like WeChat, Skype, Oovoo, and Google Hangout bring people together through live video feeds and the possibility of including this feature in our app would make it possible to visit without leaving one's home. However, the app's abilities should not downplay the aspect of seeing a friendly face.

Within the application, an established map could be used to locate nearby facilities. This would mimic the map created by Google's Ingress, an app that took a game to real locations allowing users to meet up and play in real life. The TAFAs app could enable anyone to find a mission to help another live person who is suffering in his or her neighborhood. In addition to these features, the app could make visiting more fun as volunteers could earn badges for their achievements, ultimately bolstering the chance of not missing friends. Being rewarded, even if it is a simple thumbs up, for visiting a month in a row can let people know they are doing the right thing.

TAFAs can benefit and grow from this as well, as this app can be designed so that volunteers would not have to work with someone from TAFAs to start visiting. A volunteer application can be filled out online and then the app would provide the volunteer with local matches. The organization would have hands free to do more and expand to where the need is. As well, the data could be collected for fundraising purposes, which non-profits like TAFAs need to survive. Non-profit organizations with strong data and proof of their achievements in improving society have an easier time finding funding. Additionally, this data could help TAFAs be more transparent to those who wish to really see what and where TAFAs makes a difference.

Since I have these ideas but am not an expert in creating apps, I am seeking someone to advise and consult with me to find out how the app can become real. I think it is possible, but I alone can't make it happen. If you know someone who wants to make the world a better place through technology, they can volunteer with me to do so.

Anyone interested in helping with this project, please email me directly at [ateplitsky.tafa@gmail.com](mailto:ateplitsky.tafa@gmail.com). I am looking for someone with experience creating apps or working with computer language or who could help with this project in other ways. ●

## Marketing Update

By Caitlyn Yerves  
Director of Marketing

Perhaps the greatest friction that the Movement to End Loneliness has faced has been the lack of a strong online presence. For years our volunteers gave their all in attempts to bring this local organization to a national level, but the sheer manpower to follow up was missing. Over the past year, the TAFE management team has worked tirelessly to conquer these challenges.

First of all, we would like to recognize our Director of Operations, Afshan Ladha, for her commitment to creating a new and more effective website. HAWK Media designed our new site, and we are very pleased with the results! This is the most important tool we can have, and it will connect our volunteers to all of the resources that they need to end loneliness – one Forever Friendship at a time.

The next major step is the development of an Electronic Press Kit (EPK), which will be used as our virtual follow-up secretary! When a person or organization expresses interest in getting involved with TAFE, they will be sent the EPK filled with all of the details they need to know.

What this means is that someone in California may be interested in starting a Smile Station, but we do not have anybody out there to teach him or her how. The EPK will include a checklist that ensures our new volunteers fill out all of the necessary paperwork to track TAFE's expansion.

The other two pieces of the EPK are what we are very excited about: two videos produced by award-winning filmmaker Sheryll Franko of Falling Awake Productions. The first video has been completed and is called "How to Start a Smile Station." Volunteers can learn everything they need to know to get started in five simple steps, while visualizing the powerful effect TAFE can have.

The final piece of the EPK is the highly anticipated

"Promotional Video" which will highlight the mission of TAFE through the perspectives of TAFE volunteers, facility staff, and residents. This video will be less than three minutes, and will be used as a commercial in which we are selling compassion – for free!

Stay tuned for more information! The EPK is expected to be completed by the end of June, just in time for the next newsletter. ●



*Image by Google Images*

## May is Mental Health Month

The goal is to create a nonjudgmental and compassionate experience by mixing classic "Drew rhetoric," such as the Smile Catcher and Good Detector, with new tools such as Laughing Yoga and Trauma Informed Care.

We are envisioning a return to the roots of TAFE by empowering individuals who have mental health challenges. Through these efforts, it is projected that our volunteers with mental illness will not only be able to have a Forever Friend from the Stigma-Free community, but they will also be able to be a Forever Friend for others who are struggling with loneliness.

The program will be launched with a Compassion Coffeehouse at Care Plus on May 15<sup>th</sup>, as part of honoring Mental Health month. Stay tuned for developments, and contact Caitlyn with any questions: [CaitlynEve.TAFE@gmail.com](mailto:CaitlynEve.TAFE@gmail.com). ●

## The Modern Epidemic

By Mehnaz Ladha

Loneliness is sweeping the nation as the modern lifestyle makes us more isolated from friends and family. According to a recent study published in the journal, *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, loneliness increase mortality risk by 26%.

Media outlets throughout the world especially in the UK reported on the new findings. But why is this study from Brigham Young University receiving so much news coverage? It's because the findings of this study suggest that loneliness is on its way to becoming the next public health issue. In an interview with *The Daily Mail*, Associate Professor Holt-Lunstad commented saying that "the effect is comparable to obesity, something that public health takes very seriously...we need to start taking our social relationships more seriously."

Unlike our ancestors, we are living a life of isolation, relying on social technology to unite us with our extended friends and family. The lack of face-to-face interaction results in superficial and less rewarding relationships. As social creatures, we have the natural instinct to stay connected with each other. Although social networks like Facebook help us maintain contact with friends and family who live far away, they do not provide us with the physical connection that we crave.

It is commonly known that loneliness affects elderly people because of decreased mobility and loss of friends and family, yet society forgets that this epidemic affects people of all ages. Being surrounded by people does not imply that we are not lonely; it is not about the quantity but quality of the relationships we have.

Researchers can develop methods to overcome loneliness, but the truth is that people need to be willing to end this epidemic. The mission of the Turn-A-Frown-Around Foundation is to end loneliness by connecting Forever Friends to institutions of loneliness. As an organization, TAFE

is determined to put an end to this problem before it becomes a public health epidemic. There still is time to reverse the results of the study and it is possible to decrease the rates of loneliness. ●

### Get Involved!

Contact us at [tafafoundation@gmail.com](mailto:tafafoundation@gmail.com)  
or call (862)682-9830.

Visit our website: [turnafrownaround.org](http://turnafrownaround.org)

Find us on Facebook: [TAFAFoundation](https://www.facebook.com/TAFAFoundation)

Follow us on Twitter: [TAFAFoundation](https://twitter.com/TAFAFoundation)

### The Smile Station Express

The Smile Station Express  
travels from town to town,  
setting up Smile Stations  
to turn your frown around.

Who will love the loveless?  
Who will be a friend?

Who will seek and find the lost?  
Who will bring loneliness to an end?

Will it be the worship house?  
Love is what they teach.  
Or the local bar and grill?  
With beers within your reach.

Elk clubs, moose, and lions,  
any animal will do.

Kids from grammar school to college,  
it could even be your friends and you.

So climb on the Smile Station Express  
as we gather each Forever Friend.  
Start a Smile Station right now,  
is the message that we send.

Just think about the lonely  
and how they will come alive.  
Just think about the forgotten  
whose soul you will revive.

So will you become a Forever Friend?  
Don't make us wait or guess.  
Please bring your unconditional love  
and join the Smile Station Express.