

Lending Hope

SAVING LIVES AND SERVING THE
COMMUNITY AS AN EXTENDED FAMILY IN
TIMES OF TRAUMA AND CRISIS

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MENTAL HEALTH PROFESSIONAL AMANDA BRADLEY WAS WORKING IN CORPORATE ACCOUNTING WHEN TRAGEDY CHANGED HER FAMILY FOREVER. Bradley's cousin was killed in a car accident, leaving behind a nine-month-old daughter. Two months later, to the day, the father of Bradley's deceased cousin died from a massive heart attack. His wife then became the sole caretaker of a young granddaughter while grieving the unexpected, devastating losses of her own child and husband.

"I experienced first-hand the impact tragedy can have on a family," recounts Bradley. "This led me to the realization of how fragile life is, and wondering with the time I have been given, 'Am I doing something to make the world a better place?'"

In addition to overseeing the COPES clinicians embedded in the 911 Center and the Community Response Team (CRT), Bradley facilitates suicide prevention training and strategies. The CRT and 911 Center initiatives, she explains, help those suffering from a mental illness who seek law enforcement response by calling 911. "Having an individual who is trained in mental health connect with these individuals allows for navigation of a complex mental health system, diverts individuals from jail and emergency departments and frees law enforcement to help with crimes," she explains.

The work of healthcare institutions everywhere has been heavily impacted by COVID-19. Care providers like Bradley, who offer help and hope, are undisputed heroes of the crisis. Their hours are long. Their work is unpredictable and often immersed in tragedy. Suicide prevention and caring for those affected by suicide is focal to Bradley's work. She says, "The field of mental health has never been more needed than it is now. We will be helping

people through the struggles of the past year for many years to come. The need for community and connection has never been greater."

From the beginning, COVID presented challenges. Bradley made a rapid assessment of the new risks and took steps to address the safety of all staff members and those who needed assistance, along with her own safety and that of her family. Anxiety about the unknown, the tragedy of losing loved ones, lost jobs, school closings and isolation have been overwhelming for many. Mental health workers had to quickly adjust to an evolving crisis as it affected their clients while dealing with the same struggles themselves.

"Crisis work doesn't lend itself to free space on a calendar. It is important to remember that the work being done is important and meaningful," she says of her day-to-day challenges. As for the continuing pandemic, she offers, "Hang on. Just stay. This pandemic has been hard on so many, but what we have learned is that we need each other. We are resilient and adaptable. We can take the lessons learned from this time and create a new normal that is better than where we came from."

People often marvel at those in helper professions and ask, "Who cares for the caretaker?" For Bradley, life in the country with her supportive family and pets is restorative. She grew up in rural areas around Oklahoma such as Nuyaka, Mounds and Welty. Her family settled in Sapulpa, where she graduated from high school. She currently lives in Coweta. "I enjoy living in the country where we have amazing sunsets and clear night skies with brightly lit stars that seem to dance when they twinkle," she says. **CONTINUED >**



"My perfect day would start by drinking coffee outside on the porch as the sun comes up, overlooking the pasture where horses are grazing and knowing that anyone in a mental health crisis would know who to call for help, and trust us to lend them our hope until theirs is restored."

Bradley's husband shares her love of quiet and open spaces. He is a retired officer from the Broken Arrow Police Department, who served that community for 34 years. Her 21-year-old son is completing his EMT training to become a firefighter. "We are a family that values being able to help others," says Bradley. "I am also the proud parent to three energetic dogs," she adds. Her Labrador Retriever, Sadie, a Pit bull named Roxie, and Thor, a Cane Corso, are loving companions.

"There is no greater joy than coming home from a day at work and being greeted by my family and our dogs. We gather in the kitchen to talk about our days before going outside to let the puppies run off some energy."

Bradley describes herself as a cautious optimist who chooses to give more attention to the good things than to obstacles that draw down one's strength or happiness. She points out that while we cannot control everything around us, we can choose how we view it and how we respond.

"I enjoy truly listening to people share their story, exploring perspectives and working with them to find hope in building the life they want to live."

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