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***New York Becomes a National Leader in Workplace Well-Being -
Organizations are First to Complete Year-long
Certification Proving Culture Change on Mental Health***

New York, NY – Despite New York state having the second lowest suicide rate nationwide, suicide is still the second leading cause of death for residents aged 25-34, and almost seven times as many people died by suicide than in alcohol related car accidents (in 2019, the year for which the most recent data is available). “Employers are recognizing the vital role they can play in helping to save and improve the lives of their employees. With about 80% of people who die by suicide being of working age, 18 to 65, nationwide, the workplace is the most cross-cutting system for suicide prevention,” said Dr. Sally Spencer-Thomas, President and Founder of United Suicide Survivors International (US).

The state of New York partnered with US and other organizations to proactively address issues including mental health, suicide, overdose and addiction by completing a year-long pilot program known as H.O.P.E. certification and becoming the first state in the country to adopt it. The third-party verified certification for employers stands for “Helping Our People Elevate tough times.” The Denver-based nonprofit, US, developed it with support from the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention, headquartered in lower Manhattan.

“We are so proud to be part of this work. We were excited when looking at the evaluation of our pilot but not only the hard data - the change that has happened is visible within these agencies from all the work the teams have done,” said Jenna Heise, director of implementation for the Office of Mental Health’s Suicide Prevention Center of New York. Three teams from the construction industry, which has one of the highest rates of suicide of any industry, earned certifications: CNY Group, the International Union of Operating Engineers Local 825 and New York State Laborers Health and Safety Fund.

“Participation in this program has a wide impact, not only on suicide prevention strategies. It helps organization view things through a mental health lens which

positively influences a lot of other people-related practices including diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI), employee recruiting, retention, engagement, and community outreach,” said Katie Urtnowski, Vice President of People & Culture for the [construction management firm CNY Group](#).

“The importance of employee wellness and a culture of care is simple. In this line of work, you need to be firing on all cylinders. Construction accidents happen in less than a second and to be sure your workforce - from the top down - are all in a good state of mind and looking out for each other makes everyone involved safer overall,” said Chris Lalevee. A Business Agent for the [International Union Of Operating Engineers, Local 825 heavy equipment operators of lower New York State and New Jersey](#), Lalevee lead the charge in his union for HOPE certification.

Colorado is the second state to undergo H.O.P.E. certification. Efforts kickoff Tuesday with a workplace wellbeing summit in Golden where more than 100 employees from 17 organizations will get an in-depth look at implementation. HOPE certification is based on a set of [National Guidelines for Workplace Suicide Prevention](#), for which Spencer-Thomas was the lead author. In late '22, [the U.S. Surgeon General brought national attention to the foundational role that workplaces should play in promoting the health and well-being of workers](#) amid “quiet quitting,” the Great Resignation, and the pandemic changing the nature of work for many and the relationship that some workers have with their jobs.

“Our hope and goal is to make H.O.P.E. certification as well known and widely adopted as LEEDs certification is in the green building industry,” said Spencer-Thomas. “We are excited that New York and Colorado are inspiring employers nationwide through this commitment to an evidence-based, comprehensive approach,” she continued. Spencer-Thomas became a suicide prevention expert following her brother Carson’s death by suicide in 2004. He was a successful Colorado businessman.

For more information visit www.hopercertification.com. [A video is also available.](#)

For 24/7 mental health and crisis support, call or text 988 - the 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline.

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About United Suicide Survivors International, Inc. (501c3)

United Suicide Survivors International (founded 2016) is an independent international membership organization that serves as a home for people who have experienced suicide loss, suicide attempts and suicidal thoughts and feelings, and their friends and families -- collectively known as people with lived experience with suicide – to leverage their expertise for large scale change. We envision a world where lived expertise becomes the fulcrum that leverages all suicide prevention efforts. We put the lived expertise of suicide attempt and loss survivors into action through leadership, collaboration and advocacy. www.UniteSurvivors.org