

This letter contains something dear to my heart, but first a commercial about something else dear to my heart. The Interfaith Community Picnic on will be held on Tuesday, August 24 from 5:30-7:30. Please bring a dish to share (all food will be served by vaccinated folks). It will be held at the pavilion behind Bethany Lutheran Church (by the County Building). In case of rain, we can meet indoors. Also, we ask that you bring your own table service and beverages. And if you have a lawn chair you can bring, please do! Any questions? Contact Bruce Levine (sbl\_63118@msn.com, 716-378-6773).

Dylan Oakley, 23, died on January 1<sup>st</sup>. Many in the community expressed sympathy and sadness. But there was a subcommunity who felt the loss differently. They lost more than a friend. They lost a place to stay when they needed it. They lost a place to be with friends, to shower or do laundry, to eat, to feel safe, to be comforted and cared for.

There's a subcommunity of people in their late teens to mid-20's that are struggling to find their place in the world. Many say, "That's the age, that's what we all do then." But this is different. This group is struggling more than what is considered normal. Many of them are dealing with emotional struggles, mental health challenges, developmental challenges and/or dysfunctional family issues. They don't know where to go or who they can trust to help them without feeling judged and ordered how to live their lives.

Dylan himself was a member of this subcommunity. Unlike so many others, he had a good number of supports and took it upon himself to provide what he could to those who needed it. He did not judge someone for their sexual identity or drug use status or mental health choices. He did not even base his willingness to help on whether he liked the person or not.

Dylan understood people needed more than just their typical basic needs provided for. He saw that they needed a peer that would walk their journey with them, beside them, and to provide a break from the constant stress of it. If a 23-year-old young man who faced mental health and developmental challenges all his life was able to identify these needs in others and offer help with what little he had, how can we, as a community of many with varied resources and abilities, not continue what he started?

We have started a memorial foundation in Dylan's honor, The DOers Project (Dylan Oakley's energy remains strong), to begin the journey to look at doing just that. We are interested in hearing what unmet needs exist for the late teens and young adults within our community. And even more than that, we're looking to hear from those who are willing to support and partner to further this vital cause.

To offer input or support you can email [thedoersproject23@gmail.com](mailto:thedoersproject23@gmail.com), mail The DOers Project at PO Box 924, Olean, NY, 14760, or call Pastor Bruce at 716-372-7844.

This article was a collaboration between Andrea Oakley (Dylan's mother), Rev. Dodi McIntyre and Rev. Bruce Levine.