

# Sam

Sam was 89. His wife was gone and he had no friends left. He still lived in the beautiful home, with objects of art tastefully displayed in each room--but the house was too large now. Sam had experienced three careers and had been successful at all. He was a fascinating man and had many stories still to tell—but there was no one left to tell them to. Sam had decided that 90 was just too old, and his plan was to end his life before his birthday. He was completely isolated except for neighbors who noticed that he was looking disheveled, he was poorly groomed, he seemed thinner, and he didn't go out much anymore. No one visited him.

A thoughtful community member called our Older Adult Program and I went to see Sam. He admitted his plan to kill himself soon but not that day. I called our wonderful community partners, Adult Protective Services, and Meals-On-Wheels. One of our staff visited him every day of the work week. On the weekend, a Senior Peer Counselor went to his home to visit him. We listened to his stories.

In addition, the Meals-On-Wheels volunteers delivered a meal Monday thru Friday and cheerfully greeted him. We were breaking down the isolation. He said he could not drink milk, and being a child of the Great Depression, he did not want to waste the small carton of milk delivered each day by Meals on Wheels program. I conspired with Meals on Wheels and then told Sam that they could not change the delivery. We struck a deal: Sam saved the milk each day and on every third day, I would go to his home to pick up three cartons of milk to bring to a "needy resident" that I knew. We had an agreement: he saved the milk for me, and I met with him every 3<sup>rd</sup> day to assess his suicidality.

Finally, his 90<sup>th</sup> birthday came—it was on a Sunday. A Senior Peer counselor went to his home that morning and brought a birthday cake and a bouquet of balloons. The next day he drove himself to our offices. "I just wanted to see where you work," Sam said, "You have taken good care of me." We knew the crisis was abating. He soon agreed with us that he would be happier in assisted living, and we helped him find a nice place. He is there now, telling his stories. I hope someone is writing them down because Sam is a treasure. In this case, we were so fortunate to have good community partners and Senior Peer Counselors.