

Brevard teen's legacy inspires a dance-a-thon

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LOCAL

A dance for mental health: Moving together for mental health awareness

[Jennifer M. Torres](#)

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- Emily Dailey, a dancer struggling with OCD and anxiety, died by suicide in January at age 18.
- Her family started the non-profit Give Yourself a Reason to raise mental health awareness among young adults.
- The organization's first fundraiser, a Dance-A-Thon, will be held Saturday, August 2nd, in Melbourne, Florida.
- The event aims to honor Emily's life and support mental health education and outreach.

Dancing was Emily Dailey's outlet — her passion, her joy. She trained and competed for years as part of a competitive dance team, pouring her energy into movement and expression.

But behind her graceful presence, Emily quietly battled OCD and anxiety. Her aunt, Shannon Sviben, said it wasn't until the end of Emily's senior year that deeper struggles began to surface. Still, she pushed forward, graduating from Viera High School in June 2024 and heading to Tallahassee State College with plans to study dentistry.

Around that time, Emily began therapy and started medication to help manage her mental health.

"She had a solid circle of friends, stayed social, and outwardly seemed like the kind of young woman who was thriving, beautiful, kind and full of life," Sviben said. "She roomed with one of her best friends and seemed happy and excited about the future."

Even when a hip injury temporarily pulled her away from dancing, she fought to recover and return to what she loved. During winter break, Emily returned home in good spirits and the family had a joyful holiday with her — talking about her next semester and long-term plans. She told her family she was thinking of shifting her path from dentistry to pediatric orthopedics — perhaps inspired by her own experience with injury.

She also mentioned wanting to get a tattoo with the words “Give Yourself a Reason,” a lyric from Noah Kahan’s song “Call Your Mom.”

“The song speaks to the struggle for mental wellness,” Sviben said. “We believe Emily saw those words as a personal pledge to hold on. Tragically, that wasn’t enough ... none of us imagined it would be the last time we saw her.”

In January, just days after returning to her college apartment, 18-year-old Emily took her own life. Her family later learned she had stopped taking her medication.

“Her loss devastated us,” Sviben said. “But in our grief, we knew we had to turn this tragedy into something meaningful. That’s how Give Yourself a Reason was born. If we can help even one person in the way we weren’t able to help Emily, then her story becomes a force for hope.”

Showing up, standing together for those who struggle

Give Yourself a Reason is a volunteer-led nonprofit founded to raise mental health awareness among teens and young adults, with a focus on Brevard County. Its mission is to support mental health education in schools and communities by funding aligned programs until it can launch direct services of its own.

The organization’s flagship fundraiser is the annual Dance-A-Thon, with plans for more community events in the future. With all staff serving on a volunteer basis and minimal overhead, nearly every dollar raised goes directly toward outreach and education.

In time, the nonprofit hopes to expand its reach across Florida and provide direct support to families affected by mental health challenges. The goal: to reduce stigma, increase access to care, and empower young people to prioritize their mental well-being.

This Saturday’s Dance-A-Thon is the first step — timed to honor what would have been Emily’s August birthday — and a way for loved ones and supporters to come together, celebrate her life, and spotlight a cause that affects so many.

Suggested donations are \$20 to attend and \$40 for entry into the dance-a-thon and a Give Yourself a Reason T-shirt. Beverages will be provided, and food and drinks will also be available for purchase.

You don’t have to be a dancer to make a difference. For Emily’s family, the Dance-A-Thon is about more than movement — it’s about showing up, standing together, and sending a message of support to anyone who may be silently struggling.

If You Go:

- What: Give Yourself a Reason Dance-A-Thon

- When: Saturday, Aug. 2, from noon to 4 p.m.
- Where: Pineapples EGAD, 1434 Pineapple Ave., Melbourne

For more information or to donate, visit the [Give Yourself a Reason fundraising site](#).

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