

Deceased UWI student called suicide hotline

...Friend pleads at funeral: Make help readily available

Carolyn Kissoon
carolyn.kissoon@trinidadexpress.com

BEFORE attempting suicide last week Friday, 24-year-old Matthew Levi Caesar called the suicide hotline desperate for help. No one answered, his family said.

Caesar went ahead and drank a poison. He was found lying on a football field at The University of the West Indies, St Augustine. He died at the Eric Williams Medical Sciences Complex on Monday.

Speaking yesterday at his funeral service at Guides Funeral Home, San Fernando, family friend Ramkishore Maharaj pleaded for the authorities to ensure that a 24-hour suicide hotline is made available to those in need.

"The hotline only operates from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. and persons trying to access this service must pay for it. If we want to prevent tragedies like this

from happening again, we should strive to ensure that this vital service can be made more readily accessible to those in desperate need of it. One of the greatest things you can give someone who is struggling, is understanding and a listening ear. If we want to change the world, let's start with making it easier for people to get help when they need it," he said.

The *Express* telephoned the suicide hotline yesterday shortly before 4 p.m. and again at around 4.20 p.m. No one answered.

Broken system

Maharaj said he received a call from Caesar the night he drank the poison during which Caesar thanked him for everything he had done for him. Caesar's cellphone was then switched off.

Caesar had sent a worrying voice note to his friends who immediately

began searching for him. Maharaj said they checked the football fields first, as it was his first passion.

The former Naparima College, San Fernando, pupil faced many hardships, Maharaj said, but continued to be a shining example for anyone facing adversity.

"Matthew always had a plan. He loved board games because he always had a strategy and plan to win. People would say that the actual way to play the game was that you sit down for an hour and then Caesar wins. Someone once said that if you meet Matthew, you would always want to meet him again, but if you meet him on the football field, you never want to see him again. Football was one of Matthew's greatest passions. He was an integral member of a football team started by his friends as well as the engineering football team," he said.

Caesar worked at the Cocoyea Su-



DIED MONDAY: Matthew Levi Caesar

permarket in San Fernando for some time before enrolling in the Faculty of Engineering at The University of the West Indies, St Augustine.

"While pursuing this vision of changing the world, he became plagued by thoughts of negativity, as he struggled to find solutions to our broken society. He started feeling like things would never change and that he was alone in his vision. He no longer felt like being a part of this broken system. He was strong but he was tired. He was once told that he can't change the world, and his response was that he would change the world one life at a time which is why today we want to encourage and continue this mentality," Maharaj said.

LifeLine sorry

A representative of LifeLine has apologised to Caesar's family.

"Saying we are sorry can't really express how we feel that he didn't get through," the representative said as she lamented that the organisation lacked resources to operate efficiently.

LifeLine operators are available Monday to Friday between 7.30 a.m. to 3.30 p.m. and then from 6 p.m. to 6 a.m.

On weekends, however, there is no one available to take calls until 6 p.m.

"At this time we have limited resources and this is all we can do at this time. We are concerned about this, that we are not able to be here and take calls for 24 hours. We want to be here 24 hours but we do not have the funding to do so," she said.

The official said LifeLine operated solely on a Government subvention.

"We depend on volunteers. And we need more volunteers here now. We are appealing to people to come forward and join us," she said.

Suicidal persons can call the hotline at 231-2824 on Monday to Friday between 7.30 a.m. to 3.30 p.m., 220-3636 from 6 p.m. to 6 a.m.

Also, you can contact LifeLine at ttlifeline@gmail.com and on Facebook.