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Riley Moscatel

## Philly-Area Trans Teen Commits Suicide on Train Tracks

By Mitch Kellaway

Originally published on Advocate.com August 21 2014 6:54 PM ET

Riley Matthew Moscatel, a 17-year-old transgender youth, was killed Monday afternoon when an Amtrak train struck him in Bristol Township, Pa.,

near his home, reports *Philadelphia* magazine. Officials have ruled it a suicide; Moscatel had stepped onto the railroad tracks, and the train hit him near a station.

Moscatel, a student at Bucks County Technical High School, had been suffering from depression for five years, according to his mother Kristine Moscatel.

Both of Riley's parents believe that difficult emotions around his gender identity played a role in his suicide. But his father, Rich Moscatel, told *The Trentonian* that Riley was also struggling with a couple of failed relationships, worries over entering his senior year in high school, and the decision on whether to attend college.

Following Riley's death, the overwhelming feeling among family and friends is shock. "Everyone supported him," Kate Cimino, a classmate and friend, told *Philadelphia's Inquirer*. "He was everyone's best friend."

But she adds that using male pronouns and Riley's chosen name were not enough: The teen, like many trans youth, expressed sadness and anger about his body and was researching medical transition. "He was super-frustrated with his body," another friend, Carley Foss, told *The Inquirer*. "And more and more frustrated every day."

Meanwhile, Riley's parents said they were accepting of his male identity, which the teen first shared with them a year ago, but did not fully grasp what it meant. "We knew it was important to [him]," his father explained to *The Trentonian*. "If it was important to [him], it was important to us whether we understood it or not."

He and Riley's mother showed their support by driving Riley to another high school's gay-straight alliance meetings and purchasing him a chest binder. But his mother said she struggled with his name change and only occasionally referred to him by his preferred name.

"[He]'s my daughter, [he]'ll always be my daughter," she told *The Trentonian* of the teen who loved drawing, movies, photography, animals, and driving lessons. "We were trying to accept and we never said, 'No, you can't be a boy.'"

Trans and gender-nonconforming people have exponentially higher rates of depression and suicidality than nontransgender peers. According to a study by the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force and National Center for Transgender Equality, 41 percent of respondents in these categories had attempted suicide, as compared to 4.6 percent of the population.

In the wake of Riley's death, which has drawn national attention to suicide among transgender teens, Philadelphia's Trans-Health Information Project has pointed to factors that can contribute to tragedies they consider largely "avoidable."

"By continually denying young people the resources to access competent and sensitive care in an environment where they feel both safe and validated, we are conspiring with the systems of social marginalization that push these kids to their breaking point," said a statement from the organization, adding that there is a need for more positive representations of transgender people in the media.

*If you are an LGBT youth and thinking about suicide, or if someone you know is, please reach out to the Trevor Project Lifeline (ages 24 or younger) at 1-866-7386. The National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1-800-273-8255 can also be called 24 hours a day.*

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