

Bonus Episode: Live. Life. Love. Benefit Concert – Kim Petras, Jake Miller, Caroline Kole

Please note: This transcript has been lightly edited to remove filler words or sounds.

Jamie Tworowski: We're here tonight to say that people need other people, to say that you're not alone no matter what you're in the middle of, no matter what you wish was different in your life, no matter what you wish was different about your childhood or your family, that it's okay to be honest. That it's okay to be real, that maybe more than anything, it's okay to ask for help.

Lindsay Kolsch [over music]: You're listening to the To Write Love on Her Arms podcast, a show about mental health and the things that make us human. We'll be sharing stories and conversations about topics we tend not to talk about like depression, addiction, self-injury, and suicide. Each week you'll be hearing stories from some amazing people. We'll talk about how mental health has shaped their journey and you'll continue to hear ways how you can carry this conversation into your community. We hope you'll not only connect to the episodes and conversations in a meaningful way, but we hope that maybe this podcast will make it easier for you to have conversations in your own life.

Lindsay: Each year we travel thousands of miles to meet people at events all over the country. We speak at high schools, present at college campuses, and attend events like VidCon and TwitchCon. We also find ourselves at music festivals like Bonnaroo, Electric Forest, and on the Vans Warped Tour. Music has always played such an important role in our story. We believe music is a safe place and to show you what we mean by that, we actually wanted to share a special bonus episode with you.

On December 10th we traveled to Nashville for the Live. Life. Love. Benefit Concert for Suicide Prevention. The event featured artists like Why Don't We, Dan and Shay, Lauv, Jake Miller, Kim Petras, and Caroline Kole. We had the privilege of spending time with the artists, the team behind the event, 107.5 The River Nashville, and the attendees who came from all over to be there. In this bonus episode, you're going to hear from a few of these folks about what the event meant to them.

[music playing, leading into episode]

Lindsay: And so before we get started I want to introduce a voice you're going to be hearing on this episode. I'm excited for you guys to meet Aaron Baccash. Aaron is a part of our team and he works with supporters across all walks of life, and he helps them find a way to bring TWLOHA has message to the community through partnerships and supporter benefits. Uh, so let's go ahead and welcome Aaron.

Aaron Baccash: Glad to be here. And it was an honor to be at this event.

Lindsay: Yeah. Awesome. So how did this event kind of come together?

Aaron: We heard from Robin Fomusa in 2017. She works for a radio station called 107.5 The River. They're an iHeart radio station. She reached out to us and invited us to be a part of an event. There were some things happening in Nashville that they felt relevant to do a benefit show and really shine a light on suicide prevention specifically. And within three weeks it went from an idea over an email to a full-blown event. We were totally surprised by the response and at the end of that night, they were inviting us back for another year—2018—and that's what we did a couple of weeks ago.

Lindsay: And so I imagine like a lot of our supporters and even people listening to this podcast that these issues hit home and have like a really personal and relevant connection to them. Is that kind of the same way with Robin?

Aaron: Yeah, exactly. We actually got to sit down and have a conversation before the show started and Robin was able to open up a little bit and share her personal story and how it relates to this event and the work she does.

Robin: So about 11 years ago, I was a junior in high school and a friend of mine actually passed away by suicide. At that point, music became like a really important part of my life because that's kind of what got me through it. So from that point on, I kind of wanted to, like my goal in life, became to do a benefit concert and through, I think it was through Warped Tour that I learned about To Write Love on Her Arms and obviously really connected with the cause. So that was kind of like an idea that I had going... especially once I started working for iHeart. I was like, someday I am going to have this show... somehow. And then last year in, I think it was in February, there was an officer locally who was attempting to save a woman who was attempting suicide, and in the process he actually passed away. So when that happened, my boss texted me and was like, "You know what? This is the time to do this. This is now an important topic in the local community. So this is like a perfect time for us to do this show."

Aaron: What are some things that you're hoping that people, somebody coming to this show, what are you hoping their experience will be? Or what do you hope they'll take away from this night?

Robin: Well, first I just want people to have fun because obviously it's a concert and I think a lot of, especially with the artists that we have on this show, Why Don't We being one of our headliners, they're definitely geared towards like a high-school aged person. And that's how old I was when I was affected by it and about the age that I was when I was going through things. So I think it's really important that kids that age get to have a safe environment to talk about that. Whereas at some schools they may not. And then I mean for the older crowd too, we've got Dan and Shay and Lauv, um, they're a little bit older demo and you know, it's not...mental

health and depression are not things that only affect a certain age group. It affects everyone. So I'm hoping that through this show people can realize like what resources there are and that there is help even though they may not feel like there really is.

Aaron: For those of you who haven't been to events with us out on the road, we like to bring different invitations so it's not just resources and t-shirts, but we invite people to participate in what we're doing. So we have these blank cards and the two that we brought to this event where: a song that saved my life... and music is a safe place because... We asked these two open ended questions and as the night goes on, we see a wall fill up with these responses that are handwritten by attendees. And so not only did we get responses from some of the people that were coming to the event, but we also asked some of the event organizers as well as some of the artists to answer these questions. And it's really cool to see the connections that you may have from an artist that's on stage as an attendee in the crowd. It kind of breaks down that barrier one more level. Um, and there's some really special things in here.

And first we're going to hear from Robin the event organizer about a song that helped her through a difficult time.

Robin: OK, well you can't make fun of me for this one. The Jonas Brothers at that time was like a big deal for me.

Aaron: Awesome.

Robin: Um, they had an unreleased song that came out around the time that my friend passed away called "Eternity." Uh, that was about, uh, their, I think it was about their grandmother that had passed away. And that song was like everything to me at that point. I actually have it tattooed now.

Lindsay: You know, I really love what Robin says because that might have been a couple of years ago when Jonas was the big boy band. But at the headline of this show was Why Don't We, which also kind of falls into that category knowing that there's going to be kids that age or younger people listening and that these songs might actually mean and, and really mean something to their, to the lives of those in the room. So I actually, I really love what Robin shared there.

Aaron: Oh yeah, no doubt. And the funny thing is, is we don't usually find ourselves at events with boy bands. And it was really cool to just feel the energy and there were so many screaming kids and there's no doubt in my mind that there's going to be a Robin in a few years that is saying, you know, that this was such an important part of my life and that there are these songs that means so much to me now.

Lindsay: So we also got to hear that night from an artist named Kim Petras, and Kim has a super special journey. It was great to hear her response to those two questions we were asking

people: “music is a safe place because...” and “a song that saved my life is...” And, and Kim actually had more of a playlist, uh, then just one song. And so I'm excited to share that response with you guys.

Kim Petras: I think music is like a little bit of an escape for me. As a kid, like I remember just not being popular in school at all. Like, hating going to school, hating my life, really, you know, like just not liking how my actual life was and going home and like putting on music videos, like really colorful music videos, putting on pop music that will like pump me up and just trying to like, not think about my problems. So for me, music has always been that. And it's always like that what I'm like chasing when I write a song, I always want to create that. So I think that's super, super true. It's just like a world you can let go into and just like shut all of everything else off.

It's always up. It's always like up songs that like helped me get through stuff. I remember I like listen to Madonna, like old-eighties Madonna, a lot when I feel sad like “Holiday” or like “Into the Groove.” Just those like party jams or probably, Cyndi Lauper, “Girls Just Wanna Have Fun” or a Cyndi Lauper, actually, “True Colors,” which is incredible. “Time After Time.” Yeah. Cyndi Lauper and Madonna.

Lindsay: So this event was full of amazing artists. We also had a chance to have a local artist join the event. That was Caroline Kole, and she got to share a little bit more about what music means to her. I'd love if you just kind of fill us in a little bit about how she got connected to the event.

Aaron: Yes, so she actually hopped on pretty late in about a week before the event started and she got a shout out from Kelly Clarkson, which was pretty cool on Twitter. Um, but she just brought such a really amazing energy to the show and then it really showed how much she cared about her fans. She was out behind her booth almost the entire night. Just so excited to meet people and really convey these ideas that she shares in the interview.

Caroline Kole: Music as a safe place! I mean, you're talking to a songwriter where music is, is a haven for me and always has been. It's where I write my thoughts and my feelings and my emotions and I put a melody to it. But it's very much my own personal journal. Um, which makes, you know, as the more open you decide to be in the songs you release, it makes it more difficult because it's like, ‘oh my gosh, how much of this can I really say to everybody?’ But man, if music hadn't been there for me, I don't know what I would have done because the creativity that spurs from pain, sadness, happiness, excitement, joy, friendships, heartbreak, is all a very real thing.

Lindsay: I think something we hear a lot from people, especially when we asked this question about a song that saved my life, is, is people actually don't know where they might be if that song didn't exist. So I love hearing from Caroline that like all these songs have become like that safe place for her. You know, a place to put pain and sadness and also a way to take care of

herself, you know, to, to really find that space for self-care and for healing.

Aaron: Yeah, that's really powerful. And it's really impacting to me personally, I can imagine what that would feel like to people who are huge fans of a local artist that got to meet her and talk to her at the booth that night.

And the last person that we got to hear from was Jake Miller, and he actually was just visiting the iHeart music station. He was asking them what kind of events they had coming up and they told him about this event and he immediately wanted to do whatever he could to get to the event and be a part of it. So he got on late in the game as well and it was so cool. These are some topics and ideas you'll hear when he shares, but these are things that hit really close to home for him. Um, and these are ideas that he feels really strongly about so you can really just hear it in his voice and sitting down and talking to him, how much this was such a special event for him.

Jake Miller: Yeah, definitely. Um, I have a lyric called, it's a song called "Stop This Train" by John Mayer, tattooed on my arm. I never thought I'd be the guy who put a lyric tattooed on my body, but that song really has helped me more than anything in my life. Um, just the song is about, you know, the lyric is "Stop this train. I wish I could get off and go home again." And um, it's all just about making sure that life doesn't pass you by too quickly. And the second verse is, um, it basically says like, uh, I know what I would do without my parents. Um, I'm one generation's length away from fighting life out on my own. And it's the whole, the whole song is just about, you know, cherishing your family and while the people you love are still around telling them that you love them and just kind of not letting life pass you by too quickly. And so that's kind of like a theme that always sticks with me. I wrote a song called "Palm Boulevard," kinda similar to that. It's just about the street that I grew up on and never forgetting my roots and my friends and family. And so that song really helped me. Also the song called "Hand of God" by John Bellion. I could go on and on, but yeah, music, music just in general has saved my life.

Lindsay: Man, I really loved hearing all of those responses. I love that music really is, again, not just something they do as a profession, but it's something that is so personal and intimate to their life and they're aware that they have a platform, like, they have a chance to say something about mental health. They have a chance to talk out, speak out, um, impact the people in front of them. And so that's always an honor for us to be in the room for those moments. It was such a special event.

As we got to know the artists a little bit more and we spent more time with them, we wanted to make sure that we got to ask them the question that we often pose on this podcast. We wanted to ask them what they might say to somebody who is struggling, what they might say to someone who is having a hard time and so you'll get a chance now to hear again from the artists about what they would say to someone struggling. You'll hear first from Kim Petras and then Caroline Kole, and Jake Miller.

Kim: I think we all go through hard times. I think we all like have really bad thoughts sometimes, it's really hard sometimes to snap out of it and to think of anything positive. Like I remember just feeling super like "why am I alive?" as a teenager and like hating my life a lot and I still like get really depressed sometimes and then I don't know how to keep going and I just say "it gets better." It sounds so cliché always, but it's like the only stuff you can really say. It's really hard sometimes to, to think that you're loved or to think like that you have a purpose or to you think that life makes sense. But just know that everybody's going through that and everybody's having the same struggles. You can do it. You can make it through. That's like my goal. I just want to make people have a good time and kind of pass on what like these amazing artists have done for me, uh, when I really needed it. And I really think that music really like helps so much, make it better.

Caroline: I want every single person to walk in here and celebrate life with me because here we are, we're all together and you know, I think we need each other a lot more than maybe we think we do. But tonight should be a true celebration of life and each other and music and you know, it's not all so bad. We're all going to be okay.

Jake: I think a lot of people feel depressed and they feel like they're the only ones who feel that way. But it's such a common thing. And so it's so easy to go out there and...listen. It's really hard to like find a lot of great friends. And I'm not saying you have to go out and find a lot, but find one person in your school, in your city who...they don't even have to be going through the same thing, just somebody who can help you and get through it with you and you can vent to them and they can vent to you. And just having companionship, whether it's someone at home or if you're not lucky enough to have someone at home, then just somebody you know, a coworker, a friend, just somebody that you could talk to you. Because if you just have yourself and you're talking to yourself and thinking too much, that's when you start to kind of lose your mind. So I would say anybody out there who...don't be embarrassed to ask for help, don't be embarrassed to just kind of try to make friends and get through it that way. Because I think that's, that's the best way to kind of just be happy to have great people surrounded.

[music playing]

Lindsay: So Aaron, we got a chance to hear from a couple of different artists and the organizers, but I'm curious what for you, you got to attend. What was your favorite part of the event or what kind of stuck out to you at the end of the night?

Aaron: Yeah, it's something that hit me right at the end of the night was one of the prompt questions that we brought: Music is a safe place. That actually shows up in the first few sentences of the original To Write Love on Her Arms story that Jamie wrote. And that was before this was an organization. It was just one story and attempt to help one friend and watching that wall fill up with responses. It's pretty incredible to know that some of those words that were intended for, to help one person through a tough time, are still out on the road, out at these events impacting people and really inspiring people to think bigger ideas about how music

relates to their mental health and how that kind of pushes them forward through difficult times.

Lindsay: And so we do get the question a lot: How can I help share this message? And of course there are so many different ways throughout the year. We have people who are helping share the stories from our blog, sharing this podcast, interacting, starting conversations in their social media feeds, but they may want to do something kind of in their own community or face to face with people. And there's also tons of options there. So I would love for you to kind of point people to what that would look like in their own community and some of the different options.

Aaron: Maybe even hearing this episode, it may feel overwhelming or difficult as you're thinking in your own community: How do I impact my community? But the cool part is Robin, really when she was younger in high school, she had this idea, 'I want to put on this show.' And all these years later she's working in the music industry at a radio station and this opportunity just kind of popped up and this was a way for her to really live out a dream and impact other people. So yeah, I would just challenge anybody listening. There's a bunch of different ways to get involved, whether that's hosting a movie conference or being a part of a youth chapter or doing a benefit show or if you have a business and you work in the professional world and you want to do a partnership event using uh, what you do at work as a part of a way to connect to To Write Love. Any way that that makes sense to you, we want to hear your ideas and we would love to hear from you. There's no idea that's too small and there's also no dream that's too far off for us to not start a conversation.

Lindsay: Yeah, I think over the years, Aaron, we've seen that that's definitely true and we continue to be surprised by what people are doing in their own communities. So what would be a way for people to get in contact with us if they want to start something or have an idea to share?

Aaron: From the front page on our website, you can click on the Get Involved section. It's going to pop up a bunch of different options for you and you can read through those and see which one makes the most sense. And um, and then you can always reach out to our info account if you're not sure where to start. Uh, that's where a team of people are going to be able to respond to you and walk you through those steps and get you connected to the right person on our team.

Lindsay: Oh, awesome. Thanks Aaron for sharing that. We're really excited to hear what you guys are thinking about and how you want to bring this message to your community.

[music playing]

Lindsay: Thank you so much to 107.5 The River Nashville and the entire team that put on this Live. Life. Love. Benefit Concert. We want to thank all the artists that performed to make such a special evening and specifically want to thank the artists featured on this episode: Kim Petras, Jake Miller, and Caroline Kole. If you're looking for a way to help bring the message of To Write Love on Her Arms into your community, you can check out our Get Involved section. To do that, go to our website, twloha.com, and click on the Get Involved tab. We'll also have a link to all of

that in our show notes.

We hope each episode is a reminder that your story is important, you matter, and you're not alone. We understand that so many of you listening might be struggling or know someone who is struggling with the issues that we've been talking about. We believe that help exists. Part of our mission is to connect people to the help that they need and deserve. You can find local mental health resources at our website, twloha.com, and click the "Find Help" at the top of the page. If you need to talk to someone right now, you can always connect with our friends at Crisis Text Line. You simply text the word TWLOHA, that's T-W-L-O-H-A, to 741741 and you'll be connected to a trained crisis counselor. It's free, confidential, and available 24/7.

If you enjoyed this episode and you want to hear more, we hope you'll subscribe on iTunes or wherever you get your podcasts. And if you can do us a favor, we'd really love for you to write us a review. It will help more people find this podcast and the mission of TWLOHA. If you have any feedback or questions, please send us an email to podcast@twloha.com.

A big thank you to our friends at Copeland for the original music on this episode. The TWLOHA podcast is produced by Mark Codgen. Editorial support was provided by Claire Biggs and Jennie Armstrong of Lore de Force. And music assistance provided by James Likeness and Ben Tichenor. I'm Lindsay Kolsch. Thank you so much for listening.

To Write Love on Her Arms is a nonprofit movement dedicated to presenting hope and finding help for people struggling with depression, addiction, self injury, and suicide. TWLOHA exists to encourage, inform, inspire, and also to invest directly into treatment and recovery. You can find more information about [twloha](http://twloha.com) at twloha.com.