

Episode 212: “Crisis Text Line CEO Nancy Lublin: There Are So Many Ways Out And Up”

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

NANCY LUBLIN: Oh my gosh. You are stronger than you know. You're so much stronger than you know. And you have people and resources and options. Sometimes it just does it feels like it does, it does feel like it's too much. And like there's, there's no way out. But there are so many ways out and ways up.

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LINDSAY KOLSCH: You're listening to the To Write Love on Her Arms podcast, a show about mental health and the things that make us human. Each episode we'll be talking about the things that can often feel hard to talk about, like depression, addiction, self-injury, and suicide. We'll be sharing stories and exploring big themes like hope, healing, and recovery.

LINDSAY (narration): On today's episode, TWLOHA founder Jamie Tworkowski talks with Nancy Lublin, the founder and CEO of Crisis Text Line. You may have heard of Crisis Text Line here on the podcast, or possibly seen us share Crisis Text Line on social media or on our FIND HELP page. No matter where we go or who we're talking to, we always want to share their work because it's literally a life-saving resource.

LINDSAY: In this episode you'll hear how Crisis Text Line got started, how their ever-expanding network of trained volunteers on the network help move people from a hot moment to a cool calm, and what their data is showing about things like sleep, self-harm, and more.

LINDSAY: And we've shared it before, but we think it's important to do it one more time. If you're looking for free, confidential text support that's available 24/7, all you have to do is text TWLOHA—that's t w l o h a—to 741741 and you'll be connected to a crisis counselor from Crisis Text Line.

LINDSAY: And now we're excited to share the conversation with Nancy Lublin.

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JAMIE TWORKOWSKI: For those who aren't familiar, can you briefly walk us through who you are? And why you started Crisis Text Line?

NANCY: So my name is Nancy Lublin. And I guess I've always done, like, not-for-profits. I started a couple not-for-profits. And the last place where I was called DoSomething.org which is a big organization for young people in America who want to do more volunteer work and change their communities. And we started getting text messages from people in pain. So not really having anything to do with the stuff we were doing at DoSomething but just people who needed

a place to text about their pain. And we got some pretty gnarly messages from people. Should I get specific, Jamie, or is that a bit rough?

JAMIE: No, it's, it's totally up to you. If you want to share even a little bit that could be good.

NANCY: We would triage them. Like if something came in, we'd send a hotline, you know, we'd send a link to you guys, we'd send the information for RAINN, the rape and incest organization. And then we got a message that was just really dark from someone who said, "He won't stop raping me. It's my dad. He told me not to tell anyone." And the letters "r u t" for are you there? And just to imagine that someone was that alone and to text us something so personal, I just thought, "Okay, we need to start a hotline by text; clearly they want to share this way. So we need to build something." And then two years later, we finally launched; it took, it took a long time to get it up and going. This stuff is hard. But here we are about 130 million messages later.

JAMIE: That's so incredible. I feel like for so many people, they, they might see that need, but just think that's too big. That's too big for me to take on. And I just wonder what was that process like of seeing this need and being so moved and then following through to make it a reality in terms of creating Crisis Text Line?

NANCY: Yeah, that's the thing. I'm, that's what it means to be an entrepreneur. I like to jump off the cliff and build the plane on the way down. Right? Like, I'm, I'm cool with the, 'I'll figure it out as I go.' And I think I'm good at enlisting people who are smarter than me. So I pulled in, you know, a co-founder, who's a chief data scientist, Bob, and, and a founding CTO, and I just put some other people together to help make it a reality. But that's what entrepreneurs do. They, they take ideas and turn them into real things. And I've kind of always been that way.

JAMIE: I love that. You've talked about how 100% of suicides should be preventable. And I wonder if you would share what you mean by that.

NANCY: I first heard someone from AFSP, the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention, talk about that, and I thought that was such a smart way to, to think of this. But they are. They're all preventable. You know, it's not like a car accident or some of these other equally tragic things. And that if we can make it easier to get help than avoid getting help, we can save a lot of lives. So that's, that's how I think of what we do here. We're trying to get as big as we can as fast as we can to help people. But really the goal is to make it easier to get help than avoid getting help. I want to be everywhere.

JAMIE: Access to help is a huge issue for so many people, especially given our healthcare system in America. How does that show up in the work of Crisis Text Line?

NANCY: Oh gosh, access and stigma affects every. This is the thing. Organizations exist in ecosystems, right? So even if we do an A plus bang up job on stuff, we still need, you know, hospitals to send people to. We still need 911 to be able to respond quickly. And in order for us

to do our job, we need stigma to be reduced so that people feel comfortable saying, “I need help.” So that they do reach out to us. So stigma and people not feeling okay to share or to ask for help is something we don't control but we're dependent on. That's why we love our partnership with you. I mean, whenever you get out there, we know that more people find us. You make it easier for people to say, “You know what? I'm having a rough time today. And I can't get through this day alone.” You're part of what we do. We're all in this together.

JAMIE: No, I love that. And I totally agree. One thing that people may not realize is that you guys are—it's primarily volunteers responding to the messages. And I wonder if you could talk about the network of people. I know that there obviously there's staff and management mixed in there. But I wonder if you could talk about the folks who are actually responding. And then if you could also talk about what it means to walk someone from a hot moment to a cool calm.

NANCY: Well, they're pretty much the best people in the world. You've met a bunch of them. And they're like just the best people and so we sometimes call them our empathy MVPs. I mean, they're just, you know, it's strangers loving on strangers in their darkest moments. They're just, and yeah, they're not paid. At things like Thanksgiving and Super Bowl Sunday, I always go on the platform, I think, “Is anyone really going to be here? Like, are any volunteers really going to show up?” And they are, they're always there. So, yeah, you have to be over age 18 and have a US social security number in the US. And then you go through a background check. An application, a background check. And then it's about a 30- to 34-hour training. And if you pass and not everybody passes, it's about a 30% acceptance rate, if you pass you're a crisis counselor. And it's kind of like being a Lyft driver, or an Uber driver, you can do it when it makes sense for you and you can do it from anywhere as long as you have a laptop with a good WiFi connection. So what's, what's cool about this is until now, if you want to volunteer for anything, not just mental health, but you know, hunger, homelessness, you pretty much have to be in a city and available during business hours. But this, this is a distributed network. So we have rural volunteers. We have stay-at-home moms, we have retirees, we have people with physical disabilities. We have graduate students whose time is available sort of sporadically. I know a couple of flight attendants who do this because their schedule is so bananas and unpredictable. It's a great way to volunteer.

JAMIE: What about just the second part?

NANCY: Yeah. Hot to cool.

JAMIE: Something you guys talk about with just, just the hot to cool. I wonder if you could share more about that.

NANCY: That's what we're here for, right? So we're here so that you're not alone in those darkest moments. We can't bring back your mom who passed away and we can't, you know, pay your bills, pay your mortgage so you don't lose your home. But we can make you feel less alone in those moments. We can validate that pain. We can help you think clearly about a plan

to address those things and that pain. We can remind you how strong you are. So we have tested, "Do we need special training for different issues?" We've even tested, "Do we need a crisis counselor in Texas to talk to a texter in Texas?" And we've tested, "Is someone female-identified matched with someone female-identified leading to higher ratings?" And none of that matters. What matters most is speed: How quickly can we get you matched with an empathetic human? And the kind of training that we give that human. So we're constantly looking at our own data and implementing improvements to, to our own training and policies to make sure that everyone who texts in is met by, you know, by someone who's going to do an excellent job loving on them. And I guess we're doing a good job because right now we have an 85% approval rating, a satisfaction rating from our texters, which is pretty bananas when you consider that everybody reaching out to us is unhappy. So yeah, to have such a high rating from people who are fundamentally in a dark place is pretty awesome. We're fiercely proud of that number.

JAMIE: That's incredible. You should be.

NANCY: Yeah.

JAMIE: I know, something we encounter, I think just in general, when something is foreign to you, it's easy to be afraid that, that you might do it wrong. I think we hear that about counseling, you know, if someone's not sure what sitting with a counselor would be like, and so it becomes more scary. And sort of with that in mind, for someone who's thinking of texting in, what would you want them to know?

NANCY: Oh, gosh, they are not alone. 66% of the people reaching out to us say they've never shared with another human being before. So we are that first thing and we're kind of like a gateway because in 81% of our conversations, we end up talking about counseling, therapy, because they realized that sharing feels pretty darn good. And so maybe they would want a regular champion in their life. And so we talk about maybe a school guidance counselor or a friendly adult or a best friend or opening up to their spouse. So, yeah. It's a great place to test it out. What's nice also is because it's text, there's total anonymity, and there's a veil of ignorance, right? There's no bias. So you don't hear age, gender, race, location in the country. You don't hear any of that. And it's all encrypted. So the crisis counselor isn't seeing that and the texter's not seeing that. So it's really just two strangers getting to the heart of feels together.

JAMIE: Yeah.

NANCY: Yeah.

JAMIE: Just to kind of touch on the basics for someone who doesn't know you touched on the anonymity, the privacy. Obviously it's 24 hours a day, seven days a week, every single day of the year. Is there anything else people should know about, about the experience or about using Crisis Text Line?

NANCY: And then it's all ages. I think sometimes people do think this is just for young people. And it's true that 75% of our texters are under the age of 25. But that still leaves 25% over the age of 25. We are here for people of all ages. So, in fact, and I just got data this morning, an update on something. The 12% poorest people in America are using 30% of our volume. So this is a really great solution for people who don't have financial resources.

JAMIE: Yeah. Because it's, it's completely free.

NANCY: That's right. Oh, in fact, we actually even got the mobile fees waived. So on almost every mobile carrier, not only won't you be charged a fee, but we won't show up in your bill; we got what's called a zero rating, and we're pulled from all the billing statements. So it really is, like you said to go private and anonymous. So that is abusive partner, that alcoholic parent, they won't see that you reached out to us.

JAMIE: That's so good. Lindsay Kolsch on our team; She's one of our co executive directors who you've met actually, last time we saw you. And she's a huge fan of data. And so this was a question that, that came from her. Can you share a few pieces of data about who your texters are, what issues they're facing, and how this information empowers people to understand crises in their communities?

NANCY: Yeah. So I would say the one, and while I'm talking to you, I'm actually going to pull up some data. Because I literally just got it this morning. One of the ones that's most shocking to me is the data on self-harm.

JAMIE: Yeah.

NANCY: And just a huge chunk of young people who are self-harming. And I'll just confess, before I got into this work before I came here, I just didn't know. Right? Like I'm of an age, I just really didn't know. I mean, the numbers are really big. It's about, depending on the age group, somewhere between 11 and 20%, depending on the age group, seasonality, it happens a lot more in winter, which I think makes sense. So it really peaks in a big way in December. It peaks big time in December, January, February, March and then starts to drop off, which I guess makes sense because it's a lot of arms and legs that are covered up in the winter. A lot of homework time. So 60% of our conversations that mentioned self-harm happened between 6 p.m. and 2 a.m. Eastern time. So that's yeah, it's really a nighttime like when you're alone, when you're stressed. Some of the words in December related to self-harm are finals, failing, passing, subject, holiday, Christmas, Thanksgiving... But then compare that to August, there's less of a clear theme but it's things like stood out, insecurity, traumatic, substance, pool. So you could get like it's seasonal; it's definitely seasonal things, but you can see that a lot of it is connected to feelings of anxiety, a lot of co-presenting with anxiety.

NANCY: The best news though, is we, I said before, we have an 85% satisfaction rating overall, for self-harm conversations we have a 91% satisfaction rating.

JAMIE: That's so good.

NANCY: Yeah, we're really, we're kind of crushing it in these conversations. And I'm proud of that. I'm literally reading it to you off of a Slack thread that I got it from one of our data scientists this morning.

JAMIE: We'd love to hear what are some of the most surprising or important anecdotes you've heard from people texting in, or people taking action based on the data you've collected?

NANCY: Sleep, oh my gosh. We're having a sleep crisis in America. More than 20% of conversations explicitly mentioned sleep as an issue. And we do see a lot of volume in the middle of the night. People need to be getting more sleep. And we need crisis counselors who don't sleep. We need crisis counselors like in Hawaii and on the West coast. I know you were just in Oregon; we need we need people in Oregon and Seattle and California to be crisis counselors. Because there's a lot of demand at night, and you know, a lack of sleep and anxiety is a bad mixture.

NANCY: Yeah, sleep. That's a big thing.

JAMIE: Can you be a crisis counselor in a country that you guys are not currently active in?

NANCY: Yes. So we have we have crisis counselors in, in Dubai, in London, in Tel Aviv, as long as they are Americans with a US social security number and go through everything. But we're also up and running in Canada, Ireland, and the UK. So people who are citizens of those countries can apply and become crisis counselors there. And stay tuned, growing in 2020.

JAMIE: Can you talk about that growth, that expansion outside the US a little bit? I'm sure that's been so meaningful and so exciting, and I'm sure challenging as well.

NANCY: Super meaningful, I mean. So meaningful, and then also interesting what we're learning. So meaningful: I just got back actually last night from London and two days ago, I met almost 600 of the crisis volunteers there in the UK. They came to a one-day conference in London where actually The Duke of Cambridge, so William and Kate, actually came and they're big supporters in the UK of ours. And it was really fun to meet all the crisis volunteers. I mean, they flew down from Scotland and took trains. And some of them said, "I took a sick day to be here today."

JAMIE: Yeah.

NANCY: It was amazing to meet them. And it's amazing to see us helping there in the UK where we are doing even a greater percentage of both suicide and sexual assault. They're seeing a greater percentage of those two types of conversations. So super meaningful there in the UK. And then what we're learning is fascinating. I mean, language has, has to be a little bit different. Right? So there they're called crisis volunteers, whereas here, they're in the US they're called crisis counselors. There is a popular NGO, not-for-profit in the UK called Crisis that works on homelessness. So we couldn't call it Crisis Text Line. So it's called Shout.

JAMIE: Yeah.

NANCY: So that's, that is us there. So it's just stuff like that that's challenging from a business perspective. But, you know, we're learning and comparing notes. And it's awesome to just see that we're helping people in other countries, too.

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LINDSAY: Hey, podcast family, this is Lindsay Kolsch. We're coming up on the end of 2019 and as we look back over the year, we're simply amazed at how this movement has grown and reached new people.

LINDSAY: Your support throughout the year means so much to TWLOHA. We want to thank you for listening and sharing this podcast. If you've purchased TWLOHA merch or participated in the campaigns throughout the year, if you've shared our FIND HELP Tool, or represented this message in your place of work—thank you. Our goal is to always bring you this podcast and the stories we share on our blog and through social media with the support and generosity of our community.

LINDSAY: And if you're thinking about making a year-end gift, we hope you'll support TWLOHA. We currently have a goal to raise \$150,000 by the end of the year. These funds help us continue to reach new communities, expand our FIND HELP program, and work to challenge the lie that says we can't talk about mental health. We recently launched a new high school program and are continuing to invest in college students. We're really excited about what 2020 will hold.

LINDSAY: So if you want to help us continue that work, you can make a gift to TWLOHA by visiting [TWLOHA.com/donate](https://www.twloha.com/donate). That's [twloha.com/donate](https://www.twloha.com/donate). It's fast and easy and every dollar will help. And when you make a gift of \$10 or more, you'll receive a digital copy of our new 2020 calendar designs. We also have some great gifts like TWLOHA mugs and TWLOHA calendars. We're so excited to see what 2020 is going to bring. We truly believe that better days are ahead, and we want you to be there with us.

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JAMIE: You've mentioned that your next big goal is to spread more empathy in the world, which I think is wonderful. Can you tell us about that?

NANCY: I mean, we just want to find lots more ways to put more empathy out there. So we spun out a for-profit company about a year and a half ago, that's helping for-profit companies. If you think about it, customer service reps, like they do similar work to what a crisis counselor does. They're all unpredictable inbound messages from someone who's feeling hot. And you've got to get them to a cool calm. And being a customer service rep is hard. It's hard work. The tools are not necessarily very fun, so we're building tools for them to rate messages coming in. How hot is it? And what are the best words to use in response? Which is another way of putting empathy in the world. And we gave the founders equity to Crisis Text Line. So Crisis Text Line currently owns about 51% of Loris, that new company. So if and when Loris does well, Crisis Text Line will make tons of money and that means Crisis Text Line can save more lives. And that means we don't have to throw like a dinner or a walk-a-thon or go for any government money. It'll help us grow bigger and faster while also putting more empathy in the world.

JAMIE: Yeah, how does funding happen? How are you guys able to do this work?

NANCY: I'm envious of the way you guys do it because I love, love the shirts and the sweatshirts. That new red and black check shirt is so awesome. I want one.

JAMIE: I could send you one.

NANCY: I'm going to buy them for my family for the holidays because it's, it's great, I love it. Anyway, um, you guys make the best merch and it's such a great way to make money because you're like walking billboards of love. It's so great. You know—

JAMIE: It starts conversations.

NANCY: Yeah. Yeah. Love it. And it makes money for you. So we take charitable contributions, so but we don't send direct mail, we don't do dinners. So people find us and donate to us, which is really very kind. And we have some companies who pay us for being able to promote us. So everything from you know, *13 Reasons Why* and *Euphoria* and some other tough content to some social media and search companies. We have a great partnership with YouTube, with Snapchat, with Facebook, and they, they give us funding and we handle some hard conversations that happen on their platforms. So in YouTube, for example, if you search how to kill yourself, you'll find us. And it's a great partnership because it means we help more people, it means YouTube helps more people, and we're sustainable because they give us a contribution. And we're considering some other, some other ways of growing revenue in 2020 so we can grow even more too, but we don't have a big development team here. I've also tried to be raising money in rounds more like a for-profit tech startup would, because we think of us more like a tech startup than like a not-for-profit, even though we happen to be a not-for-profit. So I've kind of like every two years been raising big chunks of money. I spend like three or four months on that, and then I put my head down and get back to work on, on product and just being the best company we can possibly be.

JAMIE: What have been some of the challenges in creating, launching, and growing Crisis Text Line? I know that's a question I get asked you know, in the context of To Write Love on Her Arms, and I wonder what your answer or answers would be.

NANCY: I want to hear yours. What do you say to that when you get asked that? What's the hardest part about growth?

JAMIE: I think for me, honestly, it's been a lot of the relational management side. I think it's one thing to publicly be known for caring about people. But it's another thing for the people who are with you and working with you every day, for them to feel cared for. And so, and I think when you mix in, in my situation, working with family over the years, working with close friends. That that definitely comes to mind. I think in the early years, not knowing it was okay to admit the stuff I didn't know. You touched on hiring people and connecting with people who were smarter than you. And I think because I totally stumbled into this and it really happened by accident, there were moments where I think I was just insecure about admitting, 'Oh my gosh, I don't, I don't know how to do this', or 'I don't know what you're talking about.' And so I think what we want to be about is just it's okay to be yourself. If, if you had no way of knowing this, you don't have this background or this experience, it's okay to say that, you know? And I think just that you don't have to be perfect, you don't have to have it all together. I think it took a long time for me personally just to get to a place of kind of being able to see and acknowledge my, strengths are pretty easy but, but weaknesses and struggles and my own mental health and the way that I'm wired and what makes me feel alive and what doesn't. So maybe that's a surprising answer for some people, but I think that's my answer.

NANCY: I think it's what makes you so effective publicly. Because you're so real, Jamie. And you're I mean, everything from your social media presence to your in-person speaking. I think it's why you're so good at what you do. You're don't hold back, you're honest, you're real, you're open, you're accessible. I think as a leader of an organization internally, I think you nailed that. It's really hard to do that because we still have to convey confidence to our teams. In part because of stigma, but also because, you know, it's hard to report to somebody who's having a bad day. I sometimes say that as a CEO, I don't have the luxury of a bad day. I've got to be up, I've got to be positive, I've got to be focused because my team when they're having a bad day needs to be able to look at me and be like, "Okay, but Nancy's got this." So I waver between showing my human side so I am totally quirky. I mean, you've seen my Hello Kitty collection. And I, you know, like I say things that are, that are real and authentic to humanize myself but also because that's who I am. And at the same time, I'm very conscious of the fact that we are held to another standard, both as the CEO and founder and then also as a leader of empathy companies. We are held to, I think, sometimes unfair standards. And they forget that we're human too. And then you layer on that we work with a lot of people who are going through their own mental health experiences, who may be millennial, who may be super politically woke. And it's in a time period where people are disappointed in leadership just in general around the world, corporate leadership, political leadership. And so they look to people like us to fill those

gaps and sort of be heroic. I mean, I, I never know how to respond when someone says, like you meet them someone and they're like you're so awesome, I just love what you do, and you're so amazing. I want to look at them and be like, "I just farted 10 minutes ago." Like—

JAMIE: (laughs) Yeah.

NANCY: Sometimes when I'm driving I still pick my nose. Like I just feel like I want to be like, "You have no..." And that's just the easy stuff like... Those are the moments I'm actually most uncomfortable is when people put me on some kind of a pedestal and then expect me to stay there. I'm going to fall the heck off that pedestal in like two minutes.

JAMIE: As as much as you're comfortable sharing I wonder sort of what your self-care or prioritizing your own mental health, maybe even in light of what you just shared, what some of that looks like for you and maybe even how the work you do has informed any of that.

NANCY: Oh, thank you. Um, so I would say that I'm not as good as I would like to be or as people in my life would like me to be at this. I also think that people have expectations of how good we are supposed to be. This is another one where we're on a pedestal. So okay, let's say the things that work for me and the things that really don't work for me. The best, my best form of self-care is I really do love being a mother and I am really close to my kids. They're 14 and 12. And they're just really good people. And my daughter has gone through some of her own mental health things and is just so clear, and such a good communicator. And, and just she's just strong. And I just I really love spending time with them. I think they're interesting. I think they're fun. And they care about the right thing. Like they don't care how much money I've brought in, or, you know, I don't know what we shipped or what the growth rates and KPIs look like. You know, they care that I helped with math homework or english homework or that I walked to school with them, like the bar is so low for happiness. I know you've got that with your nephews; I know they're a huge part of your self-care. just totally just love spending time with little people. I really do. Yeah, and especially my little people, but also their friends, I like their friends too. So that's a huge one for me. I am best when I'm walking a lot. So one of my favorite things about being in New York City is we don't, we don't own a car. My office and where I live is about a 25-minute walk and I really, and then my kids school is kind of in between. So I walk a lot, and I just I really liked being out there in the city in the mix of everything but also not talking to anybody if that makes sense. So it's like with people and walking around and feeling the vibe of the city. But like not being in the middle of the party, I think.

JAMIE: Oh yeah.

NANCY: You know, like many people think I'm super extroverted and in some ways I am but even extroverts need some anonymity. I really, I like walking around New York and seeing the vibe and hearing the horns honking and, and people yelling and music blasting out of stores and I like walking past it. Does that make sense?

JAMIE: Yeah, no, I mean, I lived there for two years. And people asked me, “You know, when you go back to the city, what do you, what do you like to do?” And honestly, that was pretty much my answer. Like I just loved walking. I loved sitting in the park. And totally like you said you can be alone in a crowd. It’s such a special unique way of life and so I I totally dig that.

NANCY: But you’ve got the ocean right now. So in Florida, or is that a big part?

JAMIE: Yeah, yeah. I’ve grown up a surfer. My parents owned a surf shop, actually in North Carolina when I was born. So, so yeah, that’s a big part and even when I lived there, obviously it’s, it’s not as easy as you know, walking a couple of blocks, but I loved driving out to Long Island or even going all the way out to Montauk.

NANCY: Good for you. And surf. Yeah.

JAMIE: Yeah, yeah. But speaking of being among people, you respond to messages on the platform.

NANCY: I mean, that’s the best part of my job is actually being a crisis counselor alongside everybody else. I, yeah, I really dig it. I’m in probably the top 100 of crisis counselors now who’ve taken conversations. We’ve trained about 25,000 people, and I’ve probably in that top, top 100. I used to be in the top 50. But in the last couple of months, I haven’t had as much time to go on the platform. Over the holidays, I really plan on getting in there.

JAMIE: So why is that important to you? I know people would understand if you’re the CEO, you’re very busy. If you were working on other things, people would totally understand. Why is it important to you to be responding to messages?

NANCY: Well, the truth is when we launched I wasn’t in there. And I was afraid I was gonna suck at it. I was, I was like, “Oh my god, what if like, what if the co-founder / CEO is really bad at taking conversations?” Or what if I just melt down in a puddle of tears after taking conversations? That would not be good. And so for like the first year and a half, I didn’t go on the platform and I sort of justified it as “Oh no, the CEO should have a clear head. And, you know, be kept he kept a out of the front lines.” And then we had a spike and a big volume surge. And one of our supervisors hit me up on Slack and said the community needs to see you in here next to them. Which was probably a tough thing for her to manage up and say to me.

JAMIE: Yeah.

NANCY: I said, “You’re right. Here I come.” And so I came in and then like, good luck getting me off the platform. I’ve now done almost 2,800 conversations.

JAMIE: So what was that process like? Like you shared kind of the intimidation or even the fear of stepping into that. And what, what did you find when you went there?

NANCY: It's a lot easier than I thought to love on people in pain. As long as people follow our guidelines and follow the training they get from us, they're going to be good at this. So yeah, being a crisis counselor is awesome. I love it and I am good at it. So yeah, I encourage, I encourage all these listeners, and all of the the Jamie disciples and fans and friends to be a crisis counselor because it's, it's a, it's a really meaningful connection with another human being and their dark times.

JAMIE: On that note, there's a story that you shared with me the last time I saw you and I know it's a story that has gotten some press, has gotten some attention and you happen to be the one who got to respond to a message that led to a really incredible outcome. And I wonder if, I assume you know what story I'm talking about.

NANCY: I do. I can talk about this because it hit the press. Normally we don't give specifics, but we can... This, this happened in San Jose and the San Jose Mercury News picked it up from the police. And so they, I can tell you the same details that they've shared, which is there's a young person who 14-year-old girl who texted us that she was a runaway and wanted to go home and essentially she was being trafficked. And she said that, you know, "If they hear me, they'll kill me." So she couldn't call 911. She texted us; I don't even know how she got her number or how she got ahold of a phone. But we did send, we did call 911, and the San Jose police responded and arrested five men and found her and two other girls. And it was super meaningful. The maybe the craziest part of the conversation was that she and I happened to have the same birthday. And so, you know, parts of the conversation she was so mature and saying really mature things to help us locate her and send help. And then other parts, you know, when she said her birthday and I said, "Wow, that's mine, too. That's a good sign. We've got luck on our side tonight." You know, she sent back an exploding head emoji and lols and those are the parts where I was like, "Yeah, she's 14." And yeah, that was really powerful. That was super powerful.

JAMIE: Two questions that we like to ask every guest and so I'm going to hit you with those. The first one and this is totally kind of changing, switching gears. What would you say to your younger self? And you can you can choose if that's middle school, high school, younger, older but I wonder, you know, sitting where you sit now, what would you say to that person?

NANCY: How long do I have with me? Is this like *Back to the Future* and I don't have much time? I mean so much. I think everything from like a stop caring so much about what they think to. Yeah, definitely have more sex. It's harder to get pregnant than you think. But use a condom and all that.

JAMIE: And you do like being a mom?

NANCY: Yeah, I love being a mom. Yeah, maybe not that. But my point is like, like relax. I was a little bit Tracy Flick in high school. You get the Reese Witherspoon reference. Like, like relax

and have more fun and it's all going to be okay. Oh, I think I might also say invest in that Apple stock and hold on to it. Maybe pay attention to those guys who are playing Dungeons and Dragons like, like they're going to be your friends someday. Gosh, I think. Oh yeah, I think I just like hang out with me. Maybe listen to some [inaudible], you know, drink some more sun kissed and enjoy the 80s a little bit more. I don't know, wouldn't it be so fun to go back? What would you say to yourself, Jamie? What would you go back and say or who do you spend time with that you didn't?

JAMIE: I relate to a lot of what you said. I think I think a theme for me and it's carried into my adult life is, is obsessing over romantic love, whether it's the idea of it in general or a specific person or just being so devastated by a breakup. And that's been true. And I also realized that's not unique. It's what almost every song is about. But I think you nailed it in terms of just holding things loosely and not, not worrying so much. Not not letting fear be so loud. Yeah, I think for a long time, just a lot of, just a lot of stress and anxiety, kind of this constant fear of failure. I think I've been able to be myself. That's one of the things I'm most thankful for, with To Write Love, like with the fact that it happened. My mom said early on that especially early on To Write Love on Her Arms was basically everything I was ever interested in, everything I loved, somehow falling under one roof. Specifically I know we're telling our younger self, but I love to tell young people a) try not to do a job that you hate, especially when you're young enough to have a say in, in sort of, what your future looks like. And then the other side of that just to try to do what you love, think about, notice what breaks your heart and how could you be part of the solution. And I feel like that's what you've done with Crisis Text Line.

NANCY: I would go back and tell myself this, I wouldn't go back and live that again. I'm pretty glad to have been through some of that. And, like you said, To Write Love is, is the thing that you were always meant to do. And you're here now. I wouldn't want to go back through that. But I would definitely tell myself if I could go back that in the moments where I have just effed up and there's been a lot of them, it's been because I've chosen fear over love. And that in the moments where I succeed and persevere, it's when I've chosen love over fear. So when I react in anger, when I react in frustration, when I react out of, fear I don't make my best decisions. And that happens sometimes. That's a killer.

JAMIE: Have you seen the Jim Carrey graduation speech? About choosing love over fear?

NANCY: Oh, no, but now apparently need to.

JAMIE: I'm gonna send it to you. Yeah it was like it was a couple years ago so it wasn't him graduating it was him speaking as a commencement speaker. And it was really wonderful. So I'll, I'll send you that. The other, the other question we love to ask people which is obviously the heart of the matter and it really represents the work that you and your team do. For someone who's listening to this podcast and they're struggling right now, what would you want to say to that person?

NANCY: Oh my gosh. You are stronger than you know. You're so much stronger than you know. And you have people and resources and options. Sometimes it just does it feels like it does, it does feel like it's too much. And like there's, there's no way out. But there are so many ways out and ways up. And Crisis Text Line is one of them. Jamie and To Write Love is another. There are so many, there are people you haven't even met people who haven't crossed your paths yet that you will meet and things you will do and foods you will taste and places you'll go that haven't even come across your path yet. It will get better and you're strong enough to get there.

JAMIE: I love that. I love to encourage people to stay for the surprises and I think that's what you're talking about. Finally, how can people get more involved? How can people support Crisis Text Line, how can they learn more?

NANCY: Well, you've sent us a ton of crisis counselors, which is awesome. We hear all the time that people found us thanks To Write Love. So, or they've seen you give a speech or your tweets about us. So thank you. We still need more crisis counselors, and definitely the crisis counselors who are up in the middle of the night. So we call them night owls here or the early morning like you want to be on the platform at 4 a.m. for a couple hours before you start your day. So we definitely need more crisis counselors, you can go to crisistextline.org to apply if you're over 18. And also just let people know about us because I still think we're, we're like a little baby. A lot of people don't know exist. You are only six years old. So a lot of people still haven't heard of us. So get the word out there.

JAMIE: It's one of my favorite things that I get to do. And I'm grateful that I'm able to offer you guys as a resource. I feel like part of my job and even purpose is just trying to serve as a bridge to connect someone who's struggling or they're thinking about a loved one who's struggling to make them aware of this incredible resource which is Crisis Text Line. So thank you for noticing and, and honestly, I feel like it happens almost every day where I get to, to share CTL with people.

NANCY: Thank you know, really, thank you. You're the best.

JAMIE: We'll wrap it up. I I touched on this earlier but I'm, I'm proud to know you. I'm thankful that I get to call you a friend and I'm grateful you're, for your out-of-the-blue encouragement. I know I'm due for a trip to New York so we can walk around together.

NANCY: Hugs. Hugs soon.

JAMIE: Yeah, but thank you for this. Thank you for the conversation. Thank you for the work that you do and thank you to your team as well.

NANCY: Please, the same to you, to your family, your friends, the people who support you and keep you strong so that you can keep doing this work. And give your dog a little snuggle for me too.

JAMIE: I will, I'm going to see her really soon.

NANCY: I know she's part of your self-care so give her a little snuggle for me.

JAMIE: Totally. Thank you, Nancy.

[music playing]

LINDSAY (narration): We want to thank Jamie Tworkowski and Nancy Lublin for their conversation on the podcast today.

Crisis Text Line has been an incredible partner for To Write Love on Her Arms. In fact, through our keyword partnership, Crisis Text Line has helped 4,000 texters in over 14,000 conversations over the past two years. Crisis Text Line has performed 106 active rescues and 250 suicide deescalations for TWLOHA texters. And 48% of TWLOHA texters tell a Crisis Counselor something they've never told anyone else before.

We want to give a huge thank you to the volunteers of Crisis Text Line. You make space in your life to help others feel seen, feel heard, and get through some of their hardest moments. And on behalf of the stories that are still going because of your work, thank you.

And finally, we want people to know about Crisis Text Line. One easy way to do this is to make sure you add Crisis Text Line to your phone. All you have to do is text TWLOHA — t w l o h a — to 741741 and you'll be connected to a crisis counselor. It's free, confidential, and available 24/7.

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 they need and deserve. You can find local mental health resources on our website: twloha.com. That's [t w l o h a.com](http://twloha.com), click the FIND HELP tab at the top of the page. Or, if you need to talk to someone right now, you can always connect with our friend 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 crisis counselor. It's free, confidential, and available 24/7.

LINDSAY: And if you've enjoyed this episode and want to hear more, we hope you'll subscribe on iTunes or wherever you get this podcast. And if you can do us a favor, we'd really love for you to write us a review. It'll 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.

[music playing]

LINDSAY: A big thank you to our friends at Copeland for the original music on this episode. The TWLOHA podcast is produced by Mark Codgen, with editorial support by Claire Biggs and Rebecca Ebert. Music assistance was provided by James Likeness and Ben Tichenor. I'm Lindsay Kolsch. Thank you so much for listening.

LINDSAY: 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 To Write Love on Her Arms at twloha.com.