

THE S WORD

Logline

A suicide attempt survivor is on a mission to find fellow survivors and document their stories of courage, insight and humor. Along the way, she discovers a rising national movement transforming personal struggles into action.

Synopsis

THE S WORD is a powerful feature documentary that puts a human face on a topic that has long been stigmatized and buried with the lives it has claimed. The film gives a platform to those with lived experience - people who have attempted to take their own lives and survived to tell their stories. These are the voices that have been silenced for so long and their stories could save lives. Capturing personal revelations and surprising moments of humor, THE S WORD opens a door on this most taboo of subjects through the eyes of the people who have been there and are now committed to preventing others from getting to that edge.

Our central subject, attempt survivor **Dese'Rae Stage**, embarks on a mission to find fellow survivors and share their stories and portraits with the world. Suicide has affected her since she can remember; as a child, a family friend died by suicide, and as a teenager, her best friend died by suicide. She herself attempted suicide at 23 and continues to struggle through cycles of loneliness and depression. After moving to New York and pursuing a career in photography, she discovers that many of her own questions can be addressed using her camera, and she begins to explore life on the other side of suicide. As she becomes a recognized pioneer of a new movement, she also proposes marriage to her girlfriend Fel.

As Des pursues her vision, she discovers a vibrant community of other attempt survivors who we meet through her unique lens:

- Boston-area resident **Craig Miller** was eight years old the first time he considered suicide. At that time, he was being molested by an adult neighbor. After his failed suicide attempt at the age of 20 he turned back to his salvation — writing. His book [This Is How It Feels](#), is now spreading the message that life is an opportunity instead of a burden. As he travels the country telling his story, he tries to balance the pressures of suicide prevention with the strains of his day job and the needs of his family. His story continues to unfold.

- **Kelechi Ubozoh** explains her suicide attempt this way: “I wore a mask every day, pretending to be happy when I was not.” Growing up, people would describe her as the happiest person they knew. But wearing that mask of “the strong black woman” almost leads to her death, because she doesn’t share her internal pain with anyone. After her attempt, she hoped that recovery meant never having a suicidal thought again, but has since come to learn the thoughts are still there. Now living in Oakland, California, Kelechi turns her struggles into action by working as an advocate for the underserved population of people caught up in the Bay Area mental health system. “We need to have the brown faces talking about this as well. It’s not just a white issue.”
- **Leah Harris** is a Washington D.C. mother, storyteller, suicide survivor and activist. Raised by her grandparents after her mother was institutionalized and diagnosed with schizophrenia, Leah herself survives multiple suicide attempts, including her most serious at 16. Surviving her suicide attempts leads her to the realization that maybe she is supposed to be here. After being introduced to a movement led by a group of “ex-mental patients” striving for change in the system, her calling becomes evident. She turns to advocacy, becoming an activist fighting to change policy on Capitol Hill to one which promotes human rights, dignity and parity for mental health, a journey that takes her to the White House to speak, a pinnacle in her ongoing crusade to make suicide the next social justice issue of our time.

Within this unique and personal approach, THE S WORD takes an intimate look at the lives of these survivors and their loved ones and records their candid and profoundly emotional stories of survival...and gives us all a guide to a future with fewer suicides.

The film’s narrative flows organically from one to the next, starting with personal moments and building emotional momentum before widening out to show how their journeys are driving the national movement to take the “S” word from unthinkable to preventable.