

**For Immediate Release**

## **National OCD Walk Returns to Boston to Raise Awareness, Fight Stigma, and Break a World Record!**

Boston, May 15, 2018 — The International OCD Foundation (IOCDF) will be hosting Boston's 6<sup>th</sup> *Annual 1 Million Steps 4 OCD Walk* on Sunday, June 3rd at Jamaica Pond. The Walk is the largest grassroots awareness-building and fundraising campaign to highlight obsessive compulsive disorder (OCD) and related disorders, including body dysmorphic disorder (BDD) and hoarding disorder (HD). In addition to the flagship Boston Walk, there will be 25 affiliate Walks held across the country, as well as Community Walks taking place around the world! Funds raised at the Walk will help to improve the lives of those living with OCD and related disorders by supporting the important work of the International OCD Foundation and its partnering Local Affiliates.

Based in Boston, the IOCDF is the largest non-profit organization focused solely on improving the lives of those impacted by OCD and related disorders. Their programs aim to support all those affected by OCD, and to further educate the greater community about what it means to live with OCD and/or a related disorder. The annual *1 Million Steps 4 OCD Walk* is vital to supporting these programs and raising much needed awareness.

**It's estimated that 1 in 100 adults and 1 in 200 children live with OCD.** Despite its prevalence, OCD is often misunderstood and misrepresented in the media as a personality quirk or helpful trait that keeps people organized. In reality, OCD is debilitating and severely impacts those living with the disorder, as well as their friends and family. OCD can be treated using Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) and/or medication, however, it takes, on average, 14 to 17 years between onset of OCD symptoms and access to effective treatment. Common barriers to treatment include lack of awareness, inadequate resources, and fear of stigma surrounding mental health disorders.

*"Imagine that there was a cure for cancer, but people either didn't know about it, or were too afraid of being stigmatized to ask for help. This is unfortunately the reality for many people who suffer from OCD, and this needs to change,"* explains Jeff Szymanski, PhD, executive director of the IOCDF. *"The 1 Million Steps 4 OCD Walk is about building awareness — and making sure people know how to access the resources and support they need."*

The *1 Million Steps 4 OCD Walk* began in 2013, inspired by the pilgrimage of Denis Asselin. In 2012, Denis walked from his home in Cheyney, PA, to Boston, MA in memory of his son, Nathaniel. Nathaniel took his own life at the age of just 24, after a long struggle with severe body dysmorphic disorder (BDD) and OCD. Denis walked almost 500 miles — roughly one million steps -- to honor his son and raise awareness about the disease that stole his life. Each June, the community walks together to further this mission of awareness-building and stigma-reduction.

This year, in an effort to create even greater awareness, the IOCDF plans to use the Boston Walk as a platform to create a community health fair and break a new world record! Walk participants will be invited to help break the record for having the most people wearing shoes on the wrong feet! The current record is 160, but with over 400 people expected to attend the Walk, the IOCDF is confident that they can break this.

In addition to breaking a world record, the Boston walk will break the IOCDF's record for having the most individuals serving as grand marshals'. The IOCDF is pleased to welcome 60 kids and teens from Bradley Hospital to serve as the grand marshals of the Boston Walk. Based in Rhode Island, Bradley is the leader in pediatric and adolescent mental health, offering inpatient and outpatient mental health services. The kids and teens representing Bradley will include program alumni as well as those who are currently undergoing treatment for OCD.

Over the last 5 years the *1 Million Steps 4 OCD Walk* has continued to grow exponentially. To celebrate this growth, the IOCDF will be hosting a Health Fair at the Boston Walk and inviting local health-related organizations to setup tables and distribute information about the work that they do.

The IOCDF invites all members of the community to join the *1 Million Steps 4 OCD Walk* this June to raise awareness, funds, and hope. To learn more, visit [www.iocdf.org/walkBoston](http://www.iocdf.org/walkBoston).

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#### **About the International OCD Foundation**

The International OCD Foundation is a donor-supported nonprofit organization, working to increase access to effective treatment, end the stigma associated with mental health issues, and foster a community for those affected by OCD and the professionals who treat them. Based in Boston, the IOCDF has affiliates in 25 states and territories, as well as 12 global partners. The IOCDF has granted millions of dollars for OCD research, and is a vital resource for the estimated 1 in 100 individuals with OCD around the world. For more information, visit [www.iocdf.org](http://www.iocdf.org).

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