

UMATTER
YOUTH SUICIDE PREVENTION
Overview

Federal Support for Vermont Youth Suicide Prevention

In the fall of 2008, the Center for Health and Learning (CHL) collaborated with the Child, Adolescent and Family Mental Health division of the Vermont Department of Mental Health to secure a three-year 1.5 million dollar federal grant in youth suicide prevention. The grant is administered through the Center for Mental Health Services of the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), as part of the Garrett Lee Smith Memorial Act funding. Its primary objective is to equip Vermont youth and adults with the knowledge, skills and resources to respond effectively to suicidal behavior in youth. In Vermont the campaign's signature phrase is *Umatter*.

Vermont Youth Suicide Prevention Coalition (VYSPC)

The SAMHSA funding has underwritten the formation of the Vermont Youth Suicide Prevention Coalition. VYSPC consists of representatives from public health and education, suicide prevention advocacy and survivor groups, youth leadership, law enforcement, Vermont 2-1-1, state agencies and private mental health services. The mission of the coalition is to create school and community-based support for youth suicide prevention planning statewide, which includes the development of a multi-year plan to ensure long-term, sustainable approaches to prevention and early intervention.



Even though suicide is rare, it is still the second leading cause of death for Vermont youth between the ages of 11 and 23. In many cases it is preventable – if adults know the warning signs and the steps they can take to get help. Ninety per cent of suicide attempts are made by people with diagnosable mental health problems. Training adults to provide early and appropriate support and interventions, creating environments free of harassment and bullying and encouraging help-seeking behaviors can reduce the likelihood of youth suicide. The *Umatter* project and the United Ways of Vermont recently collaborated on providing the staff at the Vermont 2-1-1 helpline with the opportunity to receive training in the National Lifelines protocol for suicide prevention and intervention responses.

Positive mental health and the cultivation of youth assets can have a profound effect on student performance and the quality of life within the school community. In addition to educating participants in dealing effectively with crisis situations and intervention, the *Umatter* Youth Suicide Prevention Project places emphasis on building assets and strengthening resiliency in youth. The intent is to give youth the message that feeling depressed is a common experience and that asking for help is not a sign of weakness but an act of courage. They are encouraged to discover the gifts and talents they possess, to see how they might contribute to the lives and well-being of others, to understand their impact in the larger community and to identify the things they feel passionate about. This means focusing more on their assets than on their liabilities, building on their strengths and helping them connect to their family, their friends, community and to the Big Picture.

Professional Protocol Development and Training

Umatter for Schools

Training is at the heart of the Umatter project. In schools, small teams are trained as Gatekeepers. Each team, which includes an Administrative Sponsor, School Liaison, Health Educator and Community Liaison, is responsible for preparing the school community to respond to suicide risks and warning signs, developing or updating school suicide prevention protocols and implementing the *Lifelines* curriculum.

Lifelines is a research-based, field-tested curriculum that encourages students to understand the crucial role they play in identifying suicidal behavior in their friends (or themselves). In addition to teaching students how to offer an appropriate response and how to find help, *Lifelines* stresses how important it is for them to be inclined to take such action. It fulfills Vermont law H.630, which requires the inclusion of youth suicide prevention in the health education curriculum for middle and high school students.

Umatter for Professionals

Because there is no such thing as a typical suicide victim and because suicidal behavior arises from a complex and diverse set of factors, effective prevention requires a comprehensive, sustainable public approach within the community. In addition to the Gatekeeper and *Lifelines* trainings, CHL offers trainings to professionals who are likely to come into contact with suicidal youth. People will be identified from among various professions to become “community educators.” These educators will first be trained as Gatekeepers and will then be trained in the material for their specific professional discipline. They will train their peers/colleagues in schools and in the community. CHL staff will be available at all times for technical assistance to support this training and make it available to the following professionals: Mental Health and Substance Abuse Providers; Primary Care Physicians; Law Enforcement and First Responders; Social Service Workers; Faith Leaders and Funeral Directors.

Public Information

CHL has launched two web sites, UMatterUCanHelp.com for parents and professionals and UMatterUCanGetHelp.com for youth. The *Umatter* message and logo figure prominently in a statewide media campaign that focuses on reducing the stigma associated with being a consumer of mental health services.

Evaluation

Umatter has contracted with VCHIP (Vermont Child Health Improvement Program) to evaluate the effectiveness of the CHL trainings and state media campaign and to contribute data to a national survey on the effectiveness of youth suicide prevention efforts across the country.



For more information on the Umatter Youth Suicide Prevention Project and school and community-based trainings, contact:

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