

Educating Decision Makers about Suicide Prevention

SPRC Regions I and II Conference
Meriden, CT

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Advocacy

- "Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it's the only thing that ever has." - Margaret Mead
- "The rights of every person are diminished when the rights of one are threatened." - John F. Kennedy
- "Human progress is neither automatic nor inevitable... Every step toward the goal of justice requires sacrifice, suffering, and struggle; the tireless exertions and passionate concern of dedicated individuals." - Martin Luther King, Jr.



What is Advocacy?

ADVOCACY = active verbal support for a cause or an issue

ADVOCATE = somebody who supports or speaks in favor of something
somebody who acts or intercedes on behalf of another somebody who pleads another's case in a legal forum

Advocacy is a means of exercising your 1st amendment right, which guarantees your the right to peaceably assemble, and to petition the government for a redress of grievances.



Advocacy is...

“using your personal story and life experience to change hearts, minds and attitudes through education and example on a day-to-day basis.”

Stephen Propst
DBSA Newsletter
Summer 2003



Why Advocate?

- Raise awareness
- Educate
- Change laws
- Obtain funding
- Improve services
- Make a difference
- Help others



How to be a successful advocate

- Know your issue (facts, figures, statistics)
- Know what you want (research, funding, legislation)
- Know the champions for suicide prevention
- Know the position of your elected officials
 - Are they in the majority/minority?
 - Do they serve on a relevant committee?
 - Have they established a voting record?
 - Do they have a connection to the issue?
- Know what others are saying about this issue
 - Who supports and who opposes
- Know what else is being done around your issue



How can it be done?

- Form/join a coalition
- Introduce a resolution
- Introduce language in a bill or in the record
- Hold a hearing
- Conduct/participate in awareness events
- Develop a plan with concrete action steps
- Ask others to get involved
- Evaluate performance
- Ask the media to cover the issue



What to ask elected officials for

- Introduce legislation
- Cosponsor legislation
- Sign delegation letter
- Vote for/against a bill
- Write a letter to a federal or state agency on your behalf
- Enter a statement in the Congressional Record
- Your representative's position on a given issue
- A letter to a Committee Chairman or Ranking Member on your behalf
- Arrange a meeting with other federal or state agencies or officials
- Attend a meeting or event you are organizing
- Answer a question or concern you have
- Obtain copies of government reports



The Federal Products of Advocacy

- S.Res.84
- H.Res.212
- Surgeon General's Call to Action to Prevent Suicide (1999)
- National Strategy for Suicide Prevention (NSSP)
- Crisis Line Grant
- Garrett Lee Smith Memorial Act (P.L. 108-355)
- Suicide Prevention Resource Center (SPRC)



State Products of Advocacy

- Special Reports
- State Capitol Awareness Events
- State funding for suicide prevention
- State plans
- Increased awareness re: suicide



How to communicate?

- Letter (stick to one issue)
- Visit
 - DC Office
 - State Office
 - District Office
- Phone call
- Fax
- E-mail (<http://capwiz.com/spanusa>)
- Town hall meetings
- Public activities/events



A Sample Letter



The Honorable XXX
XXX Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

May 17, 2005

Dear Senator XXX,

On behalf of the Suicide Prevention Action Network grassroots community, I am writing to ask for your cosponsorship of S.486, the Senator Paul Wellstone Mental Health Equitable Treatment Act of 2003, introduced by Senator Pete Domenici and currently cosponsored by sixty-four of your colleagues.

Your support would ensure the provision of equal coverage of mental health benefits with respect to health insurance coverage unless comparable limitations are imposed on medical and surgical benefits.

As you know, every 17 minutes someone in America takes their own life. Suicide ranks 11th as a cause of death in the nation and ranks 3rd among youth ages 10-24. We must ensure the passage of S.486 during this legislative session. With your help, many Americans struggling with mental illness will receive the help that is available to treat their illness and have the chance to return to a normal and healthy quality of life as a result.

Please join your colleagues in cosponsoring S.486, the Senator Paul Wellstone Mental Health Equitable Treatment Act of 2003. One way to prevent suicide is to ensure available treatment is accessible and affordable for all who need it. The passage of S.486 is an important step in the right direction. I urge you to cosponsor this important legislation.

Sincerely,



Guide to Communication

- Be brief, bright and gone
- Stick to one issue
- Be polite and specific (please support S.486)
- Is there a local story?
- Ask for a response
- Give your name and address
- Get more tips about communicating with elected officials at:
<http://capwiz.com/spanusa/issues/basics/?style=comm>



Who to approach?

- At the local level:
 - Mayor's office
 - City/County Agencies
 - Local media
 - Local advocacy groups
 - Local businesses
 - Local schools
 - Local faith community
 - Local philanthropic groups
- At the state level:
 - Governor
 - State legislators
 - State agencies
 - State advocacy groups
 - State interest groups
 - State business community
 - State philanthropic groups
 - State affiliates



Who to approach?

- At the national level:
 - White House
 - Congress
 - U.S. Senate
 - U.S. House of Representatives
 - Other national interest groups
 - National media sources
 - National corporations
 - National faith community
 - National philanthropic groups



What are we asking for?

- Full FY 2006 Appropriation of the Garrett Lee Smith Memorial Act (PL 108-355)
- Passage of the Senator Paul Wellstone Mental Health Equitable Treatment Act
- \$5 million to CDC for suicide prevention research and evaluation
- Legislation on senior suicide early intervention and prevention



Some important federal legislation

- **Family Opportunity Act of 2005**
(S. 183/ H.R.1443)
- **Medicare Mental Health Modernization Act of 2005** (S.927)
- **Senator Paul Wellstone Mental Health Equitable Treatment Act of 2005**
(H.R.1402)
- **Medicare Mental Health Copayment Equity Act of 2005**
(H.R.1125)
- **Keeping Families Together Act**
(S.380)



Child Healthcare Crisis Relief Act
(S.537/H.R.1106)

Important Reports

- President's New Freedom Commission on Mental Health (2003)
- Institute of Medicine Report – Reducing Suicide A National Imperative (2002)
- National Strategy for Suicide Prevention (2001)



Sample legislation

- **Virginia (SJ 312) Senate Joint Resolution**
Requesting the Secretary of Health and Human Resources, in cooperation with the Secretaries of Education and Public Safety, to formulate a comprehensive Suicide Prevention Across the Life Span Plan for the Commonwealth. Report.
- **Illinois (HB 4558) Suicide Prevention, Education, and Treatment Act**
Requiring that pilot programs must include major public awareness campaigns, statewide prevention conferences, and provide training and programs for suicide prevention.
- **Pennsylvania (HR 2000) House Resolution**
Recognizing youth mental illness and suicide as a State public health crisis and encouraging evidence-based initiatives to screen children and adolescents for mental disorders in order to identify illness and prevent suicide among youth



What has legislation accomplished?

- The development of a state suicide prevention plan
- The formation of a committee to investigate the problem of suicide and possible solutions
- The establishment of a day to promote awareness about suicide
- The creation of an office and/or position for a suicide prevention within the state



Sites to Search



- To learn about current federal and state legislation: <http://capwiz.com/spanusa/issues/bills/>
- To receive alerts on federal and state suicide prevention legislation: <http://capwiz.com/spanusa/mlm/signup/>
- To search state legislatures: <http://www.ncsl.org/public/leglinks.cfm>
- To see some examples of suicide prevention legislation (state and federal): <http://www.phppo.cdc.gov/od/phlp/suicidelegislation.asp>



To search current & old federal legislation: <http://thomas.loc.gov>

10 P's of Public Policy Advocacy

- Be Professional
- Be Prepared
- Be Persistent
- Be Persuasive
- Be Passionate
- Be Precise
- Be Patient
- Be Political
- Be Positive
- Be Polite



Advocacy beyond the Legislature

- Media
- State staff
- Faith based groups
- Community groups
- Business groups
- Schools
- Health care professionals
- First responders
- Law enforcement



Bottom Line.....

- We advocate to build political will and effect change.
- We are greater as a group than any one of our individual parts.
- Advocacy requires knowing what you want, a willingness to go after it, and sticking with it until you get it.
- Saving lives is our goal. The time to act is now.



Suicide Rates



Conclusion



- Advocacy should be purposeful
- Inspire others to help
- Offer to do the work to get it done
- Remember only 5% of bills introduced make it to law
- There are a finite number of \$\$\$
- Know what you want and why
- You have the right to ask
- Keep a record of your efforts
- You will make a difference
- If you don't act, it may not get done



Advocacy is a lot like growing bamboo


