

American Foundation for Suicide Prevention
Montana Chapter
2/17/05

The Montana Chapter of the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention (AFSP) was founded in 2001 by Elinor Edmunds, Cindy O'Connell and Michael Craig after Mike's son, Allen John Craig, completed suicide in Missoula at age 13. AFSP is the only national nonprofit organization dedicated to suicide prevention and suicide prevention research. AFSP Montana is the only statewide organization dedicated to suicide prevention in Montana. Its board of directors, members and supporters come from all around the state.

AFSP Montana and QPR

AFSP Montana is committed to providing suicide prevention training throughout Montana. The chapter uses QPR (Question, Persuade and Refer), a recognized effective suicide intervention/prevention skill, to teach lay people of all ages to become gatekeepers for suicide prevention.

A gatekeeper is someone in a position to recognize a crisis and warning signs that someone may be contemplating suicide. Gatekeepers include parents, friends, teachers, school counselors, nurses, police, firefighters, and middle, high school and college students. AFSP Montana has taught QPR in communities from Wolf Point to Missoula and from Great Falls to Dillon, in schools, to community groups, service organizations, and church groups, reaching over 2,500 Montanans.

Much like CPR or the Heimlich maneuver, the fundamentals of QPR are easily learned. And like CPR and the Heimlich maneuver, the application of QPR may save a life. QPR teaches people how to recognize the warning signs, clues, and suicidal communication of people in trouble and to act vigorously to prevent a possible tragedy.

The one-hour QPR training consists of three life-saving skills of how to:

- Question a person about suicide
- Persuade the person to get help and
- Refer the person to for treatment

Knowing QPR empowers people to overcome their reluctance to become involved. QPR gatekeepers, by learning how to recognize the suicidal person's cries for help and taking positive action, plant the seeds of hope. And it is hope, more than anything else that helps reduce the risk of suicide and saves lives. Montana now has 150 certified QPR instructors in 44 communities.

In December 2003 the Montana Faith-Health Demonstration Project awarded AFSP Montana a grant to establish the Montana Suicide Prevention Training Coordination Center for QPR. The center matches certified QPR instructors with communities seeking QPR gatekeeper training.

Many people in a suicidal crisis have difficulty accessing mental health services, even with the help of a QPR gatekeeper. AFSP Montana is working with community-based suicide prevention groups to build local resource banks of same-day appointments, sliding fee scales and pro bono mental health services to begin to address this problem. If people in a suicidal crisis receive the appropriate mental health treatment, they may never experience another suicidal crisis.

By linking communities with QPR instructors to teach the suicide intervention / prevention skills of QPR, more Montanans will become empowered to take positive action to prevent suicides in their communities. Working together we can offer hope to people in a suicide crisis, and hope does save lives.

Activities Update

- Certified QPR Instructor Training. Co-sponsored Dr. Paul Quinnett, developer of QPR, to train 120 new Montana QPR instructors, Missoula in 2003; Billings in 2004. Self-study QPR instructor training scholarships are available from AFSP Montana.

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- QPR Gatekeeper Training and Community Outreach. Taught over 2,500 Montanans the suicide prevention skill of QPR.
- AFSP Survivor Support Group Facilitator Training. AFSP workshop trained 23 Montanans how to facilitate a support group; Missoula, June of 2003. A second suicide survivor support group facilitator training will be offered in 2005.
- AFSP Survivors of Suicide Day Teleconference. Annual telecast on the Saturday before Thanksgiving features survivors panel and experts in suicide prevention. Great Falls, 2002, 2003 and 2004; Helena, Fort Belknap, Bozeman and Missoula, 2004. Communities interested in being a teleconference site should contact AFSP Montana.
- AFSP 'Out of the Darkness' Community Walk in Billings, 2004; planned for fall of 2005 in Great Falls, Missoula and Billings.