Identifying and Engaging Peer Support
Networks on Campus
Promoting Student Safety and Well Being

SAMHSA/CMHS
GLS Suicide Prevention Grantee Meeting
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SPRC Strategic Planning Model

1. Describe the problem
2. Set goals
3. Identify strategies
4. Select interventions
5. Development evaluation plan
6. Create action plan
7. Implement, evaluate, & improve

Identifying Need Areas

- Annual suicide rate on College campuses
  - 7.5 per 100,000 students (Silverman et al, 1997)
- ACHA-NCHA Findings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>In the last 32 months, have you?</th>
<th>Fall 2000</th>
<th>Fall 2004</th>
<th>Fall 2007</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Felt very sad</td>
<td>40.7</td>
<td>37.2</td>
<td>36.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Felt so depressed it was difficult to function</td>
<td>43.9</td>
<td>41.0</td>
<td>40.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seriously considered attempting suicide</td>
<td>11.0</td>
<td>10.6</td>
<td>10.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attempted Suicide</td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>1.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have you ever:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Been diagnosed with depression</td>
<td>10.1</td>
<td>10.7</td>
<td>10.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Healthy Minds Study

- When students experience problems, 70% talk to their friends about it
- Personally-held vs. perceived stigmas in others regarding mental health and treatment
  - Perceived stigma is much more common
  - Personally-held stigma has a significant negative correlation with help-seeking, perceived stigma has no significant correlation
  - Personally-held stigmas correlate with being male, lower SES, Asian or Pacific Islander, younger, an international student, and/or having strong religious beliefs

National Data on Students Considering Suicide

- 55% of students had experienced suicidal thoughts in their lifetime
- 46% never talk to anyone else about thoughts or suicidal attempts
- Of those who talked to others, 67% first told a friend/peer
- Of those who talked to others, 52% found it helpful and 58% were advised to seek professional help

Drum et al, 2009
National Research Consortium of Counseling Centers (June 2009 issue of Professional Psychology: Research and Practice)

mtvU and Associated Press College Stress and Mental Health Poll (Spring 2009)

- Friends and family are most sought out
  - 77% would turn to friends for help
  - 67% would turn to parents for help
- Students are less inclined to seek professional help
  - 20% say they would turn to school counseling
  - 6% would turn to Resident Advisor
- 3% would turn to a crisis hotline

(Eisenberg et al, 2009)
WPI Specific Data

- 44% reported feeling so depressed over the past year that they have not been able to function (approximately 1702 students)
- 7.6% have seriously contemplated suicide over the past year (289 students)
- 1.7% have made a suicide attempt (65 students)

2004 WPI “The Health Survey”

Enhancing a Network of Support

- Who is responsible for the design and implementation of preventive mental health programming on campus?
- Who are the individuals and groups within campus communities who are most influential within a network of student support?

WPI Student Support Network (SSN)

- Identifying and selecting student participants
  - E-mail to faculty and staff
  - General advertising/programming
- Training SSN participants (6 week training)
  - Knowledge
  - Skills
  - Perspectives/Stigma reduction
  - Connection

SSN Knowledge Areas

- Mental Health Concerns
  - Depression
  - Anxiety
  - Self-harm
  - Suicide
  - Substance Abuse
- Orientation to Available Resources

SSN Skill Areas

- Providing support in the moment
  - Listening/empathy (the hammer)
  - Resist urges to fix
  - Acceptance
- Successfully connecting friends with help
  - Process orientation
  - Stages of change model
  - Working with resistance
SSN Perspectives

- De-stigmatizing view of mental health
- Normalization of struggles
- Functional vs. Diagnostic descriptions
- “It’s not us and them… it’s us and us”

- Enhancing Connection
  - Networking within support system
  - Helping the helpers
  - Enhancing a community of support

Empowering and Supporting Student Initiatives

- Specialized training offered in key areas
- Supporting additional opportunities for student involvement
  - Programming
  - Marketing
- Feeds existing and new traditional Peer Ed
- Active Minds at WPI

Evaluating SSN Outcomes (based on 168 student participants)

- Pre/post SIRI II results indicate significantly better crisis responding skills
- Students demonstrated significant improvement in the following areas:
  - Recognizing warning signs for suicide
  - Making appropriate referrals for support
  - Convincing someone to get help
  - Discussing suicide with others
- Significantly Increased Student Outreach to the SDCC for consultation

Student Participant Perspectives

- “The series opened doors to talking about issues generally classified as taboo. The easy-going, relaxed atmosphere made it very comfortable to talk and learn.”
- “It was worthwhile because I got to know the SDCC staff and learn of the resources available for troubled students.”
- “I feel it helped me realize how to help others cope with their problems and also how to better cope with my own. Most importantly, I feel like I could actually help someone talk about and solve their issues.”
- “It was worthwhile because even if I don’t end up using this in college, it is something that I can use for the rest of my life.”

More Information on WPI Student Support Network

- SSN Training Manual has been submitted for review and listing on Suicide Prevention Resource Center (SPRC) Best Practices Registry
- Manual is available to campuses who are considering implementing a peer networking program
- SSN will continue to evolve with SAMHSA funding to include faculty/staff as well as specialized trainings for international and under-represented students

WPI Student Development and Counseling Center

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