Grass Roots Cultural Change

TAKING IT TO THE STUDENTS

SAMHSA/CMHS
GLS Suicide Prevention Grantee Meeting

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Charlie Morse, MA, Worcester Polytechnic Institute
  cmorse@wpi.edu
Larry Kohn, MS, Boston University
  kohnman@bu.edu
Doug Johnson, PhD, The University of Maine
  Doug_Johnson@umit.maine.edu
Bethany Asquith Walsh, MEd, The University of Maine
  Bethany_asquith@umit.maine.edu
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)
The Jed Foundation/SPRC Comprehensive Approach to Suicide Prevention and Mental Health Promotion

- Identify Students at Risk
- Increase Help-seeking Behavior
- Promote Social Networks
- Develop Life Skills
- Restrict Access to Potentially Lethal Means
- Provide Mental Health Services
- Follow Crisis Management Procedures
Touchstone Project Philosophy

- Thomas Joiner
  - *Why People Die by Suicide (2005)*

Those who desire suicide:
- Perceived burdensomeness
- Failed belongingness

Those who are capable of suicide.

Serious attempt or death by suicide.
Moving toward Social Justice

- Prevention targeted at the factors that create the context and conditions that can lead to suicide
  - “belonging” and “purpose”
- Creating a caring responsive campus culture
- Social Injustice
  - Any –ism
  - Ridicule
  - Exclusion
  - Rejection
  - Marginalization
  - Discrimination
  - Harassment
Today’s College Student

- College students show rising rates of:
  - individualism, self-esteem, narcissism and positive self-views.

- **Empathic Concern** - over the misfortunes of others
  - 40% reduction in past 30 years

- **Perspective Taking** – ability to take others perspectives

- **Fantasy** – tendency to identify with fictional characters

- **Personal Distress** – anguish over misfortunes of others

- “Changes in Dispositional Empathy in American College Students Over Time: A Meta-Analysis,” Sara Konrath
Engaging students IS suicide prevention!

- Our Educational System is designed to promote Social Justice
  - A sense of responsibility for each other’s welfare
  - Bystander Intervention
- Everyone contributes to suicide prevention when they do their job well.
  - Faculty
  - Staff
  - Students
Who wants training?

- **Student Leaders**
  - Highly functioning and involved
  - Generally aware of services

- **Other Students**
  - Variety of needs, functioning, and involvement on campus
  - Students go to students for help
  - Desire education, training, and resources to support interventions
  - Want to provide opportunities for personal development
    - Resume-building
Touchstone Social Network

- A network of students trained in advance helping skills
- Training intended to be used through natural social networks
- Modeled after the BACCHUS Certified Peer Educator training

**Topics covered include:**
- Social Justice
- Active listening
- Bystander Intervention
- Crisis prevention and Intervention
- Boundaries and Self Care
- Responding and Referral
Touchstone Peers

- Graduates from the Touchstone Social Network
  - Campaigns aimed at reducing barriers to services by increasing awareness and decreasing stigma
  - Engage with students to increase active engagement, connection, and belonging
  - Serve as a resource to students seeking to belong by staffing an office in the Student Union
Lessons Learned and Next Steps

- Students struggle with empathy and perspective-taking
- Students value relationships over ‘causes’
  - Struggle with defining what their ‘passion’ is
- Move away from didactic presentations toward experiential learning
  - Student Support Network
Next Steps: Sustainability

- Peer Education and Touchstone Peers merge
  - Combined goals of educating students and connecting to them individually

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Touchstone Peers</th>
<th>Peer Educators</th>
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<tr>
<td>Staff Office</td>
<td>Staff Office</td>
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<td>Health Campaigns and Marketing</td>
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<td>Public Health Approach</td>
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<td>Mental Health, Wellbeing</td>
<td>Sexual Health, Wellbeing</td>
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<td>One-on-one contact with students</td>
<td>Present material to groups</td>
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Awesome Outcomes

- **Touchstone Peer created support group**
  - Not affiliated with the Counseling Center- totally student run
  - 5-7 participants weekly

- **Anecdotes**
  - Students
  - Staff
  - Faculty
  - Counselors
Touchstone Project

- Faculty Staff Trainings
  - Touchstone Basics (10-15 minutes)
  - Touchstone Resource (2.5 hours)
- Student Trainings
  - Touchstone Gatekeeper (1.5 hours)
  - Touchstone Social Network (12 hour)
  - Touchstone Peers (ongoing)
- Touchstone Web
  - AFSP’s Interactive Screening Program
  - Counseling Center Website
Touchstone Web

- Online ANONYMOUS depression screening
- Rated as:
  - Tier 1(A & B) – High Risk
  - Tier 2 – Moderate Risk
  - Tier 3 – Low Risk
- Personalized Feedback
  - From Counseling Center clinician
- Interventions offered:
  - Anonymous Dialogue with Counselor
  - Face to Face Counseling Session
  - Referral to a campus partner
  - Meeting with a Touchstone Peer
- Invitation or Self Referral
Existing Networks of Student Support

- Where are the naturally occurring networks of student support?

- Who are the individuals and groups within these networks who are most influential within a network of student support?
Student Support Network (SSN)  
Program Overview

- Connecting with key students within a six week training series
- Both recruitment and welcoming all interested students
- Retaining student trainees during training
- Differentiating SSN from traditional peer education programs
Key elements of SSN Training

- Six week series with a primary focus on connection
- Experiential elements in every training
  - Visualization exercises, metaphor, role play
- Provide both knowledge and skills development
- Provide helpers with ongoing consultation and 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
SSN Outcomes

- Over 270 students trained in the past four years
- Significantly enriched and expanded traditional peer education/support programs
- 4x increase in the number of students consulting with concerns about a friend
- Evidence of campus cultural enrichment
- Generating grass roots support