University of Wisconsin – Eau Claire

Post-Vention Response and Realities

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UWEC Context

- 4-year Liberal Arts Undergraduate University
  - Enroll approx. 10,000 students (500 graduate)
  - Predominantly European American, 1st Generation, Rural, Lower SES
- Five years prior to GLS funds ~4 suicides
  - 2yrs prior, suicide of student who was child of well-known employee
- Late Jan/Early Feb of year 1 of grant award
  - Very well known & respected student died by suicide
UWEC Postvention Response

- **Email from Dean of Students**
  - Parents requested cause of death be shared
  - *Strong emotionally laden language*

- **Classroom Visits (1st time ever)**
  - Representative from DoS and CS
  - Loosely structured script:
    - Condolences, Range of Emotions,
    - Info & Encouragement to use CS, left cards
    - Wait in hallway for 10-15min for immediate needs
UWEC Postvention Response

- **Debriefing Support Sessions**
  - Within 1-3 days of email announcement
  - Student Groups, Close Peers invited
  - Content:
    - Grief process, Acceptability of Diverse Reactions/Emotions
    - Open discussion: memories, reactions, questions
    - Encouraged accessing support resources, info provided
    - *(no university structured follow-up)*

- **University Wide “Day of Remembrance”**
  - Already established practice (1<sup>st</sup> Wed in May)
  - For all Blugolds lost during past year regardless
Sequelai of Events

- At memorial for student (off campus):
  - Many stories were shared
  - Reveal of bird that was her inspiration....
    - All over social media, STEM group made memorial t-shirts
    - Student paper / Community paper stories
      - From parents: “long battle with depression, sought help, didn’t work for her, can work for others”
      - Community response → dragon boat race in honor
  - Triggers Cluster/Contagion of Suicide Deaths (6, 2 unconfirmed)
    - Culture among students = “everyone dies by suicide here”
What Happened?

- “Triggering Email?”
  - Clear differences in tone, length, response
  - All emails following student A were more concise
    - Some disclosed cause, others did not → RUMORS

- “Triggering Postvention Response?”
  - First time for classroom visits – set precedent
  - First time for debriefing sessions – no protocol

- Emotional Health of Responders
  - Huge toll on morale, energy, clinical tolerance
  - DoS “haggard” & engaged in self-blame for initial email
Steps Taking Now

- **Initiated Involvement & Improved Communication**
  - Crisis Action Team Meetings
  - Coordination with Community Crisis Response Partners

- **In-Progress Postvention Protocol & Kits**
  - Standardized text for student death announcements
  - Standardized protocol for classroom visits/orgs/teams
  - Standardized protocol for debriefing process
    - Set time frame for initial meeting
    - Consider follow-up debriefing ~2 weeks post-announcement
Remaining Questions & Concerns

- Remaining Questions & Concerns
  - Social Media & Monitoring Responses/Information Shared
  - Student Publications (media reporting guidelines)
  - Student & Faculty initiated memorials
  - Balancing of Disclosure (parental discretion)

- Debriefing and Helping Staff
  - No clear support provided