NORTH DAKOTA: Spirit Lake Nation Battles Youth Suicide

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In response to rising rates of suicide among its young people, North Dakota's Spirit Lake Tribe is taking steps to expand the scope of its suicide prevention efforts. The tribe’s Recovery and Wellness Outreach Suicide Prevention Program recently received a federal grant to fund a variety of prevention activities, including training peer leaders, spreading awareness about the warning signs of suicide, and carrying out interventions with vulnerable youth. The program’s objectives include conducting risk assessments with 400 youth and providing preventive services to approximately 1,200 individuals per year. Spirit Lake has also formed a suicide prevention coalition, called Wiconi Ohitika or "Strong Life," which recently intervened when it discovered the potential formation of a suicide cluster among children in the community. Tribal Planning Director Ila McKay said that the increase in suicide deaths has had a devastating impact on Spirit Lake, “There’s a lot of pain, a lot of confusion, and a lot of anger in the community.” That sentiment was echoed by Suicide Prevention Director of the North Dakota Department of Health Alison Traynor, who said, “One suicide is too many, and spikes shown here represent devastation for families and communities.”

Spark Extra! Learn more about suicide prevention among American Indians and Alaska Natives [2].

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