A Public Health Approach to Campus Suicide Prevention

Laurie Davidson
Suicide Prevention Resource Center
Campus Suicide Prevention: The Big Picture
Harrisonburg, VA
October 16, 2009

What We’ll Talk About

• Observations and conclusions
• Public health principles
• Building momentum and broad ownership
• Resources to help you get started or sustain your efforts
An Observation

Problems occur at multiple levels

Based on DeJong & Langford, 2002

A Logical Conclusion

We need to intervene at multiple levels

Based on DeJong & Langford, 2002
Another Observation

Consequences are experienced at multiple levels

Individual
Interpersonal
Institutional
Community
Society

Based on DeJong & Langford, 2002

Another Logical Conclusion

Problem is one of the entire campus and community
Public Health Principles

Intervene at multiple levels with multiple, integrated strategies

- Enhancing and promoting health
- Primary prevention
- Early recognition and intervention
- Treatment
- Maintenance
- Postvention

Based on National Academies, 2009

The Jed Foundation; Suicide Prevention Resource Center
Public Health Principles

Think and plan strategically

1. Describe the problem and its context.
2. Identify priority problems and long-range goals.
3. Consult the science; identify strategies.
4. Select or develop interventions.
5. Develop an evaluation plan.
6. Create an action plan.
7. Implement, evaluate, improve.

Public Health Principles

Use best practices and tactics

*The Jed Foundation;
Suicide Prevention Resource Center
Implementing a Public Health Approach

- Obtain senior leadership support
- Solicit broad-based campus participation
- Employ a strategic planning process
- Continually evaluate

Leadership

- Is there a clear vision for addressing student mental health and wellness?
- Does senior administration share that vision?
- Which decision-makers are needed to support:
  - Vision
  - Strategic planning
  - Implementation
- Have you included the goal of systemic change?

Adapted from National Center for Mental Health and Youth Violence Prevention (2009)
Grantee Advice

“Take the first year to develop strategic liaisons and partnerships so that project goals can be implemented with campus support ....”

Collaboration: Starting a Task Force

- Who should be on it?
  - Membership
  - Chairperson(s)
- How should it work?
  - Organizational structure
  - Meeting frequency
- What should it accomplish?
- How long should it exist?

The Jed Foundation, 2006
Participation & Collaboration

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Obvious Partners</th>
<th>Other Essential Partners</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Counseling center</td>
<td>Facilities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health services</td>
<td>Food service</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health/wellness promotion</td>
<td>Housekeeping</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RAs</td>
<td>Learning center/tutors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community treatment providers</td>
<td>Teaching assistants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faculty</td>
<td>Academic dept.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>administrative staff</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Change...

“...involves recognizing a problem, searching for a way to change, and then beginning and sticking with that change strategy....”

– William R. Miller

Miller 1991
Barriers to Campus Change

• Lack of knowledge of the problem
• Intervention not seen as feasible
• Lack of buy-in from the community
• Lack of leadership
• Lack of resources

Solarz, 2002

Grantee Advice

“Don’t take it personally, but some will present barriers to your efforts.”

“Your passion will push through all the hard work and obstacles.”
Increasing Campus Readiness

- Use interviews to determine level of readiness
  - Identify 4 to 6 individuals who are connected to the issue
- Decide how to increase readiness of different groups to move forward with planning/implementation process

Adapted from
Tri-Ethnic Center for Prevention Research (2006); DeRicco (2007)

Stages of Campus Readiness

1. Tolerance/No Knowledge
2. Denial
3. Vague Awareness
4. Preplanning
5. Preparation
6. Initiation
7. Institutionalization/Stabilization
8. Confirmation/Expansion
9. Professionalization

Tri-Ethnic Center for Prevention Research (2006)
Stages of Campus Readiness

1. No Awareness
2. Denial
3. Vague Awareness
4. Preplanning
5. Preparation
6. Initiation
7. Institutionalization/Stabilization
8. Confirmation/Expansion
9. Professionalization

Tri-Ethnic Center for Prevention Research (2006)
**Stages of Campus Readiness**

1. No Awareness
2. Denial
3. Vague Awareness
4. Preplanning
5. Preparation
6. Initiation
7. Institutionalization/Stabilization
8. Confirmation/Expansion
9. Professionalization

---

*Tri-Ethnic Center for Prevention Research (2006)*
Strategic Planning

1. Describe the problem and its context.
2. Identify priority problems and long-range goals.
3. Consult the science; identify strategies.
4. Select or develop interventions.
5. Develop an evaluation plan.
6. Create an action plan.
7. Implement, evaluate, improve.

Grantee Advice

“Start slowly and take time to think out/plan out your initiatives. Leave room to change what you do as you’ll likely have to do so.”
Step 1: Describe Problem

- Why start with the problem?
  - To identify what is lacking
  - To provide focus and promote change
  - To ensure interventions match needs
  - To gain community and/or funder support
  - To gain credibility
Collect Data

• National
• State
• Community
• Campus

Campus-Specific Data

• ACHA-NCHA
• Healthy Minds study
• Drum et al
• Counseling center
• Residence life
• Student affairs
• Key informants
• Focus groups

Step 1: Describe Problem

Risk factors
– Bio-psycho-social
– Socio-cultural and environmental
– Demographic

Protective factors

Step 1: Describe Problem

• Look at what is currently in place
  – Programs, policies, activities and interventions
  – Assets and resources
  – Institutional climate, readiness
  – Partners or potential partners

Step 1: Describe Problem

• Collecting missing data
  – Quantitative: New survey
  – Qualitative: Focus groups (students, faculty, staff),
    large group brainstorming sessions
  – Inventory of current efforts, assets and climate
  – Anecdotal information
Step 1: Describe the Problem

• Example of problem analysis
  — Survey data: Prevalence of depressed students is of concern.
  — Causes & contributors: Current financial problems; challenges in help-seeking; quality of social support.
  — What is in place: Counseling center brochure; annual NASD; orientation presentation.
  — Climate: MH and suicide not seen as responsibility of many stakeholders, but senior administration is on board

Grantee Advice

“Be realistic in your goals and objectives, but also dare to think big.”
Strategic Planning

1. Describe the problem and its context.
2. Identify priority problems and long-range goals.
3. Consult the science; identify strategies.
4. Select or develop interventions.
5. Develop an evaluation plan.
6. Create an action plan.
7. Implement, evaluate, improve.

Step 2: Identify Priorities & Goals

- Prioritize identified problems
  - Where is the most significant impact? On which audiences?
  - What might be easily achieved?
  - What has been done in the past to address these problems and audiences?
Suicide Prevention Goals

• Decrease deaths by suicide
• Decrease suicide attempts
• Decrease suicidal ideation
• Decrease injuries from suicide attempts

Mental Health Promotion Goals

• Increase students’ ability to cope with life occurrences
  – Academic
  – Relationships
  – Financial
  – Job or career related
Mental Health Promotion Goals

- Decrease # of students with untreated depression and anxiety
- Decrease prevalence of high-risk drinking and its consequences
  - Academic problems
  - Relationship problems
  - Injury, assault, sexual assault
  - Death

Strategic Planning

1. Describe the problem and its context.
2. Identify priority problems and long-range goals.
3. Consult the science; identify strategies.
4. Select or develop interventions.
5. Develop an evaluation plan.
6. Create an action plan.
7. Implement, evaluate, improve.
Safety Warning: Essential Capacities

- Crisis protocol, with key players trained
- 24-hour hotlines widely publicized
- Sufficient mental health services on and off campus
- Clinicians trained to assess and manage suicide risk
Develop Life Skills

**Goal:**
- To promote the development of skills that will assist students as they face various challenges in school and in life.

Promote Social Networks

**Goal:**
- To promote relationship-building between students, staff, and faculty and a sense of community on campus.
Identify Students at Risk

Goal:
- To identify those students who may have mental health problems, be at risk for mental health problems, or be at risk for suicide

Increase Help-Seeking Behaviors

Goal:
- To increase the likelihood that a student who needs supportive services or counseling will seek out and secure assistance
Increase Access to Mental Health Services

Goals:
- To ensure that students who need services receive them
- To ensure services are appropriate and of high quality
- To assess and manage suicide risk

Follow Crisis Management Procedures

Goals:
- To respond effectively to students who are acutely distressed or suicidal
- To help survivors deal with grief and confusion and to prevent suicide contagion when a suicide does occur
Restrict Access to Lethal Means

Goal:
- To limit access to potential sites, weapons, and other agents that may facilitate dying by suicide

Strategic Planning

1. Describe the problem and its context.
2. Identify priority problems and long-range goals.
3. Consult the science; identify strategies.
4. Select or develop interventions.
5. Develop an evaluation plan.
6. Create an action plan.
7. Implement, evaluate, improve.
Final Grantee Advice

• Assemble a multidisciplinary implementation team.
• Plan with the outcomes in mind.
• Train your team and partners to think strategically.
• Encourage your team to question assumptions.
• Use ongoing evaluation results to improve plan.

It Takes a Community

“...the work of suicide prevention must occur at the community level, where human relationships breathe life into public policy.”

David Satcher, MD, PhD
Sixteenth Surgeon General

Our Future

www.sprc.org
• New Colleges & Universities web pages!
  • Online Library
  • Best Practices Registry
• Sign up for Weekly Spark
• CampusMHAP webinar series
  • Upcoming Guide
Planning Resources

- Community Toolbox
- Getting to Outcomes
- Health Education Resource Exchange: Behavior Theories and Models
- Evaluation Handbook

Resources

SPRC’s Campus Program Team
Leah Horn Roman - Kerri Smith
Dave Stewart

Laurie Davidson
617.618.2361
ldavidson@edc.org


