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## Introduction

### Did you know:

- Each week, an average of 2 young people complete suicide in Washington state
- Each week, another 14 youth make suicide attempts that result in hospitalization
- One out of 6 sixth graders acknowledge seriously considering suicide
- 32% of 10th graders reported feeling 'depressed or sad MOST days in the past two weeks'\*



While these facts are disturbing, there is hope. By educating ourselves and others, we can make a difference in preventing youth suicide. Some Washington communities are beginning to acknowledge youth suicide and talk more openly about it, because they don't want to lose any more young people.

The Youth Suicide Prevention Program (YSPPP) mission is to reduce teen suicide attempts and deaths in Washington State. Working toward that goal, we build public awareness, offer training, and support communities taking action.

### YSPPP takes an active role supporting communities:

- We provide Suicide Awareness presentations and trainings, so more youth and families can learn about the warning signs and how to respond to them.
- We assist communities to develop Suicide Prevention Action Plans — one of the main purposes of this Community Toolkit.
- We promote cooperation between mental and physical health resources and families.
- We advocate for the early identification of children's mental health issues and encourage families to seek help, rather than avoid it.
- We support the accreditation and incorporation of local crisis hotlines into the national networks, 1-800-SUICIDE, 1-800-273-TALK.
- We collaborate with other organizations, like Washington State PTA, Children's Alliance, Washington Ceasefire Foundation and Washington Community Mental Health Council to advocate for resources for youth.

### We developed this Toolkit to help focus your efforts:

- To join with others and get organized
- To become educated in youth suicide issues and prevention techniques
- To create goals and action plans, to educate others and make a difference
- To stay motivated and energized

### In this section, you'll find out more about:

- YSPPP: History and mission
- Why your community group is essential to help prevent youth suicide
- Key Factors of a successful community network

\*SOURCE: 2004 Healthy Youth Survey

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## About YSPPP

In 1992 a promising 16-year old student and athlete named Trevor Simpson died by suicide. Shortly after his death, Trevor's parents began advocating for a program to help prevent other young people from dying by suicide. The Washington State Youth Suicide Prevention Plan was written and in 1995 the University of Washington's School of Nursing began implementing strategies identified in the plan.



In 1999 the Department of Health (DOH) contracted Sue Eastgard, YSPPP's current director, to continue implementation. In 2000 the Youth Suicide Prevention Program incorporated as a private, not-for-profit organization.



Today, our mission remains the same as in the original plan: to reduce the incidence of youth suicide in our state.

Working toward that goal, we build Public Awareness, deliver Training and support Communities in Action.

**To increase Public Awareness**, we distribute educational materials, offer presentations and promote Suicide Prevention Week. In schools, we help students develop prevention campaigns, and assist educators with training and crisis response plans. Parent information focuses on depression and community resources, and Media Guidelines encourage responsible reporting on suicide.

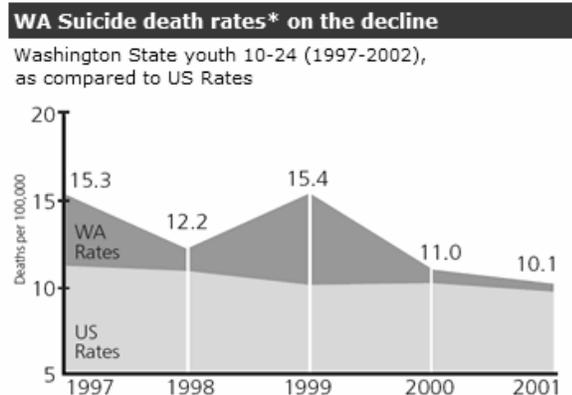
**Gatekeeper Training** prepares those in close, day-to-day contact with youth to assess and intervene with at-risk young people.

**To assist Communities in Action**, YSPPP collaborates with local PTAs, service clubs, grassroots organizations, schools, and government agencies to strengthen communication and collaboration. If every community built a stronger support system for youth, perhaps fewer young people would fall 'between the cracks.' We partner with others to develop communities where children are safe, where help is available, and where youth and families feel good about seeking help.

## What We are Doing is Making a Difference — But We Need Your Help

Rates for youth suicide have gone down in Washington (see chart). Still, our work represents a long-term commitment to changing behaviors and attitudes in individuals, families and communities.

We believe that every citizen of the state should understand that while youth suicide is a problem, there is something that can be done about it. Much has been done to educate Washington citizens about the issue of youth suicide, but a great deal more can be done.



### Your community group is an essential part of the solution.

The Centers for Disease Control recommends that local mental health agencies, crisis centers, clergy, health departments, medical organizations, injury prevention agencies, schools and other community members work together to develop goals and strategies to prevent suicide. In addition, the fourth of twelve goals and strategies created by the U.S. Dept. Of Health and Human Services is to "Develop and Implement community-based suicide prevention programs." \*

Below are a few specific areas that need to be addressed. You'll find more in Section Three, Get Active.

#### To enhance community-based safety nets for youth...

- Community members need to address the stigma associated with mental illness and increase the accessibility of crisis resources.
- Communities should support funding for after school and evening programs that provide youth with meaningful activities.

#### To enhance public awareness...

- Children as young as 6th grade should be taught to recognize the warning signs for depression and suicide. They need to know how to help a friend who is exhibiting signs, and the resources for help.
- Parents need to know about community resources and should be encouraged to push through obstacles to asking for help.
- Teachers and school personnel need to develop crisis plans that encourage staff to respond to suicidal behaviors.

#### To enhance skills and knowledge of gatekeepers who work with youth...

- All educators, physicians and health care providers need to be trained to ask a young person directly about suicidal thoughts.

\*SOURCE: US National Strategy for Suicide Prevention, 2001

## Key Components of a Successful Community Network

In 2004, the Group Health Community Foundation (GHCF) assessed prevention efforts in selected counties in Washington for YSPP. The report identified key factors associated with successful suicide prevention networks, and made recommendations for improving and sustaining community efforts. Many of their findings are throughout this Toolkit; a comprehensive list of recommendations is on page 40.



### 12 key components of a successful youth suicide prevention network\*

- Interest and involvement of multiple sectors of the community.
- Core group of people to provide leadership as well as volunteers; committed individuals and organizations willing to take an active role over the long-term.
- Buy-in by school administrators.
- Training for key people needed to maintain the effort.
- Ongoing structure to facilitate communication and collaboration.
- Some level of funding.
- Access to support regarding best practices and materials (YSPP support).
- Foundation of adequate services in the community.
- A plan with realistic goals and strategies.
- Media focus on suicide prevention.
- Involvement of survivors.
- Commitment of community leaders.

*"People wanted to change the incredible sadness into an energy that would be useful and positive and actually do something."*

— Community advocate, Pacific County

\*SOURCE: YSPP Evaluation of Community Networks in Eight Washington Counties 7-28-04  
Full report is available online at [www.yspp.org/aboutYSPP/reports](http://www.yspp.org/aboutYSPP/reports)

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## Potential Obstacles to Getting a Group Together

The counties in the Community Network Report identified five areas of concern that communities or schools have when thinking about a coordinated youth suicide prevention effort. We've added considerations that might help to overcome the concerns.

- **Fear that if they talk about this issue, that kids will act out their suicidal thoughts.**

The fear is real, but the answer is education. This is one of the myths associated with youth suicide; see more about myths in Section 2: Get Educated.

- **The stigma of admitting there is a problem. An informant said, "99% of school administrators will say they don't have a problem at their school."**

Statistics show that there is an average of two suicides a week in Washington state. A youth suicide can occur at any school, in any place. If more administrators were educated, they could address the issue BEFORE it happens.

- **Competition with other priorities. One informant said, "One answer is the infrequency with which youth suicide occurs, given all the other issues involving youth." Another said, "The statistics aren't there. There are bigger problems to work on."**

The statistics show not only two deaths a week, but high numbers of attempts that result in hospitalization, as well as depression (one of the risk factors for suicide). Despite the fact that suicide ranks higher than homicide as a cause of death among teens, suicide prevention was perceived by school principals as a lower priority problem than violence, drug/alcohol use and sexual assault.\* Again, more education needs to happen so the statistics are known.

- **Time—finding people who have time available to dedicate to this effort.**

This is a challenge, but there are people in every community who are willing to help. The WA State legislature found that "large numbers of Washington's citizens are actively engaged in carrying forward the ethic of service and voluntary activities that benefit their citizens, their communities, and the entire state."\*\*

- **Resources. One informant said, "We have identified useful strategies but it is difficult to get resources. It is not high on the radar of those who control the resources."**

If your group seeks to make community changes that require government funding, you will face many long-term challenges. However, much can be done without large financial resources, so it is important to plan the scope of your activities with available resources in mind. You'll find more about developing a plan for your activities, as well as fundraising and other resources, in Section 3, Get Active.

\*SOURCE July 2001 ORS Survey of Principals, Teachers and Counselors

\*\*SOURCE: RCW 43.150.010 Legislative findings

## What Makes Community Change Work?

The Community Tool Box (CTB) is an online resource of practical information to support work in community health and development (<http://ctb.ku.edu>).

This is from the introduction, *Working Together for Healthier Communities: A Framework for Collaboration Among Community Partnerships, Support Organizations, and Funders*.



### Seven essential ingredients that contribute to community change:\*

- Clear vision and mission -- those initiatives with a clear and specific focus bring about much higher rates of change than broad "healthy communities" efforts which lack a targeted mission and objectives.  
> Section 3: Get Active
- Action planning -- Identifying specific community changes (that is, new or modified programs, policies, and practices) to be sought may be the single, most important practice that can be implemented. The action plan should be quite precise, specifying with whom, by whom, how and by when each action step should be carried out. > Section 3: Get Active
- Leadership -- A change in leadership can dramatically affect the rate of change brought about by a community group. The loss of strong leadership can be particularly difficult for an organization. > Section 2: Get Organized
- Resources for community mobilizers -- Hiring community mobilizers or organizers can aid in following up on action plans. It can be very difficult to maintain an organization without some paid staff. Paid organizers can help fan the flames and keep the level of excitement about the organization and its goals at a consistently high level. > Section 3: Get Active
- Documentation and feedback on the changes brought about by the organization -- It's also very important that people keep a record of what they have done and how they have done it. Having this history can be an invaluable guide for the organization's work. Looking regularly (at least quarterly) at what the group has done, how quickly it has occurred, and outside events that affect the group's work has been shown to spur groups onto even greater heights.  
> Section 4: Sustain the Effort
- Technical assistance -- Outside help with specific actions, such as action planning or securing resources, is also a way to support a group's efforts to transform its community. > YSPSP is available for technical and planning support.

\*SOURCE: <http://ctb.ku.edu>; Work Group on Health Promotion and Community Development at the University of Kansas in Lawrence, Kansas; AHEC/Community Partners