

Frameworks Youth Suicide Prevention Pilot Project

Kristine M. Baber and Gretchen Bean
UNH Center on Adolescence

Suicide is the second leading cause of death for youth aged 10 to 24 years in New Hampshire and the suicide rate for NH youth is higher than the national rate for people in this age group (Center for Disease Control, 2005). Over a decade of work on preventing youth suicide in New Hampshire, initiated by the efforts of a coalition called the Youth Suicide Prevention Assembly (YSPA), led to the development of a program to reduce suicide-related events among youth in the state. This program, the Frameworks Youth Suicide Prevention Project, was further developed by YSPA and an intense research phase was begun by Dartmouth Injury Prevention Center working in collaboration with a funder, the Suicide Prevention Partnership. In 2003, the National Alliance on Mental Illness, New Hampshire (NAMI-NH) began leadership of program design and implementation of the Frameworks Project.

The Frameworks Project is a unique, community-based intervention designed to increase the competence of communities to respond to suicidal events including suicidal ideation, attempts and threats, and completed suicides in a manner that ultimately reduces the number and rate of youth suicides. The project focuses on reducing youth suicide by recognizing youth at risk for suicide, connecting with those youth, connecting the youth with appropriate services to ensure his/her safety, and connecting members of the community in an integrated effort to prevent youth suicide.

The essence of the Frameworks intervention is the training of gatekeepers, peers, and professionals in protocols for responding to suicidal events. The protocols were developed by NAMI-NH staff working with professionals from around the state representing a variety of disciplines. National experts in youth suicide prevention also reviewed the protocols. The Frameworks training is designed to raise participants' awareness of factors that may indicate that youth are at heightened risk for suicide, prepare the participants to competently connect with such youth, and enhance their ability to connect the youth to appropriate professionals and services. Frameworks training also is designed to build linkages among professionals, programs, and services in a community to improve the likelihood of developing an integrated support system for youth in Mascoma Valley.

The Pilot Community: NAMI selected the Mascoma Valley Health Initiative, representing a coalition of five New Hampshire towns--Canaan, Dorchester, Enfield, Orange, and Grafton--as the pilot site for implementation of the Frameworks Project through a competitive process. One of the reasons that MVHI was interested in being the pilot community for the Frameworks Project was because they had completed a community assessment in 2003 that indicated that youth in their community were at comparatively high risk for depression and injury. Twenty-two individuals including police officers, first responders, school guidance counselors, educators, social service workers, mental health care providers, and youth completed the training to become Frameworks Trainers. This prepared them to provide training to others in the community. Eighty-seven adults in the community, including teachers, school administrators, counselors, school custodians, social service providers, law enforcement, primary care providers, and emergency medical staff received a shorter Frameworks training. Forty-three high school students also received the Frameworks training.

The Evaluation: The UNH Center on Adolescence, with funding from the Suicide Prevention Partnership, worked with NAMI NH to design and conduct an evaluation of the pilot implementation of the Frameworks Project. The purpose of the evaluation was to determine whether the project increased knowledge of the protocols and prevention skills, increased confidence in the use of the protocols, increased comfort and competence in dealing with suicide events, and provided evidence of an integrated community response to suicide events. Data for the evaluation come from three sources. One source of data was information collected before and after Frameworks training from individuals identified as Trainers. A second source of data was

information collected from Community Participants and the students both before and after they participated in training. The third source of data was key informant interviews with individuals in Mascoma Valley.

Results

- The Frameworks Project raised awareness of youth suicide prevention and trained a critical mass of community professionals in how to recognize youth at risk for suicide, how to connect with these youth, and how to connect youth to community resources. This is of major importance because at pretest, 70% of the Trainers and 58% of the Community Participants reported that they had responded to a youth suicide or an attempt or threat prior to participating in the Frameworks Project. Forty-five percent of the students indicated they had helped someone that they thought might hurt him or herself.
- The evaluation indicated that those participating in the Frameworks project felt very responsible for doing something to help if they knew someone was thinking about, threatening, or had attempted suicide.
- The Frameworks trainings increased participants' knowledge about youth suicide prevention. There was evidence that the training increased both participants' knowledge of information included in the protocols and their belief that they had the knowledge and training to help youth who might be at risk for suicide.
- The Frameworks trainings increased participants' belief that youth suicide is preventable.
- The Frameworks training increased participants' confidence in responding to youth who might be thinking about, threatening, or who had attempted suicide.
- The Frameworks Project increased participants' appreciation of the usefulness of mental health care for youth who might be thinking about or talking about suicide, or who had made a suicide attempt.
- Individuals trained in the Frameworks protocols are reportedly using their training to recognize and connect with youth who need assistance and are connecting them to the services they need.

Frameworks is a unique, community-based program that has demonstrated effectiveness in raising awareness about youth suicide prevention, improving participants' knowledge about youth suicide and how to recognize youth at risk, and increasing trained individuals' confidence and comfort in connecting with youth they think may need assistance. Frameworks offers the possibility of preparing a large number of people in a community to recognize youth at risk, sharing the responsibility and emphasizing that everyone needs to be involved in reducing youth suicide. Results from the pilot implementation in Mascoma Valley indicate that Frameworks has the potential to provide a very important strategy for addressing the public health problem of youth suicide.

This evaluation was made possible through the work of the UNH Center on Adolescence and through funding from the Suicide Prevention Partnership. The UNH Center on Adolescence strives to foster alliances that benefit youth and provide research and education to support the health of young people in New Hampshire. The Center is directed by Kristine Baber, PhD. Gretchen Bean, MA is the Program Coordinator and Special Projects Director.

The Suicide Prevention Partnership is an initiative of the New Hampshire Charitable Foundation and the Irving and Barbara C. Gutin Charitable Foundation that works to reduce suicide and suicidal behavior in the United States.