

# Prevention Works!

A Report of Activities,  
1999-2004



**YSPP**  
Youth Suicide Prevention Program

[www.yspp.org](http://www.yspp.org)

# Working to reduce the incidence of youth suicide in our state

- Each week in Washington State, an average of 2 young people die by suicide.

(Source: DOH Injury Prevention Program)

- Another 16 make suicide attempts that result in hospitalization. (Source: DOH Injury Prevention Program)

- A 50% reduction in current rates of youth suicide behaviors would save approximately \$12 million a year in hospital-based health care expenses alone.

(Source: Children's Safety Network (CSN) Economics and Insurance Resource Center, Pacific Institute for Research and Evaluation)

YSPP envisions a state where youth suicide is a rare event, where young people are nurtured and supported, where people are aware of risk factors for suicide, and actively seek help from accessible, effective community resources.

## How YSPP began

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 School of Nursing began implementing strategies identified in the plan.

In 1999 the Department of Health (DOH) contracted Sue Eastgard, YSPP's current director, to continue implementation with reduced funding. In 2000 the Youth Suicide Prevention Program incorporated as a private, not-for-profit organization with support from DOH, foundations, individual contributions, corporate gifts and training fees.

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**.



## Is what we are doing making a difference?

**Yes.** Rates for youth suicide have gone down in Washington (see chart on page 3). Because our work represents a long-term commitment to changing behaviors and attitudes in individuals, families and communities, we look for quantifiable indicators of improvement including mortality and morbidity rates. We continually evaluate program activities to measure knowledge of suicide facts, warning signs, and resources; skills related to assessment and intervention; and attitudes and beliefs about suicide.



“What we are doing is working. I dealt with a potential suicide yesterday, one that I think was serious. A student referred her. I dealt with another today. We got counseling for one and are keeping an eye on the other.”

— High school leadership teacher, Yakima County



## YSPP Accomplishments 1999-2004

### Public Awareness

- Youth: 220 school-based suicide prevention campaigns have been implemented, with an increased likelihood of youth offering help to suicidal friends
- Parents: Collaborated with Washington State Parent Teacher Association (PTA) to design and deliver suicide awareness curriculum to thousands of caregivers
- Caregivers: 1,400 attended QPR (Question, Persuade and Refer) awareness presentations
- General public: over 138,000 suicide awareness brochures distributed to Washingtonians; 57,000 average monthly web site hits in 2004



### Training

- 1,475 Gatekeepers – persons in close, day-to-day contact with youth – attended ASIST assessment and intervention training, gaining knowledge about the warning signs for youth suicide



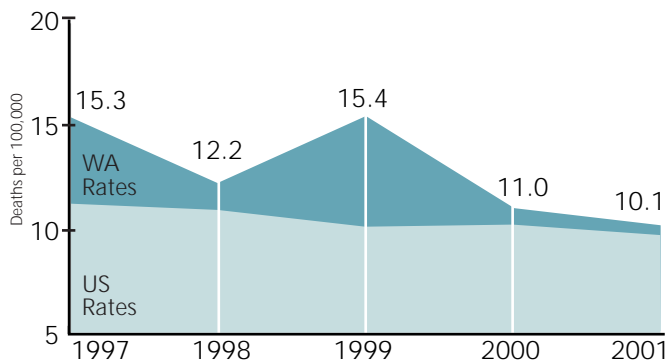
### Communities in Action

- Consulted in the development of 8 local suicide prevention networks
- Promoted integration of local hotlines into the national HopeLine Network (1-800 SUICIDE)



### Washington youth suicide rates have declined while US rates have remained static

WA youth age 15-24, 1997-2001, compared to US youth  
(Source: DOH Injury Prevention Program)



# Helping teens help their friends



In 1997 120 students recruited by YSPP from across the state designed a series of media messages about suicide prevention. To date, these

messages have been imprinted on over 50,000 posters, buttons, T-shirts, key chains and pencils which have played a key role in student-led youth suicide prevention awareness campaigns.

## YSPP provides technical assistance and support

Each fall in eastern and western Washington locations, students and faculty advisors attend free half-day workshops to jump-start their campaign efforts. Each team receives a toolkit with detailed resources and worksheets, and gets hands-on help with organization, design, and writing an implementation plan for their schools' suicide prevention campaign. YSPP provides a small grant for each school to purchase campaign materials.

The toolkit also includes a suicide awareness curriculum designed to be presented by youth to their peers in a 45-minute classroom period. The curriculum promotes awareness of the issues and teaches teens to seek help, not to be 'junior counselors.'

## Implementing student-led campaigns

Working with a faculty/staff liaison, students choose a campaign slogan, the elements they want to use to promote awareness, and how to distribute them. For example, a student group may design and wear T-shirts that emphasize campaign messages. Another group may hang posters in every classroom. Another may set up an information booth at lunch hours during Suicide Prevention Week. It's up to the students.



*Above: students carry a campaign poster at a suicide awareness walk*

*Right: campaign T-shirt, key chains and poster*

## Student campaigns focus on key messages:

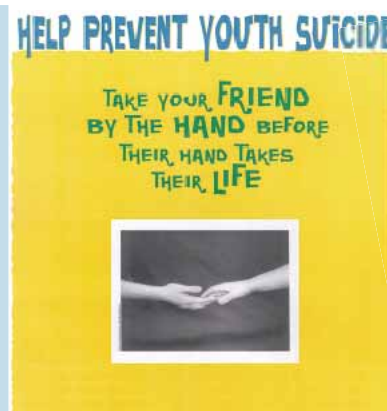
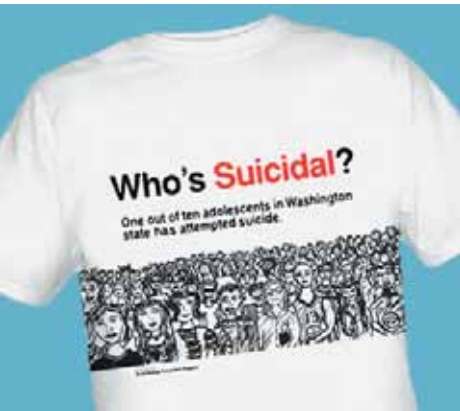
- Youth suicide is a serious problem in our state
- There are warning signs to watch for
- There are three prevention steps that can be taken to help a friend: **show you care**, **ask the question** and **get help**
- There are resources for help

In 2004 YSPP will present the "Trevor R. Simpson" award to recognize two schools – and the student teams – that produced the most effective youth suicide prevention campaigns.



“Dear Molly, Megan and Amber:  
Thank you for visiting our class. It really gave me perspective. I have experience with depression and suicidal thoughts. It was nice to hear it from someone other than a boring teacher or a worrywart parent.”

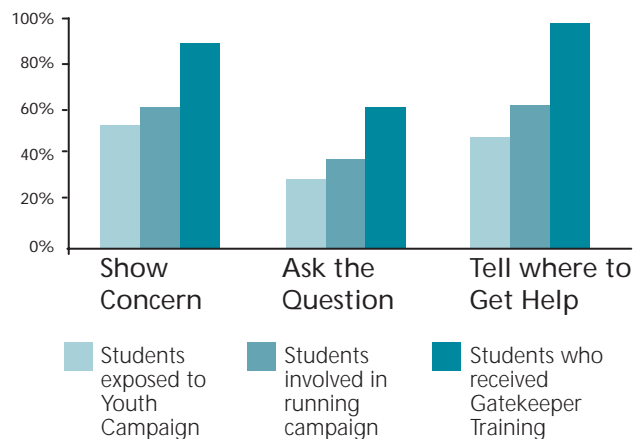
— Middle school student, Kitsap County



### Students with greater exposure to prevention training were more likely to use skills

Percent of students who reported using the three skills after a prevention campaign

(Source: 1997 University of Washington School of Nursing report)



These 1997 findings show that more exposure to suicide prevention training creates a greater likelihood that students will use the skills. A 2000 study commissioned by YSPSP produced similar anecdotal results.

(Source: 2000 Organizational Research Services (ORS) survey)

- Students are more willing to talk with each other and faculty about suicide; there is a greater willingness to cover the issue of suicide in classrooms
- There is an increase in students' awareness that they can "do something" to help peers at risk
- Students are more willing to refer friends and/or assist in getting help

### School Campaign Highlights

- In 2004 YSPSP supported 5 times as many school-based suicide prevention efforts as in 1999
  - YSPSP has facilitated 19 toolkit workshops for 179 schools and organizations
  - Participants have been enthusiastic about toolkit training and the prevention campaign materials: "...logical, step-by-step and very user-friendly"
- (Source: July 2001 Organizational Research Services (ORS) survey of 15 initial schools)
- Over 57,000 items with suicide prevention messages have been distributed by students:

- 8,244 posters
- 624 flyers
- 562 lanyards
- 1,000 antenna balls
- 3,300 T-shirts
- 19,897 key chains
- 1,370 buttons
- 17,002 pencils
- 5,000 stickers

# Talking with caregivers about adolescent depression and suicide



Each week YSPSP educates parents and community members across the state about the issue of youth suicide. Presentations include survivors' stories, multimedia slides with statistics, and hands-on exercises that explore risk factors youth face, as well as ways in which we can help.

## A team approach

On one recent occasion we used an interactive game as a model for identifying support resources and the importance of a team approach to prevention and intervention.

Leigh Manheim, a survivor of her son's suicide, opened the presentation by telling the story of Garth's life and his suicide at age 16. He had been an overly sensitive boy who had difficulty tolerating distress. Leigh revealed that her family had a history of clinical depression, and that she wished she had known more about the warning signs for suicide before Garth decided to end his pain of living.

YSPSP director Sue Eastgard, a clinical social worker, reviewed the signs of depression and shared disturbing suicide statistics from our state (see chart on page 7). She then discussed the strategies for helping someone at risk of suicide: show you care, ask the question ('are you thinking about suicide?') and get help.

## The model in action

Rhonda McKim, chairperson for the "Every Teen Counts" committee for Washington State PTA, invited parents to stand in a circle. After identifying a resource that could be helpful in a crisis situation, each parent, in turn, tossed a ball of yarn to someone else in the circle. The yarn was spun into a



*Above: YSPSP presentation attendees create a 'safety net'  
Right: survivor Leigh Manheim with photo of son Garth  
Far right: presenters Leah Simpson and Rhonda McKim*

web stretching between the parents; Rhonda then threw a balloon into the center. The group worked together to keep it aloft.

The laughter, playfulness and group camaraderie reminded everyone that a child, like the balloon, can fall through the cracks in our community if we are not working together to watch for warning signs, to listen, and to offer help and hope.



“As a result of your presentation, I was able to support a parent through an intervention, weave a safety net of resources around her child, and provide your web site for further information. THANK YOU! The work you do is powerful. Our state is lucky to have you.”

— Community advocate, Island County



## Parent Awareness Presentations

YSPP has facilitated 189 suicide awareness presentations with a total audience of over 5,400

- Speakers include a parent-survivor, a mental health professional and/or children's advocate
- Audiences include many groups such as PTA, Rotary and other service organizations, church groups, employees, etc.
- Techniques include audio-visual materials and interactive games

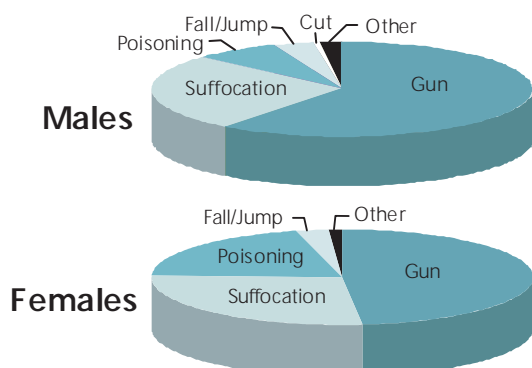
### Presentations are designed to:

- Enhance awareness about stress, depression and youth suicide
- Teach the signs and symptoms of stress and depression and the warning signs for suicide
- Teach stress management skills as well as the three basic intervention skills that can help avert a suicide
- Identify crisis resources in the local community

## Firearms are the most frequent method by which youth die by suicide

WA youth ages 10-24 (1997-2002)

(Source: DOH Injury Prevention Program)



# Reaching out to the public through media



When YSPP began implementing strategies in 1995, nearly one-third of the biennial budget was spent on a major media

campaign that included billboards, bus signs, brochures, and public service announcements for radio and television.

Despite a reduction in funding, increasing the general public's awareness about teen suicide is still a top priority for YSPP.

## Video production

In 2000 Paraclete Press, a Massachusetts video production company, approached YSPP about developing an educational video. "A Cry for Help" was filmed in Washington State and featured middle and high school students who participated in their school's suicide prevention campaigns. The video has since been reviewed and recommended by the American Association of Suicidology.

## Web site and print materials

The YSPP web site has become an increasingly vital resource, receiving over 175,000 hits last quarter. We continually add new content with the intent of growing our audience, especially young people. The YSPP web site also enables distribution of DOH resources that include posters, brochures on warning signs, and parent and teacher guides.

## Media advocacy

When a suicide occurs in a community we are often quoted in media reports, and consider each an opportunity to educate the public. Stories about suicide can inform readers and viewers about the likely causes of suicide, its warning signs,



*Above: Spanish language version of "Watch for signs" brochure; team filming a public service announcement  
Right: 'Warning signs' page from the YSPP web site*

trends in suicide rates, recent treatment advances and local crisis resources. They can also highlight opportunities to prevent suicide.

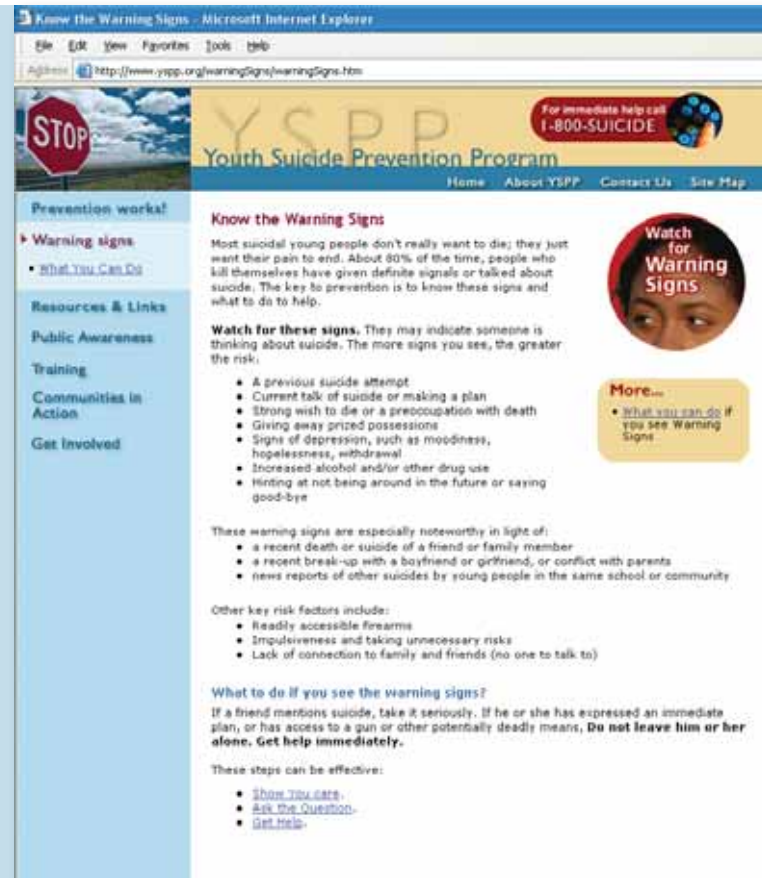
It is suspected that teenagers and young adults are more vulnerable to the phenomenon of 'contagion' than other age groups. Because media coverage of suicide can contribute to increased incidence of suicide, we encourage media to follow guidelines found on our web site, [www.yspp.org](http://www.yspp.org).





“Until my son killed himself, I believed suicide was a rare occurrence. As long as we believe that it happens only to others and not to people like us, we can ignore this problem and children will continue to kill themselves at an alarming rate.”

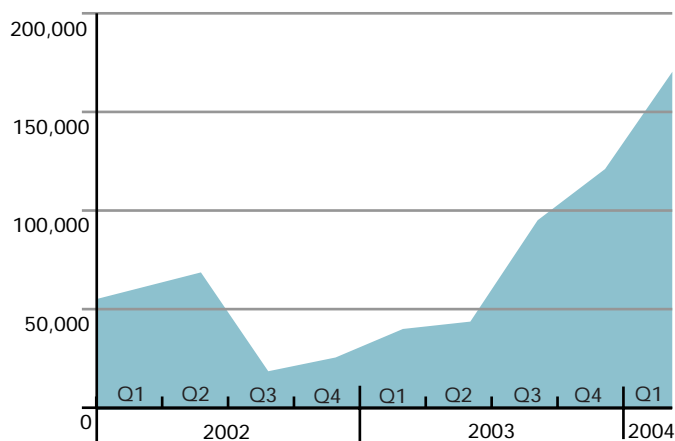
— Editorial, The Spokesman Review



## YSPPP web site audience has grown

Web site hits by quarter, 2002-2004

(Source: UW School of Nursing, Seattle Server hosting statistics)



## Public Awareness Highlights

- Over 138,000 suicide awareness brochures distributed to Washington citizens
- YSPPP was featured on TV interviews on KING, KCPCQ, KIRO and Oregon Public TV
- YSPPP was featured on radio stations KUOW, KOMO, KIRO, KJBH and KARR
- Hundreds of articles in Washington print media have mentioned suicide prevention efforts supported by YSPPP, the warning signs and/or resources for help

# On the front lines with youth: training the gatekeepers



Gatekeeper Training is designed for adults who work with young people on a daily basis: teachers, school counselors, mental health and social service professionals, police, clergy, health care practitioners, youth group leaders and others. These gatekeepers – those on the front lines with youth – have a greater need to learn the nuances of assessment and intervention.

## Applied Suicide Intervention Skills Training (ASIST)

YSPP offers ASIST, a two-day training curriculum for developing competency and skills in assessment and intervention. Evaluations show that the skills-based ASIST workshop increases participants' knowledge and confidence to respond to a youth at risk of suicide.

### ASIST in action

One recent morning 30 participants gathered for the first day of training. Most did not know what to expect. Kate Gavigan, a certified mental health counselor and master trainer of more than 25 ASIST workshops, prepared them for a unique experience. She told of the many trainings she'd attended in which she took extensive notes but never looked at them again. The ASIST, she said, is different, with its highly interactive, applied learning approach.

Kate and co-trainer Bob Baugher, a clinical psychologist, outlined the format: interactive discussion, case studies presented through video and live dramatization, lecture, and role-play practice. By the second day, participants recognized that suicide prevention is more than identifying risk alerts and developing safe plans;



*Above: YSPP-affiliated ASIST master trainers  
Right: Examples of one of the skills taught during a customized curriculum  
Far right: ASIST curriculum materials*

it includes life promotion and self-care for the caregiver. These participants now belong to a network of suicide prevention caregivers.

YSPP provides consultation, technical assistance and networking mechanisms for 15 active ASIST trainers.

### Additional training choices

YSPP offers customized training courses including three-hour and six-hour assessment and intervention modules, one-hour QPR (Question, Persuade, and Refer) awareness presentations, and mini-workshops on bereavement and self-harm.



"I enjoyed the training and gained great, applicable information that I'm relaying to my colleagues. I also valued the opportunity to network with other people from education and mental health."

— Case manager, community mental health center



## Training Highlights

YSPP offered 74 two-day ASIST workshops for 1,472 participants

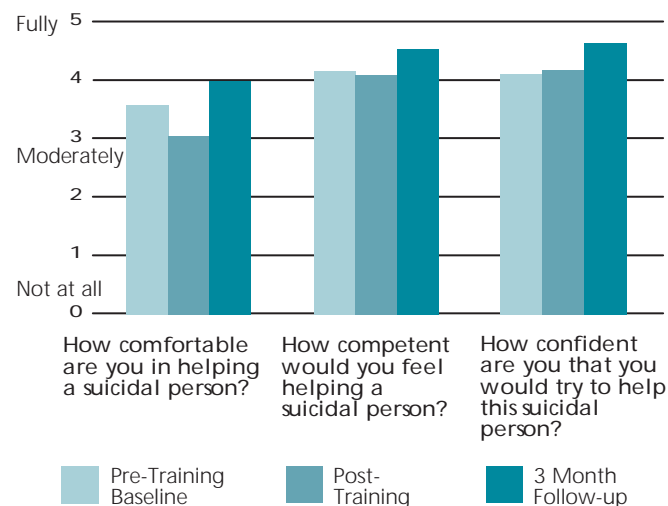
- Knowledge and skills attained by ASIST participants at the close of a workshop persist after 3 months, and in some instances even at 9 and 12 months
- Over 35% of participants reported contact with one or more suicidal youth, and are referring youth to a wide range of resources

(Source: July 2002 and July 2003 ORS Surveys)

## Knowledge gains from ASIST

Average levels of comfort, competence and confidence helping suicidal youth, before, after and 3 months following training

(Source: July 2001 ORS survey of training participants)



## Question, Persuade, and Refer (QPR):

- YSPP worked with QPR Institute to modify existing prevention materials into a youth-focused curriculum, which also was translated into Spanish
- 29 individuals were recruited and trained to facilitate QPR presentations
- 55 one-hour QPR presentations were offered to over 1,400 attendees

## Custom training:

- YSPP developed and delivered 82 customized trainings and mini-workshops for over 2,800 participants
- YSPP commissioned the QPR Institute to develop a modular, multimedia training program for crisis line staff and volunteers

# Strengthening community safety nets for kids



We believe in strengthening communication and collaboration among schools, families, churches, service clubs, and local and regional

government agencies. If every community built a stronger support system for youth, perhaps fewer young people would “fall between the cracks.”

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.

## A community that took action

In the fall of 2002, three Ilwaco teens died by suicide in less than three months. Pacific County parents, clergy and community health workers formed a volunteer group called Community Impact on Suicide and contacted us. YSPP facilitated a community meeting and helped the group to develop short-term and long-term goals.

The task force immediately took action to raise awareness. They set up a 24-hour hotline for Long Beach peninsula youth; produced suicide prevention information flyers that were inserted into grocery bags; created a “Friendly Faces” program that brought clergy into the schools; sponsored an ASIST workshop; and organized a “Walk for Life” awareness event. Youth volunteers held a poster contest and distributed wallet-sized suicide help cards to students.

Community advocates also administered a teen survey and worked with youth leaders at Ilwaco High School to solicit their perspectives. Students acknowledged a drug and alcohol problem on the



*Above, right: many communities have organized awareness events in Eastern and Western Washington*

peninsula, and identified a need for teen-oriented activities including a skate park, local dances and pool tables.

While sustaining a volunteer effort over the long term can be challenging, this Pacific County community has remained active and organized. A volunteer from Community Impact now sits on the YSPP Board of Directors.

Ilwaco's group has made a significant effort in response to a serious crisis; it is a model of what communities can do to promote a healthy culture and help protect our youth.



“People wanted to change the incredible sadness into an energy that would be usable and positive and actually do something.”

— Community advocate, Pacific County



## Supporting active communities

YSPP has helped community groups initiate suicide prevention action plans in Clallam, Clark, Jefferson, King, Kitsap, Pacific, Pierce and Yakima Counties. YSPP has also supported previously-organized efforts in Cowlitz and Spokane Counties.

### Ongoing efforts include:

- Promote cooperation and collaboration between mental and physical health resources and families
- Advocate for the early identification of children's mental health issues and encourage families to seek help, rather than avoid it
- Support accreditation and incorporation of local crisis hotlines into the national Hopeline Network, or 1-800-SUICIDE
- Collaborate and advocate for resources for youth, working with the WA State PTA, Children's Alliance, WA Ceasefire Foundation and WA Community Mental Health Council

## Key elements of a successful community-based prevention network

(Source: June 2004 Group Health Community Foundation Evaluation)

- A **committed person** to take initiative, a core **leadership** group and active volunteers
- A **partnership** involving multiple levels of the community
- Support from **school district** administration
- A foundation of **mental health** and **emergency/crisis** services
- **YSPP support:** training, best practices and materials
- A **plan** with realistic goals and strategies
- Some level of **funding**
- Some degree of **media focus** on the issue

### Survey findings reveal that there is more work to be done to increase community-based prevention efforts:

(Source: July 2001 ORS Community Needs Survey)

- While 61% of respondents to a community needs survey were aware of school-based suicide prevention efforts, significantly fewer knew of community-wide prevention activities
- Only 31% of respondents said their community is ready to initiate or expand efforts to prevent suicide

# Where do we go from here?

**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.

## **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.

## **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 also support funding for after school and evening programs that provide youth with meaningful activities.

**This work continues to be of vital importance, because...**

- Only 27% of respondents at surveyed schools said they would “very likely” continue suicide prevention efforts if YSPP support was withdrawn
- Only 50% agreed that “there is a shared belief in the community that prevention is important”
- Despite the fact that suicide ranks higher than homicide as a cause of death among teens, suicide prevention was perceived as a lower priority problem than violence, drug/alcohol use and sexual assault

(Source: July 2001 ORS Survey of Principals, Teachers and Counselors)

## **Working together**

Through our partnerships with individuals, families and communities, we’ve enjoyed many successes. Yet as long as youth still consider suicide an option we are reminded of how much more there is to do (see chart on page 15).

By creating a safety net for all of our children, we not only reduce health care costs associated with suicidal behaviors, we save young lives and spare families the anguish of such a tragic loss.

Help protect the future of our young people.



“We would not feel comfortable running our program without the ‘umbrella’ of the Youth Suicide Prevention Program, your leadership and the opportunity to consult with you.”

— Faculty liaison, Benton-Franklin Counties



## A great deal more can be done...

### Public Awareness

Number of secondary schools that have implemented suicide prevention campaigns:

110

728

Number of secondary schools in Washington state<sup>1</sup>



Number of caregivers and parents that have attended YSP youth suicide awareness presentations:

5,450

799,100

Number of Washington households with persons under 18 years of age<sup>2</sup>

### Training

Number of gatekeepers who have attended an ASIST workshop:

1,472

21,165

Number of teachers, counselors, psychologists and nurses in Washington secondary schools<sup>1</sup>



15,778

Number of police officers, family and general practitioners, child, family, and school social workers, clergy and recreation workers<sup>4</sup> in Washington

### Communities in Action

Number of communities that currently have suicide prevention initiatives underway:

6

197

Number of Washington communities with a population of 1,000 or more<sup>3</sup>



<sup>1</sup> Source: 2000-2001 Washington Schools Enrollment Facts

<sup>2</sup> Source: 2000 United States Census

<sup>3</sup> Source: 2003 Washington Office of Financial Management Data Book

<sup>4</sup> Source: 1999 Washington State Occupational Employment and Wage Estimates; recreation worker estimates: 2003 Washington Recreation and Parks Association

## Watch for Warning Signs:

- A previous suicide attempt
- Current talk of suicide or making a plan
- Strong wish to die or a preoccupation with death
- Giving away prized possessions
- Signs of depression, such as moodiness, hopelessness, withdrawal
- Increased alcohol and/or other drug use



**YSPP**  
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