

Meet SCYSPI

Did You Know?

The South Carolina Department of Mental Health (DMH) has received a youth suicide prevention grant of \$736,000 per year for five years from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA). The award, which began September 30, 2015, supports the South Carolina Youth Suicide Prevention Initiative (SCYSPI), an intensive community-based effort with a goal of reducing suicide among youths and young adults, aged 10 to 24, by 20% statewide by 2025.

The SCYSPI will use the message “While I Breathe, I Hope” to promote suicide prevention and mental health awareness. The slogan was inspired by the seal of the great state of South Carolina to express how important statewide inclusiveness and community involvement is to the initiative. The SCYSPI Community Center is located at 2205 Main Street, Columbia, SC and will open to the public in May.

Louise Johnson, MS, director of Children, Adolescents, and their Families for DMH’s Division of Community Mental Health Services, is the principal investigator for the grant. The core team includes Alexandra Karydi, PH.D as program director, Tiffany Carree-Clark as the public information coordinator, and Taylor Hall as the administrative/IT coordinator for the grant.

“I attended three funerals in one year of children under the age of 12 that had completed suicide. After seeing the pain in those mothers’ eyes, I knew this was an issue our state needed to address,” said Johnson. “I discovered that most children who complete suicide were not receiving any mental health or health services. This is what pushed me to apply for this grant.”

The SCYSPI will involve a partnership with the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention. It will focus on increasing access to screening and mental health services for youths and young adults, raising awareness through social media marketing, providing suicide prevention programming in 80 school districts and on five college campuses, and increasing protective factors by training teachers, parents, peers, guidance counselors, school nurses, and others on recognizing suicide risks and where to get help for depression and other mental health issues. Other goals include development of interagency protocols in the event that a youth or young adult is determined to be at risk, support for clinicians and educators in implementing evidence-based interventions, and training for emergency department staff on suicide means restrictions.

“The American Foundation for Suicide Prevention congratulates the Department of Mental Health on this important award,” said SC Area Director for the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention Helen Pridgen. “We look forward to the work of this collaboration with DMH and other organizations so that no more young lives are lost to suicide in South Carolina. We commend and fully support the initiative.”

The SCYSPI aims to reach 300,000 youth and young adults via social media marketing and screen 30,000 youth and young adults for suicide risk and mental health needs over the next 5 years. The involvement of parents, peers, teachers, guidance counselors, nurses, and advocates, along with Mental Health professionals, is key to meeting this goal. For this reason the SCYSPI is building a coalition of support to reach South Carolina’s young people in need.

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