

# Engaging the Campus Community in Suicide Prevention and Wellness Promotion

(University at Buffalo)

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# Defining the problem?

- § 1 in 5 college students seriously considered attempting suicide in the past year (ACHA, 2005)
- § Depression was the fourth ranked student health problem experienced by students (ACHA, 2005)
- § College students believe that suicide is a general college student problem but not one specific to their campus (Westefeld et al, 2005)
- § Most counseling center directors report that colleges don't provide adequate campus-wide education about suicide, programs, materials for parents, student support networks, or postvention programs (Gallagher, 2005)

# Defining the problem

- § More than 90% of those who complete suicide have a psychiatric illness at time of death, usually depression, alcohol abuse, or both (Hirschfeld & Russell, 1997)
- § The major motivations cited by students who attempted suicide included depression, relationship trouble, stress related to school, hopelessness, family problems, anxiety, financial stress and social isolation (Westefeld et al, 2005)
- § Students who seriously considered suicide are also more likely to report use of alcohol, tobacco, and illegal drugs (Brener, Hassan, & Barrios, 1999), and are more likely to engage in risky behaviors involving alcohol (Barrios, Simon, & Brener, 2000)

# The Environmental Management Approach

“The best way to protect public health is to change the environment in which people live and work”

-Higher Education Center

# What is needed?

- § *To create a campus atmosphere that encourages help-seeking and early identification of problems that may put students at risk for mental health problems and suicide.*
- § *To increase campus awareness of resources available for psychological problems and of resources that promote wellness and health.*
- § *To create a sense of campus community, social connectedness, and support for vulnerable students.*
- § *To enhance effectiveness of campus mental health services.*



# Who is in?

- § Know who your target audience(s) is
- § Know the facts and problems specific to your campus
- § Start with existing allies and contacts
- § Know which partnerships are most important to cultivate given the needs on your campus
- § Involve partners, including students, in the creation and implementation of programs

# Ensuring buy-in

- § Community-building is a campus value
  - Each One, Reach One
- § *“An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure” – Benjamin Franklin*
  - Reduction in acting-out behaviors
  - Less time spent in post-vention activities
- § Illustrate how involvement serves the academic mission
  - Retention
  - Student as “whole” person
  - Curriculum infusion of health, mental health, and wellness concepts

# Suicide Prevention Training

- § QPR GATEKEEPER TRAINING: QPR (Question, Persuade, Refer) This is our primary suicide prevention training program.
  - *Resident Assistant Training*
  - *Don't Cancel That Class*
  - *Faculty/Staff Groups*
  - *New Faculty/Staff Orientation (proposed)*

# Suicide Prevention Training

- § Building a common language and framework in campus community
- § Train intact groups: work groups, student organizations, classes
- § Train the willing first: academic advisors, residence life, judicial affairs, etc.
- § Have a strategy for rolling out the training on your campus
- § Be flexible with program length
- § Tailor content to the audience

# Suicide Prevention Training

- § 84% of QPR participants gave an overall evaluation of the course as being above average or outstanding.
- § 83% of participants rated that the practical applications of the training as either “above average” or “outstanding”
- § Pretest and posttest data indicate significant changes in attitudes, thoughts and beliefs before and after participants went through the training.

# Suicide Prevention Training

## § Significant differences:

- in facts concerning suicide prevention
- understanding warning signs of suicide
- knowing how to ask someone about suicide
- being able to persuade someone to get help
- knowing how to get help for someone
- where to find local resources for help with suicide
- telling a suicidal person who to talk to for help
- feeling that asking someone about suicide is appropriate.

# Writing Contest

## “The Skin I am In”

- § Essays should explore how being “different” affects your life as a college student and your emotional wellness.
- § Essays that explore connections between emotional health, race, gender, religion, class, ethnicity, sexual orientation and ability are encouraged. The essay should focus on both the challenges and the rewards of difference.

# Writing Contest Excerpts

- § The English as a Second Language class taught me that I should eat turkey on Thanksgiving Day, but it did not teach me when I should put “the” in front of a noun
- § It is this skin, weathered by ordeals that I wear without regrets and with pride.
- § *They feel safe in not knowing, free to speak about gays and lesbians as if we are somewhere else and not sitting in the chair next to them.*

# Writing Contest Excerpts

*“I have learned to pick out the hidden heroes in the textbook because they are the special ones who spoke up for others. That is who I strive to be – a leader of the invisibles.”*



# Writing Contest

## § “What A Difference A Friend Makes”

- The purpose of the writing contest is to raise awareness about the importance of reaching out and being a friend to someone experiencing depression, anxiety, substance abuse or other emotional or mental health issues.
- Entries should tell your personal story and demonstrate the importance of supportive friends who have helped you or how you have supported a friend who was dealing with emotional or mental health issues.

# Writing Contest Excerpt

*Red was the day, and wet from the view  
Orange was the room that's known but a few  
Yellow was the color I hung from my back  
Green was the walk, though it felt more like black  
Blue were my eyes in the days of my youth  
Indigo, they have darkened from gin and vermouth  
Violet, the last color I though I would see  
Then a rainbow formed when you reached out to  
me.*

# Wellness Grants for Student Organizations

Small monetary grants were awarded to student organizations to help fund programs that promoted healthy lifestyles, suicide prevention and reduction other harmful behaviors.

# Wellness Grants for Student Organizations

## § Objectives

- Promote wellness among students
- Provide information about services
- Get students to cross our threshold

## § Eligibility

- A student organization must be registered and in good-standing
- The program must promote wellness in at least one of the following areas: occupational, social, emotional, intellectual, physical, spiritual

# **Wellness Grants**

## ***NAME of PROGRAM***

"Enrichment Day, Buffalo Zoo Trip & After Party"  
"Relay For Life"  
"Beat Stress"  
"Alternative Spring Break Trip"  
"Multicultural Dinner"  
"HIV/AIDS in Western New York, Where Do We Go From Here?"  
"First Annual UB Renaissance Fair"  
"Main Street Field Day"  
"Gospel Explosion 2007"  
"YOGA: Stretch for the Stars"  
"The Working Director's Seminar"  
"Relaxation 101"

## ***ORGANIZATION***

- § URHA Student Groups
- § Black Student Union
- § Intervarsity Christian Fellowship
- § Urban Renewal
- § AIDS Coalition of SBI Health Education
- § Pagans
- § Women's Center
- § Anime
- § UB Gospel Choir
- § Minority Management Society
- § Media Study Graduate Student Union

# Making Connections: Body Movement Program

- § An interactive body movement program designed to raise awareness of the mind-body connection, help people recognize warning signs of emotional distress, and enable people feel empowered to take action & respond
- § Facilitators were dance/movement therapists
- § Co-sponsored with student groups and academic departments
- § SWT participated along with students

# Healing the Mind, Body, & Spirit Thru Dance

## § Curriculum infusion with the Dance Dept

- Choreography 1 and 2
- Group piece in Choreography 1
- Individual pieces in Choreography 2
- Public performance
- Students shared their process
- Instructor might repeat next year

# Do Ask, Do Tell



Observations on  
Emotional Health and Well-being

Call for Entries

Deadline for submissions:  
March 14, 2008

Do Ask Do Tell is a Juried Exhibition sponsored by the University at Buffalo Department of Visual Studies and the Student Wellness Team.

March 27 – April 24, 2008  
Closing Reception: Thursday April 17, 5-7pm  
Center for the Arts Atelier  
University at Buffalo, North Campus

[visualstudies.buffalo.edu/doaskdotell](http://visualstudies.buffalo.edu/doaskdotell)

Art does not solve problems but makes us aware of the problems. It opens our eyes to see and our brain to imagine.  
– Magdalena Abakanowicz

  
[www.buffalo.edu](http://www.buffalo.edu)

  
College of Arts and Sciences

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**–Magdalena Abakanowicz**

# Do Ask, Do Tell

An art exhibit that addresses issues surrounding emotional health and well-being.

- To increase awareness of the impact emotional distress has on the individual and to provide a dialogue on the resiliency of the human spirit through creative expression.
- To normalize our acceptance and understanding of emotional distress, while addressing emotional wellness as a part of being human.
- To promote, support, and develop protective factors creatively as a community is essential to our social health and well-being.

# Do Ask, Do Tell

## § Potential themes to consider:

- Expressions of emotions that promote well-being
- Identifying & belonging – family, friends & community as essential to emotional health
- What it means to know, understand, & maintain wellness – falling apart & getting it together.
- Resiliency, hope & humor – de-stressing wellness
- Stigma & denial vs. shared reality – bad things happens to us all, let's deal with it together
- Signs, manifestations, forms of emotional distress

# Do Ask, Do Tell

- § Visual Studies instructor is a key member on the grant already
- § 2 Other instructors involved in developing the program
- § Use their expertise and past experience with art exhibits and art contests
- § Student Wellness Team also served as judges
- § 40 submissions, 20 in exhibit, 3 winners
- § Closing reception to recognize all contributors and collaborations in suicide prevention for past year

# Community Collaborations

- § Assessing and Managing Suicide Risk Training
- § Sharing resources with smaller schools - QPR training (Fall 2008)
- § Research project: College student utilization of the psychiatric emergency program
- § WNY College Student Mental Health Task Force (local hospitals and counseling center staffs – Summer 2008)

# Other programs

## § LOCATION, LOCATION, LOCATION

- COMFORT KITS
- STRENGTHS SCREENINGS
- FILM: THE TRUTH ABOUT SUICIDE

## § STUDENT PERSONAL STORIES

- STUDENT VIDEOBLOG “17 MINUTES”

## § FOCUS GROUP

- INPUT ON STUDENT DESIGNED BROCHURES

# Future programs

## § More campus partnerships

- Collaboration with Theater and Dance and local LGBT community (Fall 2008, Martin Moran play – “The Tricky Part”)
- Student involvement in social messaging campaign (Fall 2008)
- Collaboration with Disabilities Services (Fall 2008, yoga program)

# What worked (& what didn't)

## § Curriculum infusion

- Don't cancel that class
- Partnering with Dance dept
- Partnering with Visual studies
- Partnering with English Language Institute
- Health & Wellness courses

## § Repeating successful programs

- Writing contests
- Wellness grants

## § Positive experiences = good PR

- Started to get invitations from student groups
- Started to get requests from faculty & staff groups

# What worked (& what didn't)

- § Incentives work
- § Evolving and adapting programs to fit needs and realities
  - Continuing to look for ways to work with faculty and community members at every level (e.g. orientation, campus dining)
- § Passive Programming throughout
- § Eliminate unsuccessful programs
  - Health & Wellness film series

# What worked (& what didn't)

- § Increased visibility and perceived accessibility of the Student Wellness Team
- § Increase in consultations with faculty, staff, and students
- § Increase in number of programs requested
- § Increase in knowledge and skills of suicide prevention (pre-test, post-test, 3 month follow up)
- § Accessed students who might not otherwise use our services
- § Heightened awareness of campus mental health and wellness

# Impact of Campus shootings

- § VA Tech and NIU shootings took place shortly after we implemented our programs
- § Therefore, the success of the programs may be due in part to a heightened awareness of mental health problems of college students and the need for a community not just counseling center response

# Questions & Discussion

- § Any questions about or reactions to the program discussed?
- § Please share collaborations taking place on your campus.