



December 6, 2018

## Testimony to the Youth Suicide Prevention Task Force

Co-Chair Schmidt, Co-Chair Tompkins and members of the Youth Suicide Prevention Task Force, my name is Brenda Mills. I am the Chief Executive Officer for Family Service & Guidance Center, a licensed Community Mental Health Center in Shawnee County that specialized in services to children and their families. I appreciate the opportunity to share with you recent activities in our community that are part of our youth suicide prevention initiative.

- In September 2018, Family Service & Guidance Center (FSGC) convened all five Shawnee County public school districts and Hayden High School, and our local suicide prevention task force, to launch a youth suicide prevention initiative called, "Suicide: Talk About It, Save a Life." The goal is to start a dialogue in our community about the typically taboo subject of suicide. The initiative was launched with a September 19 news conference and a roundtable discussion of high school students from across the community.
- The roundtable discussion explored the stressors and problems that high school students face on a daily basis and was facilitated by FSGC clinicians.
  - ❖ Students discussed the impact of social media and the youth culture towards suicide and the impact this has.
  - ❖ Students identified needing better ways to communicate with adults when they felt they or a peer was truly at risk. This needs to be handled in a way that does not feel punitive.
- School representatives met with CMHC staff following this event.
  - ❖ Discussed the need to try to build consistent responses to students identified as a possible risk.
  - ❖ Identified a need to develop a link on their websites to connect people to supports and resources.
  - ❖ Different districts have developed different student run organizations (Hayden has "houses," Washburn Rural has MAD "Make-A-Difference," Hope Street has a group that meets on Mondays. They all seem to combat this issue within their own schools.
- The group will meet again on December 13 to continue the discussion as well as brainstorm ideas for future prevention strategies.
- On November 13 and 16, FSGC hosted nationally-known suicide prevention advocate and suicide survivor Kevin Hines. Kevin presented at all Shawnee County public high schools in addition to a presentation at the Topeka Performing Arts Center that was free and open to the public.

- Ongoing: Teaching Mental Health First Aid, Youth Mental Health First Aide and ASIST.
- The Topeka Public Schools and Auburn-Washburn Schools are conducting mental health screenings at early ages to try to detect needs.
- Many schools have our logo posted in various places throughout the school along with suicide prevention resources and hotlines.
- FSGC utilizes Facebook, Twitter and our organization's website (FSGCtopeka.com) to educate and pass along prevention information.
- We have placed community mental health center staff in schools to provide direct service. FSGC is currently serving 15 Shawnee county schools with plans for significant expansion.
- FSGC is partnering with 7 Cups to offer a safe, confidential and free support website and phone app for Shawnee County youth ages 13-18. The new service will allow teens to message one-on-one with a live person. 7 Cups provides emotional support and strategies to help address issues like anxiety, depression, isolation, substance abuse, physical health, work and relationship stress. The website/app is scheduled to launch soon.
- FSGC staff have met with Administrators and Board Members of various districts about teen suicide. Our community has really come together to work on addressing this very concerning trend. All agree that our youth can provide some of the best insight into how we can help.

Thank you for the opportunity to share our local efforts in Shawnee County. I would be happy to provide additional details at your request