
Juneau Community Suicide Prevention

August 21, 2009

Task Force NEWSLETTER

Volume 2, Issue 2

Alaska's Suicide Crisis

The Alaska Bureau of Vital Statistics indicates Alaska has the highest suicide rate in the Country, and this year Alaska's suicide rate was at it's highest in a decade.

Suicide Prevention Works

We need to keep working together to give our people hope, and advocate for additional resources, support and funds at the National, State and Local level

Juneau Community Suicide Prevention Task Force Leads the State in Suicide Prevention Efforts!

In a little over one year, the Juneau Community Suicide Prevention Task Force has accomplished a great deal in addressing suicide prevention in Juneau, and has now been recognized as a leader in the State of Alaska, for its accomplishments and direction with respect to both community and school based suicide prevention efforts and strategies. The Task Force and all suicide prevention efforts are a result of a three-year grant awarded to the Juneau School District through the Alaska Department of Health and Social Services. **The State of Alaska; Department of Behavioral Health, Advisory Board on Alcoholism and Drug Abuse, Suicide Prevention Council and Senator Murkowski, recognize us a community that now leads the state in suicide prevention efforts,** and we look forward to collaborating and sharing our ideas to help support other communities throughout Alaska.

Changing Juneau's Cultural Belief System about Suicide

We have fortunately seen a significant decrease in the number of suicides in Juneau, since 2007-08, yet it would be premature to suggest the Task Force's efforts are the main causal factor for this decrease. Through hard work, proactive positive energy, persistence and determination we have made a great deal of progress in Juneau this year with respect to our suicide prevention efforts; yet our Task force still has much more work to do. Prevention efforts take time and will only work with sustainability. Juneau still has a tremendous amount of work to do in changing our communities and adolescents cultural belief system, a system that suggests talking about suicide might cause suicide. **Research clearly indicates addressing suicide prevention, head on, is one of the most powerful strategies a community can do to prevent suicides.** This cultural change in thinking will take time, yet this Task Force is determined to see that happen in our schools, and throughout the Juneau community.

Suicide is the result of mental health despair, and two major precursors that often feed this despair include untreated mental illness and substance abuse. Juneau and Southeast has much work to do in improving our mental health and substance abuse services and programs. Several examples of these problems include a pervasive Oxycontin crisis involving our adolescents. Juneau will need comprehensive inter-agency and community cooperation to resolve this complex problem. Our Veterans are in dire need of mental health services. Many feel a psychiatric hospital for adolescents in Southeast is needed. Of greatest concern however, are our smaller Alaska Native Communities, who need immediate support to address the issues surrounding suicide prevention. The Task Force is determined to support, these and other mental health concerns in Juneau and our Southeast Alaska communities in any way we can.

Special Task Force Planning Session

There will be a special Task Force planning session for the upcoming year, September 17th from 3:00-5:00 PM at Tlingit and Haida in the Andrew Hope Building, 3rd floor conference room. This meeting is open to all.

Future Oversight Meetings

Thursdays
4:00- 5:00 PM

October 15th
(Salmon Creek)

November 19th
(Valley)

December 17
(Downtown)

Specific locations will be announced.

Task Force members and concerned citizens are always welcome to attend

BUSY SUMMER for Juneau Community Suicide Prevention Task Force

JUNEAU MENTAL HEALTH.org

Another Fantastic Website for Juneau

A wonderful new website was developed over the summer. This site has been designed as a user-friendly mental health resource guide and service for members of the Juneau Community and is referred to as **“Juneau Mental Health.org”** (juneaumentalhealth.org). When you open the site you can access the **“Juneau Mental Health Directory”**. If an individual is seeking advice on where or how to obtain mental health services in Juneau, or would like to scroll a directory of mental health agencies organized by different mental health subcategories, such as substance abuse, they merely follow the directory to read about what services are available in Juneau, given their mental health concern. In the near future, we hope to survey the individual mental health clinicians again, in order to get even more specific information regarding; the populations they serve, their therapeutic specialty areas, and the insurance companies they accept, including Medicaid, and DenaliKidcare. Our hope is to make this Directory as user friendly as possible for our community members.

“JuneauMentalHealth.org” also provides quick access to agencies and services that support mental health needs at the Local, State and National level in the "Community Resources", "Alaska Resources" and "National Resources" links. A great deal of additional mental health information can also be obtained through a click of the mouse. Visitors can obtain a vast amount of information on the diagnostic criteria and treatment of many mental health illnesses, psychiatric medications and issues related to Children, Adolescents, Parenting, Substance Abuse, Veterans and Suicide Prevention. The website also connects readers to the Juneau Suicide Prevention web site (juneausuicideprevention.org). Please take your time exploring **“JuneauMentalHealth.org”**. Our hope is to provide our visitors with a clearer understanding and quick access of the multitude of mental health services offered in Juneau, Alaska, and the United States; and provide efficient log on for a multitude of information related to mental health topics.

Juneau Empire and Capital City Weekly media blitz 40,000 Suicide Prevention Inserts, On-line and Paper Ads

Approximately 40,000 Suicide Prevention Inserts will be placed in the Juneau Empire and Capital City Weekly; 20,000 the first week of September and another 20,000 in February. These inserts will also discuss the tragic statistics in Alaska, identify the warning signs, risk factors and what to do if you or someone you know appears suicidal. In addition The Bartlett Emergency Room, and Careline numbers are provided along with the Juneau Suicide Prevention website and the new Juneau Mental Health website is provided. Additional ads in the paper and online will also occur this fall advertising juneausuicideprevention.org, and juneaumentalhealth.org.

What To Do

Here are some ways to be helpful to someone who is dealing with suicidal ideation

~~~~~

*~Get help by calling the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline or Careline 1-877-266-4357*

*~Go to the Juneau Community Suicide Prevention Web Page and seek mental health support from the Mental Health Directory;*

*~Take action. Remove means, such as guns or pills*

*~Don't dare him or her to do it. Don't be sworn to secrecy.*

*~Be direct. Talk openly and matter-of-factly about suicide.*

*~Be willing to listen. Allow expressions of feelings. Accept the feelings.*

*~Get involved. Become available. Show interest and seek support.*

*~Don't act shocked or judgmental. This will put distance between you. Offer hope that alternatives are available.*

## Suicide Prevention Brochures For Parents and Teens

A great deal of work was accomplished in the development of suicide prevention materials this summer. Suicide prevention brochures for “Parents of Teens”, and a separate one for “Teens” have been created in order to provide the reader with statistics, risk factors, warning signs, prevention steps and most importantly what to do if you suspect a teen is in crisis. The Bartlett Emergency Room and Careline numbers are provided along with the Juneau Suicide Prevention web site; [juneausuicideprevention.org](http://juneausuicideprevention.org). In addition, the new Juneau Mental Health website is provided to instruct readers how to get mental health support in Juneau by accessing the “Juneau Mental Health Directory” at [juneaumentalhealth.org](http://juneaumentalhealth.org). Over 5000 prevention brochures for “Parents of Teens”, and for “Teens” have been printed and distributed. Over 3500 have been sent to the three Juneau School District High Schools and two Middle Schools for distribution. The remaining brochures are being distributed to local mental health providers and mental health agencies, medical offices and facilities, libraries, youth groups, and churches.

### “Gay and Lesbian Teen Mental Health Brochures ”

A separate brochure for the “Gay and Lesbian Teen” population in Juneau was developed to provide them helpful information regarding support systems, mental health resources, and suicide prevention information. It has been estimated that as many as 30 percent of all youth suicides are completed by gays, lesbians, or bisexuals. The U.S. Department of Health and Social Services notes GLBT youth live in a society that discriminates against and stigmatizes homosexuals while failing to recognize that a substantial number of its youth are GLBT. These youth are often faced with rejection by parents, family or peers, which can lead to isolation and mental health complications. These brochures are designed to let the GLBT population know they are not alone and that support is there for them as they explore their sexuality and take steps to come out. PFLAG is very appreciative of the brochures and will help distribute the brochures, as will mental health and school counselors. SEAGALA will place the brochures on their website.

### Supporting our Veterans

Don Phelps and Jeri Museth of the High Risk committee, continue to be very instrumental in trying to reach out to our Veterans. It is quite difficult, however to make substantial headway as Juneau, Southeast and Alaska are lacking resources to support our Veterans. Many of our Veterans have lost or are losing hope. Tragically our Veterans are in desperate need of relevant therapeutic interventions to meet their unique needs as a result of the trauma they have endured from combat. Senator Murkowski is making attempts back in Washington D.C., to make some headway with the United States Department of Veterans Administration, as she is quite aware of the inadequate services and supports our Veterans in Alaska receive and the difficulty they have in accessing services due to our unique and remote geographic challenges.

## SOS Results 2008-09

**In the Juneau School District, 23% of the Freshman class, met the diagnostic criteria of Major Depression in the last six months and/or experienced suicidal ideation or suicidal behaviors in the last year, based on results of the SOS screens.**

Suicide in Alaska is the second leading cause of death for all adolescents.

**45% of Ya Koos High School met the diagnostic criteria of Major Depression in the last six months and/or experienced suicidal ideation or suicidal behaviors in the last year.**

Alaska Native Males, 19 to 24 have the highest rate of suicide than any other demographic population in the country

## Results of the 2008-09 Signs of Suicide (SOS) Program

The Juneau School District's **Signs of Suicide (SOS)** program, which involves school based mental health curriculum about depression and suicide prevention, as well as mental health screenings for High School Students, has been a great success thus far in the Juneau School District. Last 2008-09 school year, the program was presented to 425 students, all Freshman students and all the students at Yaakoosge Daakahidi (Ya Koos) High School. Of the 332 Freshman students at TMHS and JDHS, who received the SOS screens, 78 of those students, or 23% of the Freshman class, met the diagnostic criteria of Major Depression in the last six months and/or experienced suicidal ideation or suicidal behaviors in the last year. Of the 80 students screened at Ya Koos, 36 or 45% met the diagnostic criteria of Major Depression and/or experienced suicidal ideation or suicidal behaviors in the last year. All those students (114) at the three schools, who either met the criteria for Major Depression or experienced suicidal ideation or suicidal behaviors in the last year, were called in individually for more in-depth mental health interviews. Clinicians then formulated mental health recommendations based on the information that was provided, called Parents and made these recommendations to the Parents. A total of 15 students interviewed were considered high to moderate risk of suicide and had an additional risk assessment by either JAMHI or Juneau Youth Services.

### SOS Dates for 2009-10

**Ya Koos SOS Dates; September 21-25, 2009 (Monday-Friday)**

**JDHS SOS Dates; October 27-28, 2009 (Tuesday-Wednesday)**

**TMHS SOS Dates; December 8-9, 2009 (Tuesday-Wednesday)**

Aside from implementing the SOS curriculum and screens this year to all Ya Koos students and all Freshman students, Juneau School District Counseling staff plan on expanding lessons and activities dealing with suicide prevention and depression, based on research based effective programs, into the Middle Schools and up to 12th grade. Counselors, Sally Donaldson and Chrissy Walker, piloted Middle School SOS lessons and video at DZMS last year with great success. Interestingly enough, these counselors noted when a large sample of DZMS school students were surveyed at the Health Fair sponsored by Catholic Community Services, the students were very clear in stating they wanted additional lessons addressing suicide prevention and depression.

The State of Washington has adopted a four- lesson program referred to as "Helping Every Living Person" or H. E. L. P. addressing signs of depression and suicide. It is designed for health teachers, although classroom teachers and/or counselors can certainly provide the lessons. It is geared for 10th-11th graders, however we can adapt the activities for lower grades. SOS has suicide-prevention and depression lessons referred to as "Booster kits for 12th graders going off to college". Juneau School District counselors will meet September 15<sup>th</sup>, to explore how we can provide our kids these early life long suicide prevention lessons.

## Facts About

MAJOR  
DEPRESSION

Major depression is a serious medical illness affecting 15 million American adults, or approximately 5 to 8 percent of the adult population in a given year

Among all medical illnesses, major depression is the leading cause of disability in the U.S. and many other developed countries.

Although major depression can be a devastating illness, it is highly treatable.

Between 80 and 90 percent of those diagnosed with major depression can be effectively treated and return to their usual daily activities.

Left untreated, depression can lead to suicide.

## Supporting and Collaborating with Southeast Communities On Suicide Prevention Efforts

### *Ketchikan and Others Requests our Assistance and Collaboration*

Our neighboring communities throughout Southeast Alaska have been reaching out to us for support and collaboration. Ketchikan had 10 suicides in the last 10 months. At the request of Executive Director, Laura Medford of "Ketchikan Gateway Center for Human Services" we were requested to travel to Ketchikan to share our model, strategies and materials as they were clearly in crisis as a community, and had heard of the wonderful strategies going on in Juneau as a result of our Task Force. Therefore in June, a two-day whirlwind trip, filled with meetings, interviews and discussions, occurred in order to share our ideas. The site visit started with a meeting at Gateway, then radio interview, then a two-hour Town Hall meeting at the "Alaska Discovery Center", attended by the Mayor, Alaska Native leaders, and over 100 community members. The day concluded with two more radio interviews which permitted time to continue to discuss our Task Force strategies and the importance of community based suicide prevention efforts. The next day was a presentation of the school based "SOS" program to Superintendent of Ketchikan Schools and others key Administrators. They will send representatives up to Juneau for training when we implement our SOS program at JDHS, October 27-28. Ketchikan Schools will then begin to implement SOS this year once those visitors have a chance to train their staff on what they observed and learned. The trip concluded with two more meetings, including a question and answer period with the chairs of their committees and a meeting with Gateway's Advisory Board and staff. Ketchikan is off to a great start as they begin to formulate the **Ketchikan Community Suicide Prevention Task Force**.

### *Collaborating with Other Southeast Communities*

A presentation of the Juneau Community Suicide Prevention Web Page and Task Forces strategies and programs were made at the **Suicide Prevention Symposium** sponsored by Central Council of Tlingit and Haida and State of Alaska. The June 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Symposium was very successful and was well attended by leaders of Alaska Native communities throughout Southeast Alaska. It allowed these leaders to begin to develop suicide prevention strategies for their communities. We also look forward to collaborating with the future grant recipient of the **Alaska DBH grant, funded by SAMSHA**, which is designed to facilitate regional suicide prevention efforts throughout Southeast Alaska. We look forward to collaborating with **SEARHC**, as they begin to implement a suicide prevention grant award through the U.S. Department of Indian Health Service (IHS).

The Task Force promotes sharing our ideas, strategies and programs to any community seeking our support and is determined to support and collaborate with other communities, as Alaska has the highest suicide rate in the Country. Although grand in size, Alaska is small in the sense of the relationships, and collaboration that can be made with other communities. We are all in this together and any suicide hurts us all. We will never give up hope of helping heal the beautiful people who call Alaska home.