



Thank you allowing me to speak today. I hope this day and this hearing will provide ideas and information that will enable North Dakota to develop solutions that will benefit North Dakota's citizens and our more treasured resource, our young people.

The programming that I will tell you about today is being initiated by the Stephanie Goetz Foundation of Fargo, ND in partnership with the Fargo and West Fargo Public Schools.



Our goal is to implement services that will provide early intervention for young people who identify themselves or who have been identified by others with concerns regarding personal mental health. Research indicates that it is critical to provide care in the earliest possible stages of mental illness when it can be much more easily treated, if mental health concerns are allowed to develop over longer periods, the likelihood of additional issues like self-harm or chemical dependency can increase in youth.

Our two pilot districts and the Foundation are excited because we have realistic reasons to believe we are on the right path, to carry out plans that can make a real difference in turning the situation around for many youth.

#### **Brief History:**

Fargo news anchor, Stephanie Goetz, lost her older brother, Cameron, to suicide in 2002. After this loss, finding a way to help youth struggling with mental illness became her personal mission. In November of 2012 Stephanie began discussions with professionals in mental health and education fields to determine what the communities mental health needs were. Child psychiatrist and pediatrician, Dr. Read Sulik and Nancy Jordheim, Fargo Public Schools Assistant Superintendent, now retired, joined Stephanie and myself, to launch The Stephanie Goetz Foundation (SGF) in February 2013.

#### **The Need:**

All one needs to do to realize the severity of mental illness in our youth is look at the statistics from the 2011 North Dakota Youth Risk Behavior Survey. Statewide data shown below indicated that nearly a quarter of North Dakota's 9-12<sup>th</sup> graders identify themselves as struggling to the point that they stop doing usual activities. 10% of the students surveyed admitted to having attempted suicide one or more times in the previous 12 months. In the Fargo area, for instance, that translates to hundreds of students. That's not a RARE condition, it's an EPIDEMIC. In our state both access to current services and scope of services are not adequate. *We need to come together to find new strategies to provide our young people with the opportunity to see the world as a place where they can Imagine Thriving.*

#### **The 2011 North Dakota Youth Risk Behavior Survey - critical results 9-12 grade North Dakotans**

[http://www.dpi.state.nd.us/health/yrbs/2011/2011\\_hs.pdf](http://www.dpi.state.nd.us/health/yrbs/2011/2011_hs.pdf)

- 23.8 % -- the Percentage of students who felt so sad or hopeless almost every day for two

weeks or more in a row that they stopped doing some usual activities during the previous 12 months (NDHqn23, CDC QN24)

- 14.7 % -- Percentage of students who seriously considered attempting suicide during the previous 12 months (NDHqn24, CDC QN25)
- 12.1 % -- Percentage of students who made a plan about how they would attempt suicide during the previous 12 months (NDHqn25, CDC QN26)
- 10.8 % -- Percentage of students who actually attempted suicide one or more times during the previous 12 months (NDHqn26, CDC QN27)

***Dr. David Flowers, West Fargo Public School Superintendent, relates the following:***

*“Our learning goals for each student to achieve are ambitious. There isn’t a morning I don’t get up in awe of the responsibility we have as a community to help each student succeed. Unfortunately there is not a week that goes by that I do not have to sign paperwork for one or more students in crisis to be in treatment. Though they may receive some instruction while in treatment, their mental and emotional health needs become paramount, and learning must take a back seat. **The sooner we can get them appropriate help, perhaps before the crisis is so severe, the sooner learning and being a child can be a priority for them again.** We are grateful for partners in the community who can help children and families, because the schools cannot do it alone. We need help. Our children and families need help. **Triage therapists in our schools would help us connect children in need to the services they require more quickly, which in some cases we know is a matter of life and death.**”*

**Our strategies to help students Imagine Thriving include:**

**Early Intervention – action before crisis**

1) The employment of specially trained and integrated mental health advocates, identified as Triage Therapists, are Licensed Clinical Social Workers or those with a similar background. Triage Therapists work in the school with school staff to identify students who may be struggling with a mental health issue. The Triage Therapist will provide individual students with mental health assessments. He/she then may refer the student to an appropriate mental health provider and offer continued advocacy through the initial consultant with that provider. Triage Therapists will work with parents/guardians to help them understand the mental health needs of their child and additionally may help families regarding financial assistance or understanding their own insurance policy’s benefits. Very simply, Triage Therapists create a safety net for each child. They work by building a bridge between the parent/guardian, the school, and the mental health care provider.

The Stephanie Goetz Foundation has begun the process of hiring the first Triage Therapist. It is anticipated that this Triage Therapist will be trained and in place by January 2014. As quickly as is sustainable, financially and capacity-wise, implementation will begin in all of our partner schools. The Foundation has created partnerships with the public schools in Fargo, West Fargo and Moorhead, MN, to provide funding for Triage Therapists in each of these districts. SGF will provide the funding for the salary and each district will provide employee benefits. The school districts will be the employers of the Triage Therapists. The base salary for the Triage Therapists will coincide with districts’ salary scale and range from \$38,000 – 45,000 annually.

The Triage Therapist program is modeled after programming that was started 13 years ago, by SGF Board Member, Dr. Read Sulik, in St. Cloud Minnesota. It also with grass roots fundraising and grants. The program has been very successful and continues on today.

As a Legislator or citizen of our state it is significant to know that by year three the success of the program in St. Cloud justified the St. Cloud Public Schools absorbing the costs of the program into the district. By year five, \$500,000 was saved in reduced hospitalization and associated costs. The SGF and pilot schools are working closely with the Triage Therapists in St. Cloud as they providing us with resources and guidance. St. Cloud will also help to provide training to the Triage Therapists that we are hiring.

## **2) Access to Care Fund**

The Stephanie Goetz Foundation has created an Access to Care Fund to help defray the initial costs of mental health care for families unable bear such a burden. The Foundation fundraising goal for this portion is to work with corporate sponsors. Border States Electric has already shown interest in providing initial funding for the Access to Care fund.

## **3) Education is vital to thriving youth**

Another vital piece of successful early intervention is mental health education.

**ALL** parents and educators need to have an understanding of what the early symptoms of mental illness are in children and adolescents. According to Dr. Sulik, anxiety and depression symptoms are commonly misunderstood by parents and educators. For instance, a young person struggling with either or both anxiety and depression may come across as having behavioral issues like a “bad attitude” or being lazy, instead of being accurately recognized for what they are. Misinterpretation may lead to the child not receiving care, and thus the continuing and worsening of that child’s mental health problems.

To help increase the awareness and understanding of such symptoms and problems, we have launched *Imagine Thriving*. *Imagine Thriving* is a project of the Stephanie Goetz Foundation that provides free and easily accessible mental health education and resources to students, parents and educators. The website [www.ImagineThriving.org](http://www.ImagineThriving.org) will fully launch in late fall of 2013.

The Foundation is also producing mental health educational videos that will be provided at no charge via that website, CD’s and through requested presentations. One video is aimed at students, and the other at parents and educators.

The Stephanie Goetz Foundation has created a Student Board made up of high school students from each of our partner schools. The students work to create understanding and raise awareness amongst their peers, family and community.

*Imagine Thriving* will create a movement of understanding. Awareness and education will empower students and families to not only seek out mental healthcare when needed but will encourage families to create an environment where their children can thrive. The goal of the family and the foundation is create a space where they can live up to their full potential.

In closing, we believe every child deserves: education, access to care, and dedicated professionals who help build bridges, we call them Triage Therapist’s. Why? Because all children should *imagine* themselves *thriving*.

Included in the informational folders that I've brought for each of you is an "Imagine Thriving" bracelet. Please take it out and wear it in support of the thousands of young people in North Dakota who are struggling with mental illness right now. Every child, when nurtured and supported, can thrive. Every child has unlimited potential until they are stymied by road blocks. It is a tragedy that sometimes these road blocks are created by struggles with mental illnesses like anxiety or depression because with early intervention these are *highly treatable*.

I ask Governor Dalrymple, Human Services and the Legislature to make an investment in the future of North Dakota, and to lead the nation by example in early intervention mental health care for children.

With the support of the State of North Dakota in increasing awareness and understanding of these problems, by offering early intervention to treat them, young people in North Dakota can be given the tools, understanding, education and coping skills that can change the trajectory of this disease, and their lives. North Dakota can help these young people grow into healthy, productive, thriving North Dakotans, and in doing so, North Dakota can also show the nation how to help all our nation's young people

Still not convinced?

The World Health Organization projects that by 2030 depression will be the world wide number one cause of disability. North Dakotans are not immune to this – at all.

The numbers from the ND Youth Risk Survey don't lie. Youth in North Dakota are struggling and these young people who are struggling now, are the future adults of North Dakota.

Mental illness in childhood and/or adolescence is often the start of a lifelong battle. Untreated mental illness can lead to expensive problems that often society ends up "picking up the tab for"; chemical dependency, incarcerations, domestic violence and homelessness, to name just a few. But it doesn't have to be this way.

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

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

P. O. BOX 10083, Fargo, ND 58106



Imagine Thriving is a community action project of the Stephanie Goetz Foundation. It's a free resource for tweens, teens, parents and educators that empowers mental wellness through education and awareness.

[www.ImagineThriving.org](http://www.ImagineThriving.org)  
 Launching in October 2013

**The 2011 ND Youth Risk Behavior Survey - Fargo area**

- 22.7% of students felt so sad or hopeless almost every day for two weeks or more in a row that they stopped doing some usual activity during the previous 12 months.
- 13.8% of students who seriously considered attempting suicide during the previous 12 months.
- 11.8% of students made a plan about how they would attempt suicide.
- 10.6% of students attempted suicide in the previous 12 months.

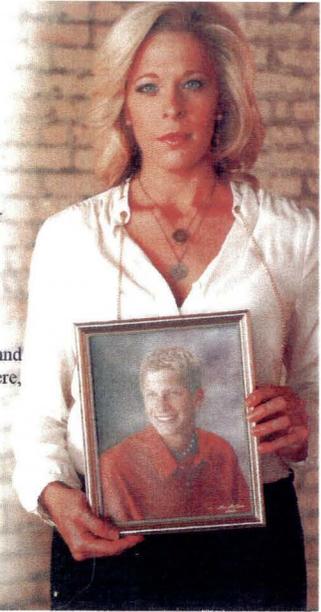


[www.StephanieGoetzFoundation.org](http://www.StephanieGoetzFoundation.org)  
 P.O.Box 10083, Fargo, ND 58106  
 701-318-2046



After battling depression, my older brother Cam took his life at 19. I started this foundation in his memory to bring hope & healing to others who are hurting. By contributing just \$19 or more, in honor of my brother's 19 years and every other struggling child out there, you will help enhance child's life. Thank you for joining us in this vital mission.

~ Stephanie Goetz



*Empowering Mental Wellness means providing all children with the opportunity and resources to imagine a world where they thrive.*

The Stephanie Goetz Foundation is working to remove barriers that stand in the way of children's mental wellness by:

**Bringing Triage Therapists into our schools**

School staff do their best to help students who are struggling but do not provide mental health services. Triage Therapists will work with individual students and their families, the school and health care professionals to provide the student with the appropriate help.

**Financial Assistance**

Defray the costs of mental health services.

**Education**

Providing mental health education to students, parents and educators.

*With early intervention, children who are struggling with mental health concerns like anxiety and depression can be empowered to live healthy and productive lives.*

*Early intervention gives our youth the means for a lifetime of thriving. Take action now and be a part of the solution.*

*Your donation or \$19 in or more to The Stephanie Goetz Foundation will help to provide children and schools critical resources.*

"Our learning goals for each student to achieve are ambitious. There isn't a morning I don't get up in awe of the responsibility we have as a community to help each student succeed. Unfortunately, there is not a week that goes by that I do not have to sign paperwork for one or more students in crisis to be in treatment. Though they may receive some instruction while in treatment, their mental and emotional health needs become paramount, and learning must take a back seat. The sooner we can get them appropriate help, perhaps before the crisis is so severe, the sooner learning and being a child can be a priority for them again. We are grateful for partners in the community who can help children and families, because the schools cannot do it alone. We need help. Our children and families need help. Triage therapists in our schools would help us connect children in need to the services they require more quickly, which in some cases we know is a matter of life and death."

~ Dr. David Flowers  
 West Fargo Public Schools  
 Superintendent

The Stephanie Goetz Foundation has created partnerships with Fargo, Moorhead and West Fargo Public Schools to enhance the mental health care resources available to our children.

Your contribution of \$19 or other will provide life saving mental health resources and education to children, families and our community. Imagine Thriving.

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

Email \_\_\_\_\_

Donation amount \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Credit card \_\_\_\_\_

cvv \_\_\_\_\_ exp \_\_\_\_\_ phone \_\_\_\_\_

Signature \_\_\_\_\_

Stephanie Goetz Foundation P.O. Box 10083, Fargo, N.D. 58106

*FM Area Foundation is the fiscal host of the Stephanie Goetz Foundation. Donations are tax-deductible.*

