

Testimony
Human Services Interim Committee

3 PM to 3:15 PM; January 6, 2016
North Dakota Department of Health

Good afternoon Madam Chair and members of the Human Service Interim Committee. My name is Alison Traynor and I am the Suicide Prevention Program director for the North Dakota Department of Health. I am here to introduce Sources of Strength, one of the evidence-based suicide prevention projects supported by state general funds.

Here to talk about the Sources of Strength program are Megan Sletten and Jessica Bentz, educators and co-lead adult advisors of Bismarck-Century High school Sources of Strength Program.

Megan and Jessica are here with three Bismarck School District students who serve as Sources of Strength Peer Leaders; Christian Kilwein, Hannah Iron Eyes, and Taylor Veen.

After the presentation, if you have questions for me or the program's founder and researcher, Mark Lo Murray, we will be happy to answer them. Here is Sources of Strength Co- Lead Advisor for Bismarck High School, Megan Sletten.

SOURCES OF STRENGTH

Presentation to the North Dakota Human Service Interim Committee

by Century High School teachers and students

What is Sources of Strength



- An answer for Responsible Decision-Making initiatives and Continual School Improvement goals
- A suicide prevention program
- An anti-bullying program
- A climate changer

Megan- Chairperson Hogan and Members of the Committee, thank you for having us today.

Megan- Sources of Strength is a big component for our school's Responsible Decision Making initiatives which is a piece of our Continual School Improvement goals, a suicide prevention program, and anti-bullying program. In general, it's a climate changer. The model challenges student leaders to help make their school a safe, fun, and positive environment.

An Evidence-Based Program

One of the most heavily researched peer leader programs

- University of Rochester- Peter Wyman, key researcher
- National Peer Leadership Study- funded by the National Institute of Mental Health (currently in sixth year of the six-year trial)
- Stanford University- suicide contagion study
- University of Rochester- Air Force
- Black Dog Institute- Australia

Megan- It is one of the most heavily research peer leader programs. Countless universities over the course of the last 18 years have validated Sources' peer-leader model.

An Evidence-Based Program

On the SAMHSA registry of suicide prevention programs, the gold-standard of prevention programs



Megan- It is one of the few programs listed on the SAMHSA registry of suicide prevention programs, which is the gold-standard of prevention programs.

Youth Risk Behavior Survey Results

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 past 12 months.

	2011	2013	2015
Bismarck	23.7%	24.5%	29.6%
North Dakota	23.8%	25.4%	27.2%

Percentage of students who seriously considered attempting suicide during the past 12 months.

	2011	2013	2015
Bismarck	16.0%	14.8%	18.2%
North Dakota	14.7%	16.1%	16.2%

Megan- As a community, we are all concerned about the well-being of our youth. As educators, we are alarmed by the recent results of the YRBS. Increasingly, youth across the state are expressing that they are struggling with feelings of hopelessness, depression, and thoughts of suicide.

Youth Risk Behavior Survey Results

Percentage of students who made a plan about how they would attempt suicide during the past 12 months.

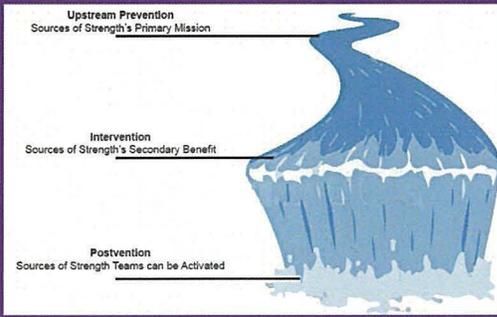
	2011	2013	2015
Bismarck	12.5%	11.2%	14.1%
North Dakota	12.1%	13.5%	13.5%

Percentage of students who actually attempted suicide one or more times during the past 12 months.

	2011	2013	2015
Bismarck	11.7%	11.1%	10.8%
North Dakota	10.8%	11.5%	9.4%

Megan- How can we stand by a do nothing, knowing that the youth of North Dakota are struggling? As educators, we understand how crucial it is that students feel equipped to handle their lives' problems. We believe we must act to reverse these disturbing trends.

Upstream Suicide Prevention



Century High School Sources of Strength started October 2014

Megan- Sources of Strength takes an “upstream” approach to suicide prevention. Unfortunately, most suicide prevention funding is focused at the top of the waterfall or below. Although those programs are still important, solely funding them would be a reactive approach. Sources of Strength is one of the few models that serves upstream-- a proactive approach that promotes resilience and positive youth development as protective factors against suicide.

Jess- At Century High School, we started Sources in the fall of 2014.

Peer Leader Training

→ Teachers identify a diverse group of students to be trained as peer leaders



Jess- Step one in the program is to identify a diverse group of students who are leaders within their peer group and then have these students attend a one-day training. We are looking for students from every corner of the school so that our positive campaigns can infiltrate every clique, club, and social group.

Jess- Approximately 10% of Century High School has been trained, which amounts to about 180 students and 40 teachers. The main purpose of the training is to help students start an internal story about what strengths they have grown in their experiences. The model focuses deeply on the story process and the sharing of stories.



Jess- We explain to the peer leaders that they are to act as be connectors and not counselors. They are to be the eyes and ears for the school and to help connect their peers to help.

Christian, Taylor, and Hannah

Building Resilience

→ Peer Leaders and Adult Advisers team up to teach the school to identify strengths to build resilience



Taylor- We use this wheel to teach our peers how to build resilience and survive their struggles. There are eight “strengths” highlighted on the wheel.

Norming Help-Seeking Behavior

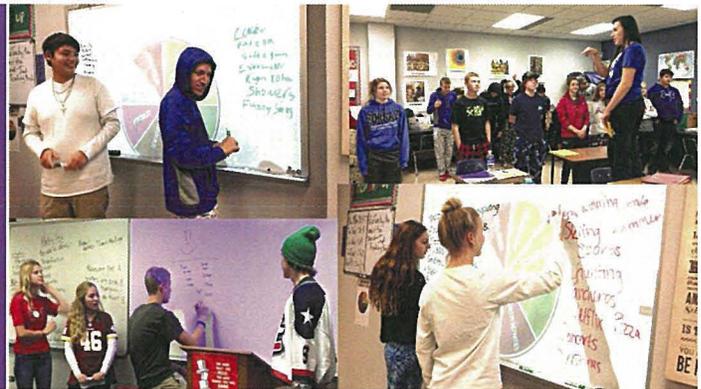
→ “We all go through challenges in life. What are your sources of strength?”



Taylor- We want to normalize help-seeking and teach our classmates to identify their areas of strength.

Teaching Peers in a Classroom setting

→ Students teach their peers about the wheel and help them identify strengths to handle life’s challenges

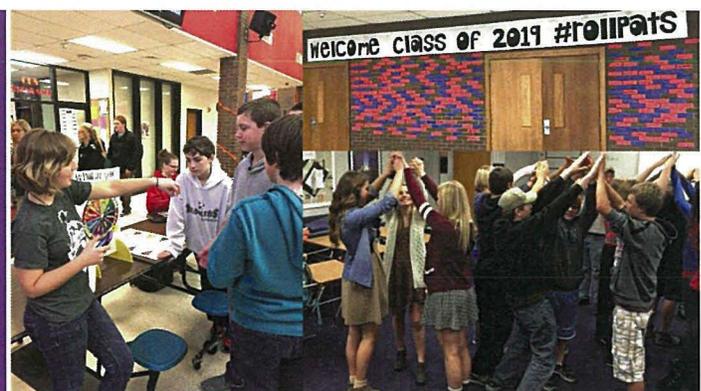


Hannah- We want everyone in the school to see and think about the wheel

Hannah- We went into the English classrooms, because every kid has an English class. We used interactive games to teach our classmates to identify their strengths.

Creating Positive Culture Change

→ Peer leaders create events and campaigns to promote healthy activities and relationships



Christian- Much of what we do in the club is spread messages of hope, help and strength.

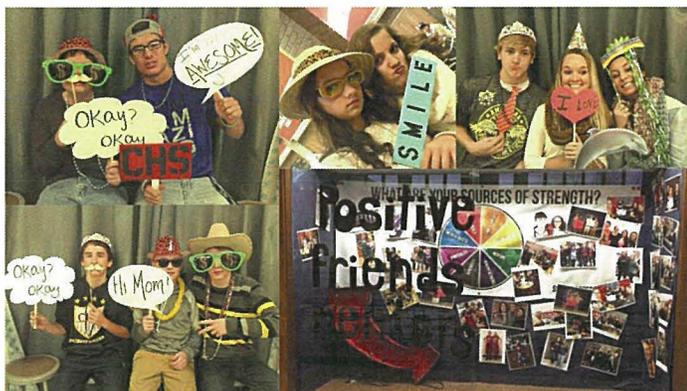
Christian- These might look like nice activities, but there’s a deeper purpose to them. They are all designed to engage students that we call “isolates.”



Taylor- Research shows that one in eight kids are “isolates”, meaning they can’t name a friend and no one names them as a friend.



Taylor- Kids who are “isolates are two times more likely to be suicidal and four times more likely to be bullied.



Taylor- Through our classroom presentations and our campaigns, every student at Century is reached and hears messages of hope, help, and strength.



Megan- As teachers, we know that social media can be a negative place. We want to leverage social media to propel messages of hope, help, and strength.

Bringing in Speakers whose messages reflect hope, help and strength

Megan- We are careful not to use “shock and awe” tactics. Research demonstrates that shock and awe messaging can actually norm negative behaviors and can result in more suicide.

Naming Trusted Adults

→ Every student is challenged to name an adult he or she could consult in a crisis

Christian- This year, we challenged every student at Century to name a trusted adult.



Christian- We had a large-scale campaign to create the norm that it is ok to reach out to someone for help.



Jess- We want to establish a pathway between students and adults and help students realize that we are more than their teachers; we are adults who deeply care about their overall well-being.



Jess- In a school in Boulder, CO, before they had Sources, the school counselors had 40 suicide interventions and 30 hospitalizations in one year. After Sources was implemented, they saw 80 suicide interventions, and only 8 hospitalizations. The amount of referrals increased dramatically, but the referrals came “up-stream” before a serious crisis occurred.

Student Testimonies

- Why Sources of Strength matters
 - ◆ Taylor Veen, junior
 - ◆ Christian Kilwein, senior
 - ◆ Hannah Iron Eyes, sophomore

Taylor, Christian, and Hannah.

Implementing in ND

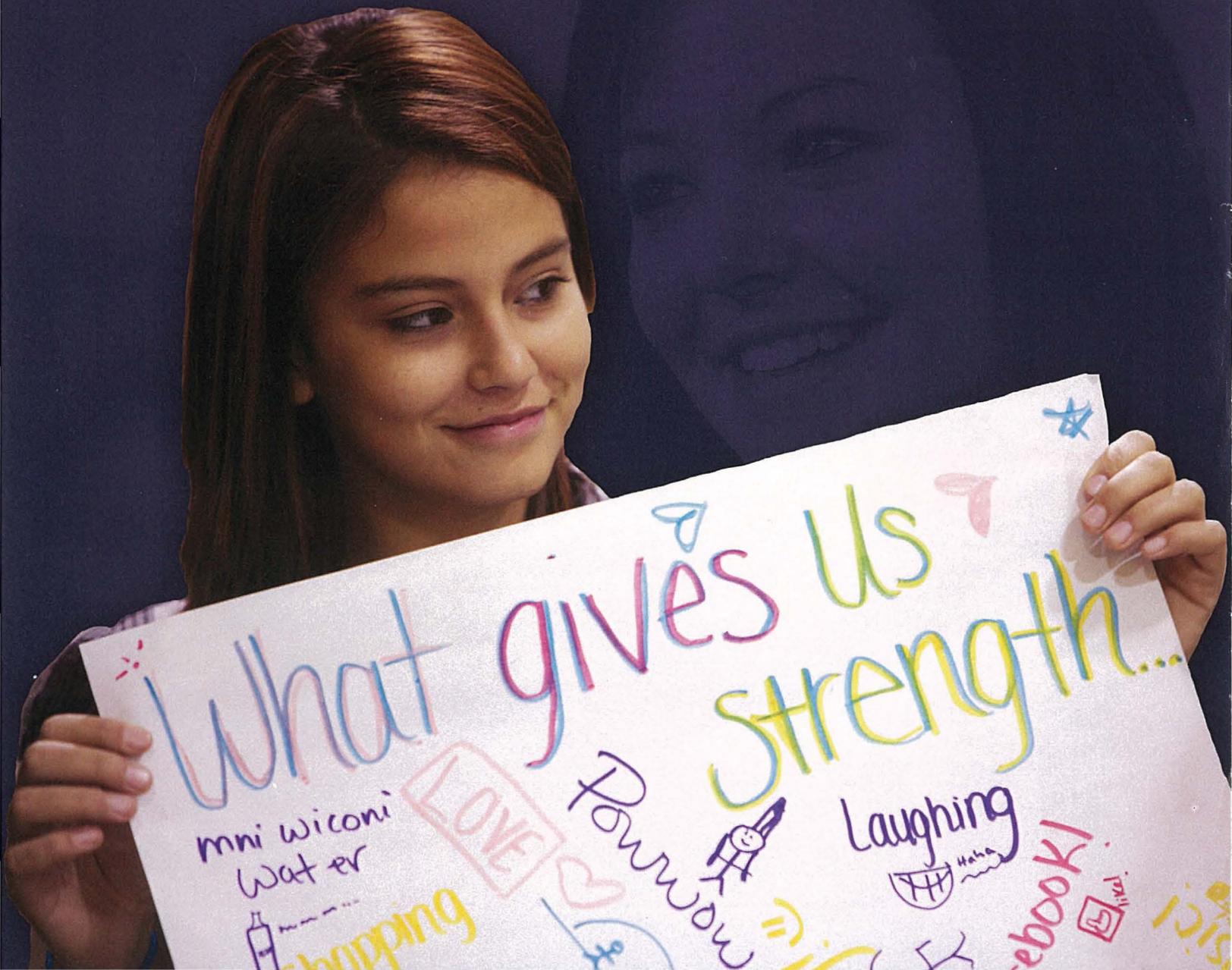
- States like Georgia, Idaho, Alaska, and New York are currently doing large-scale roll-outs
- Ottawa, New Zealand, and Australia are also implementing Sources of Strength on a large scale

Megan- We believe in Sources’ model and its ability to impact the lives of our youth. We know that other states have implemented Sources state-wide and we are excited at the possibility that you might consider funding Sources further in North Dakota. We are happy to answer any questions that you might have for us. Thank you.

SOURCES OF STRENGTH

Proven, evidence-based, upstream prevention.

 **NREPP** SAMHSA's National Registry of
Evidence-based Programs and Practices
THE GOLD-STANDARD LIST FOR PREVENTION PROGRAMS



FOUR THINGS TO KNOW:

#1 HOW IT WORKS

Sources of Strength got its start as a grassroots program in 1998. Since that time Sources of Strength has become a national model in suicide prevention as one of the most rigorously **researched** programs in the country. Sources of Strength takes an innovative, **upstream** approach to prevention by focusing on strengths, resiliency and connectedness rather than risk factors, warning signs and stories of trauma.



TRAINED SUPPORTIVE
ADULT ADVISORS



DIVERSE
PEER LEADERS

#2 WHY IT WORKS

Sources of Strength utilizes the power of peer social networks to spread health and hope throughout whole communities. The **effectiveness** of the program goes beyond suicide prevention. Research on the program has shown an impact on school environment, peer group norms and individual factors that are protective against a range of problems including: bullying, substance abuse, mental health, and violence. The principles of Sources of Strength are **adaptable** into a variety of populations and cultures. Successful implementation has included: universities, juvenile justice, LGBTQ, drop-in centers, cultural centers, Latino groups, native/tribal groups and more.



#3 THE PROCESS



BUY-IN READINESS WITH KEY STAKEHOLDERS



RECRUIT & TRAIN ADULT ADVISORS AND COORDINATORS



RECRUIT & TRAIN DIVERSE PEER LEADERS



ONGOING PLANNING & MESSAGING CAMPAIGNS



ONGOING SUPPORT & RESOURCES



YEARLY TRANSITION - REGROUP, RECRUIT & RETRAIN



#4 THE EVIDENCE

Sources of Strength is the subject of one of the nation's largest studies on peer leaders and their impact in suicide prevention (The National Peer Leadership Study). The results of this study have shown:

- Sources of Strength is the first suicide prevention program involving peer leaders to enhance protective factors associated with reducing suicide at the school population level!
- Increase in peer leader's connectedness to adults
- Increase in peer leader's school engagement
- Peer leaders in larger schools were four times more likely to refer a suicidal friend to an adult.
- Among general student population the program increased positive perceptions of adult support for suicidal youth and the acceptability of seeking help.
- Positive perception of adult support increased most in students with a history of suicidal ideation.

Wyman, P. et al. (2010). An outcome evaluation of the Sources of Strength suicide prevention program delivered by adolescent peer leaders in high schools. *American Journal of Public Health, Vol. 100: 1653-1661.*



CONTINUAL SUPPORT

Sources of Strength offers a variety of support tools to ensure every program has the best framework in place for success, including print materials, online resources, poster templates, messaging templates, teleconferences, webinars, design/video support and certified trainers.

WHAT ARE YOUR SOURCES OF STRENGTH?



PRICING

Please contact us for detailed pricing as fees can vary based on size and scale of project and travel expenses. A general initial startup price is \$5,000 per peer team, \$10,000 for university projects, and \$4,000 for one to two participants in our Training of Trainers process. Costs for sustaining Sources of Strength after year two average \$500-\$700 per year for annual support and updated resource kits.

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