

Rural Populations Outreach: Strategies in Suicide Prevention Education

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Introduction

Because of their remote geographic locations, many county services and their outreach efforts may not reach unincorporated communities in rural areas. This means extra effort must be made to reach these at risk populations.

This document intends to answer the questions: What are the strategies that can help crisis lines in California outreach to rural populations?

Rural Outreach Strategies

Three strategies that are recommended that can help crisis lines outreach to California's rural populations.

- 1) Assess the makeup of the rural areas you wish to engage.
 - Understanding the cultural, demographic and language make up of the community
 - Identify community leaders
 - Identify current service providers
 - Identify any neighborhood associations
 - Identify any booster clubs which are more common in rural communities
 - Identify faith institutions which often have great importance in rural communities
 - Identify community centers
 - Identify schools
 - Identify local law enforcement and emergency services
- 2) Engage the identified groups and community leaders in order to:
 - Understand the community's perspective on suicide
 - Partner with community institutions and leaders in planning an appropriate outreach program
 - Train local health providers in suicide prevention techniques
- 3) In order to raise awareness about suicide risks, referral resources for suicide prevention programs and services, and to promote hotline information, the following outreach activities should be considered.
 - Formal presentations and training to community groups
 - Bulletin board postings are more effective in rural communities

- Existing community events and social gatherings tend to be well attended in rural areas and outreach at these events could be effective
- Exhibit and/or speak at existing health fairs
- If there is not an existing health fair in a given community, one could offer to help organize such an event
- Rural communities are likely to have faith based events
- Speak at local schools and community colleges
- Offering ASIST (suicide first aid training) to community members in rural areas

Linguistically and Culturally Appropriate Service

Remember that literature must be provided in the preferred languages of the groups you serve. In addition, make sure your support services can speak the languages of a given community. In efforts to reach these communities, it is important to understand the cultural makeup of these populations before outreach. For example, San Mateo County's rural populations have a high percentage of Latino population, who may have a social stigma against even discussing the topic of suicide. In Santa Clara Counties alone, there are 10 identified unincorporated communities all with their unique needs and cultural makeup. In order to have a productive outreach and awareness program, community leaders and related groups are needed to help encourage community participation.

Strategy Considerations

The first step is to identify the recently developed areas that have a lack of resources as well the unincorporated areas/communities in the County. Once identified, conduct research to identify current service providers, any neighborhood associations or organizations even the Home Owner Associations, booster clubs, churches or community centers. Contacting law enforcement to identify a police captain or sheriff officers assigned to those communities can be helpful as well.

Next, contact these entities to request meetings or gatherings to come present information to their members. Outreach efforts may include but not limited to formal presentation, training, bulletin board postings, and other means to raise awareness about suicide risks, referral resources for suicide prevention programs and services, and to promote hotline information. Look for ways to participate in existing community events, like county fairs, health fairs, and community wide social gatherings. Speak to the local schools and community colleges about making presentations that are age appropriate. Offer to come and present at local faith based services as part of your outreach program. If there is not an existing health fair in a given community, one could offer to help organize such an event, partnering with other social services and community leaders. Offering ASIST (suicide first aid training) to community members can bolster suicide awareness and prevention.

Rural areas are very often centered around a strong religious community. The faith community is a critical partner.

Research Behind Recommendations

Santa Clara County identified and made contact with school districts in the rural areas particularly the Morgan Hill School District. They are in discussion with Morgan Hill school administrators and working to schedule some initial talks on suicide awareness, prevention services, and a hotline with their students and parents.

Santa Clara County is also moving forward to discuss outreach with the Catholic Diocese of San Jose, in the hopes that we will get some footing in our rural communities which have a more practicing faith community, and with the hopes that the structure of the Catholic Church can help make some headway. In line with that, Santa Clara County has also reached out to Silicon Valley Interreligious Council to increase awareness among faith leaders, and as a way to get connected to some rural communities. Santa Clara County has made several presentations to increase awareness about suicide risks and promote services provided by SCC Suicide and Crisis Services (SACS) Hotline. Santa Clara County has made one presentation to the Faith Leaders of the Muslim community, one presentation to the men's group of the Mosque community, and one presentation to the women's group of the Mosque community.

Rural areas are very often centered around a strong religious community. The Nebraska Rural Response Hotline receives a steady volume of calls from rural ranchers and farmers, after five years of focused outreach through church bulletins, word of mouth recommendations, provider referrals, etc. We consider that the faith community is a critical partner and will focus outreach on identified rural faith communities.

Similar to Oregon's Older Adult suicide prevention effort, SCC MHD/ SACS is committed to the evidence-based method of providing Gatekeeper training to key individuals in rural areas to identify those at risk of suicide, and providing SACS as the crisis referral number to connect people in need to immediate assistance. The outreach training is QPR (Question-Persuade-Refer).

Similar to AWARE, Inc's Domestic Violence Hotline Rural Outreach, trainings to primary care is one component that SCC has incorporated in its rural outreach efforts. As part of the effort to integrate mental health services into primary care, SACS outreach and referrals has been a critical component of two rural primary care clinics to promote the SACS hotline. One of the key concerns identified is that a significant percentage of this population is Spanish speaking, many monolingual, and we do not have a 24/7 Spanish speaking hotline yet available to the Bay Area.

San Mateo County spoke to Noah Whitaker, SPTF Coordinator of Tulare County. Tulare County has the largest rural population of any county in the state of California. In addition they have

vast experience in suicide prevention and outreach. Their suggestions informed much of our input, paying special attention to cultural awareness and language barriers. Every year they sponsor a “Festival of Hope” in their county, promoting community support and involvement. Tulare County also supports training in ASIST (suicide first aid). In addition we spoke to San Mateo County Behavioral Health and Recovery Services in specific relation to Half Moon Bay and Pescadero, two rural communities in San Mateo County. These conversations raised the issues of having plenty of literature for community workers to distribute and school outreach. We have an established outreach to schools on these areas.