

Summary of 2003 Teen Health Funds in Washington County
A Project of the Youth Risk Behavior Endowment of the
Minnesota Tobacco Settlement
March 2004

The Minnesota Youth Risk Behavior (YRB) Endowment was a Minnesota Department of Health initiative stemming from the Tobacco Endowment that provided funding to local public health agencies to implement research-based, promising or proven strategies for improving the health of Minnesota's youth. The goal of the initiative was to reduce youth risk behaviors (other than tobacco) and to increase the capacity of youth, adults, communities, and systems to effectively support youth health and healthy development. This requires a comprehensive, community-wide approach that involves collaboration and partnerships among youth, adults, and institutions within the community.

From this initiative, Washington County has chosen to focus on mental health and healthy youth development. Community assessment activities guided both the selection of YRB focus areas and the development of interventions. Over the summer of 2000, an advisory group of youth and community members came together to explore adolescent health issues in Washington County and surveys of youth were also conducted. Data from the Minnesota Student Survey (MSS) confirmed what was heard from community members that depression and suicide among youth was an increasing concern in Washington County. Results of the 2001 Minnesota Student survey indicate that in Washington County, 36% of 9th graders have thought about committing suicide and 13% of 9th graders have actually attempted it.¹ Washington County data shows that suicide is the third leading cause of death for the age group 5-14 and is the second leading cause of death in the age group 15-24.² There have been 28 suicides with those under the age of 25 from 1991 to 2000.³

Overview of the Teen Health Fund

The goal of the Teen Health Fund is to help communities in Washington County promote mental health and positive youth development and provide activities for the prevention of depression and suicide among 12-18 year olds.

Since January 2001, with funds from the Youth Risk Behavior Endowment, the Washington County Department of Public Health and Environment allocated \$30,000 annually for the creation of the initiative *Communities for Teen Health*. As part of this initiative, the Teen Health Fund (THF) was established to assist local communities in the county to plan, implement and evaluate youth led-adult guided activities to address depression awareness, suicide prevention and positive youth development. There are five service areas designated in the county

to receive the funds based on Washington County portions of school district population in grades 6-12 (Forest Lake, Stillwater, South Washington County, Mahtomedi, and North St. Paul/Maplewood/Oakdale schools). Each THF community group has a coordinator to oversee their group, a fiscal agent to control and disperse funds, and a technical assistant from the Washington County Department of Public Health & Environment. Additional members come from the community and involve youth, school staff, mental health providers, churches, youth serving organizations and other adults who have an interest in supporting youth or who work with youth.

The Minnesota Department of Health along with Washington County Department of Public Health and Environment provided guidelines and requirements that the Teen Health Fund used in planning and implementing effective activities in the community. In order to receive the non-competitive funding, each THF group completed a community assessment, activity work plan, evaluation plan, and budget and developed a community group to plan and implement activities. Each THF was required to submit quarterly progress reports on activities conducted as well as annual budget reports.

Strategic directions for *Communities for Teen Health* developed by community members in October of 2002 listed below support and underscore the efforts of THF:

- Develop connections and involvement by finding and expanding partners, building youth leadership and involvement and attracting adult involvement.
- Have work, fun and transportation through youth employment, positive youth development.
- Build support for teen programs by providing education/training on youth issues, accessible and sufficient support services and developing political awareness skills.

The 2003 county report, “Teens and Adults Say: What Teens Need To Be Healthy- Opinions About Teen Health” also support the directions of THF. The importance of mental and chemical health for youth, healthy places to hangout and outreach to teens, parents and adults about teen issues were themes addressed by THF.

Highlights of Teen Health Fund Activities in 2003

In 2003, the Minnesota Legislature eliminated any future Tobacco Endowment funding including the YRB activities. Counties were allowed spending from these accumulated funds until the end of the calendar year. The THF continued their programming efforts and by December 31, 2003 had reached 18,216 youth and 1,116 adults.

The following are highlights from THF activities in 2003:

- There was increased use of the Yellow Ribbon Suicide Prevention Program in schools. Four schools in Forest Lake and two schools in South Washington County instituted the Yellow Ribbon Program for a total of 4,850 youth.
- Depression screening tools used in health classes were explored and increased from one to two THF groups. The Signs of Suicide (SOS) Prevention Program for high schools was researched and found to be an effective screening tool endorsed by leading school professional organizations as a proven strategy. North St.

Paul/Oakdale/Maplewood schools began using this tool in the 10th grade health classes. Initially, 122 students were screened and 6 were referred for intervention. Expansion of the SOS screening is expected in the 2003-2004 school year. Mahtomedi High School screened 210 students in health classes, using the Reynolds's Depression Screening Tool, and referred 15 youth in 2003 for follow-up services.

- Crisis response training for school staff increased with broad distribution of information packets in THF communities.
- Training of youth to be peer mentors or Yellow Ribbon Lifelines gained momentum. Four out of five THF groups now use adult advisors and trained youth as peer mentors for depression awareness and suicide prevention. A group of Tartan High School peer leaders also met with state legislators on mental health day at the Capitol.
- Outreach and recruitment of community partners continued in 2003. Examples of new community partners include parent groups, Students Against Destructive Decisions (SADD) groups, Middle School staff, Community Volunteer Service, Community Education staff, and the YMCA.
- Support of after school time for junior high youth has been a priority for three of five THF communities. In 2003, groups either started or continued to support after school time programming.
 - South Wash. THF contributed a portion of its third year of funding to support Common Ground, the YMCA teen center weekend activities for 125 youth.
 - Forest Lake THF continued to partner for the second year with the Forest Lake Area Schools Community Education and the Chain of Lakes YMCA for an after school teen center serving 40 youth per day 4 days a week.
 - Stillwater THF has completed grant writing and secured operating funds for 2004 to begin an after school time program.
- The importance of parental involvement in the lives of teens remains a priority for all groups. The "Shoulder-to-Shoulder Minnesota: Raising Teens Together" initiative provided a website and parenting of teens booklet. In Washington County, 3,000 booklets were either mailed or widely distributed to all communities.

Additional Findings

Several THF communities have researched the linkage between bullying, depression and suicide. According to the "Youth Suicide Prevention School-Based Guide"⁴, measures that enhance resilience or protective factors are as essential for preventing suicide as reducing the factors such as bullying that increase suicide. One THF sponsored the writing and performance of a musical by a local performing arts group on bullying that was given to 2,400 middle and

high school youth and 100 adults. The following is a note that was given to the counselor from a student to share with the performing arts group after the performance.

“Thank you! I have been bullied a lot before and I felt so alone and sad, but now I feel like there's something to look forward to. You can't know how good your performance makes me feel! You have given me a gift, now I feel like somebody, not a computer; you have made me human again. Thank you!!” 7th grade student

Biggest Accomplishments

The THF community groups site the following as their biggest accomplishments:

- Sustaining youth depression awareness groups in both high schools.
- Adding more schools to the Yellow Ribbon program and new members to THF.
- Ongoing mental health screenings and mental health week activities.
- Making the connection between bullying and suicide.
- Starting an after school program for youth and securing funding using youth and adult volunteers.
- “Talking with our state senator to support mental health.”
- Awards: Minnesota Hospital Association’s “2002 Winner for Outstanding Achievement in Community Health” to Forest Lake’s Teen Health Fund suicide prevention team; Community Volunteer Service and Washington County Commissioner’s “2003 Youth Community Involvement Award” to Stillwater Teen Health Fund.

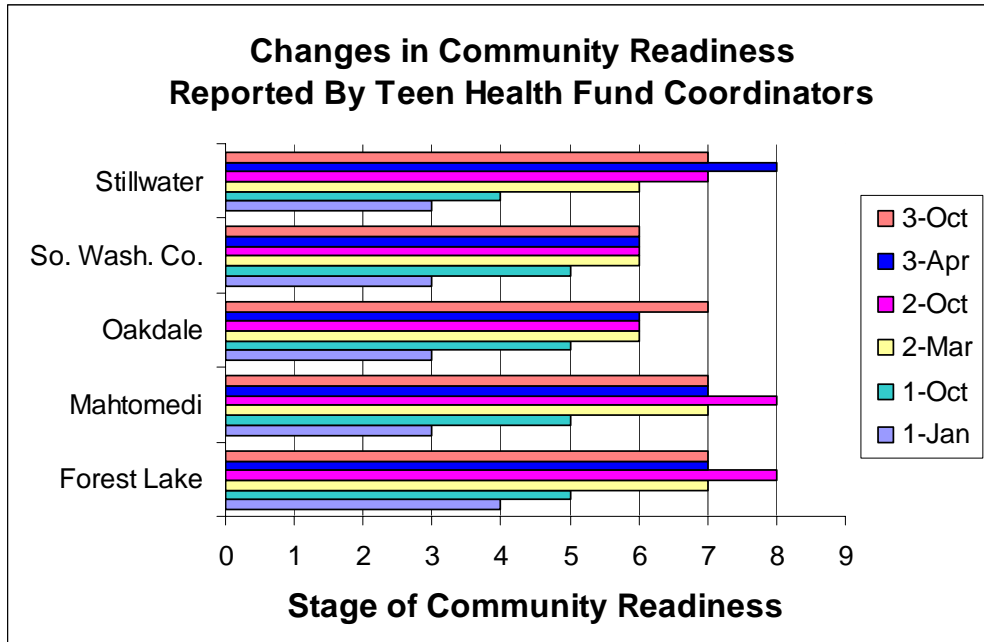
Lessons Learned

The THF community groups reported the following lessons learned for 2003:

- “It takes LOTS more time to accomplish what youth groups want to do. It is best to select a few things and do them well.”
- “It takes committed people and a coordinator to sustain activities.”
- “We must continue to nurture partnerships.”
- “It’s hard for youth to attend meetings. Our youth are very involved with implementation.”
- “Be flexible-allow plans to change as circumstances change.”
- It’s really tough to recruit new volunteers for an area like depression and suicide prevention.”

Community Readiness and Evaluation

According to The Center for the Application of Prevention Technologies, community readiness is the extent to which a community is adequately prepared to implement a prevention program⁵. Since 2001, the nine stages of community readiness through which communities develop has been assessed periodically in each community group. Increased community readiness for prevention programming improves the likelihood that prevention efforts will succeed. The following chart indicates the progression of the five projects over the past three years. As indicated, the projects are currently operating at stages six through eight meaning that programs are in place and expanding and responding to needs within the communities.



Evaluations were done after many activities and provided feedback for future programming. Overall there was continued favorable response by participants indicating increasing awareness as well as high satisfaction and enjoyment of activities.

THF 2001-2003

The Youth Risk Behavior Endowment initially provided the funding opportunity for five communities and the department to increase the capacity of youth and adults and professionals to promote mental health and positive youth development since 2001. Teen Health Funds have been used to implement research-based, promising or proven strategies for the prevention of depression and suicide among 12-18 year olds. Community readiness-the extent to which communities are adequately prepared to implement a prevention program- has grown throughout the county from denial or vague awareness to institutionalization and confirmation/expansion of suicide prevention programs. Strong partnerships have developed between and among department staff and community THF groups. Data from the 2001 Minnesota Student Survey (MSS) confirmed what was heard from community members that depression and suicide among youth was an increasing concern in Washington County.

Future Investment

A commitment to sustained health promotion and prevention is essential to achieve change in health behaviors among youth. If community-based collaboratives are given sufficient support such as time, funding and expertise, they can turn serious social problems into opportunities for positive change at the individual, community, and systems level. Washington County recognizes the collaborative work done by the THF groups over the past three years. Although the YRB and Tobacco endowments are eliminated, Washington County chooses to contribute to the sustainability of THF in the future by using apportion of Local Public Health

Grant funds. Efforts will also be made to explore local foundation funds for sustainability also. If individuals, communities and systems continue to provide depression awareness and suicide prevention and promote healthy youth development, it is expected that the MSS will show an increase in protective factors that buffer our youth from depression and thoughts of suicide when the survey is conducted again in 2004.

¹ 2001 Minnesota Student Survey, Department of Children, Families and Learning, St. Paul, Minnesota, 2001

² Minnesota County Health Profiles, Minnesota Department of Health, 2002.

³ Minnesota Hospitalization and Healthcare Partnership, Hospitalization Data for Washington County, 2001.

⁴ Doan, J., Roggenbaum, S. & Laazear, K. (2003). *Youth suicide prevention school-based guide-Issue brief 3a: Risk Factors; Risk and protective factors, and warning signs*. Tampa, FL: Department of child and Family Studies, Division of State and Local Support, Louis de la Parte Florida Mental Health Institute, University of South Florida. (FMHI Series Publication #218-3a)

⁵ Southeast Center for the Application of Prevention Technology, in a cooperative agreement with Center for Substance Abuse Prevention (CSAP) www.secapt.org.