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## Suicide prevention text line expands to 24/7

MIKE TIGHE [mtighe@lacrossetribune.com](mailto:mtighe@lacrossetribune.com) Jun 11, 2015



Bigalke



The burgeoning use of a statewide text-based system that aims to prevent suicides prompted the founder to expand the service from five to seven days a week.

The HOPELINE emotional support system, which became available in the Coulee Region in November, also will bolster its schedule from its previous daytime hours to around the clock, effective Monday, said Barb Bigalke, founder and executive director for The Center for Suicide Awareness in Kaukauna in east-central Wisconsin.

The center began the anonymous service Oct. 15, making the Badger State the 13th in the nation to offer a system tailored to the younger generation's affinity for texting to communicate.

Shortly after it became available in the La Crosse region, the center was able to determine that area residents were using it extensively, Bigalke said.

"The demand for HOPELINE far exceeded projections that were established based upon other states' results within the same time frame of operation," Bigalke said in explaining the expansion.

HOPELINE also was able to broaden service to include Canada and Mexico, Bigalke said.

"This is vital to our state as our residents travel to these areas for both business and vacation," she said. "Now, our residents can text HOPELINE any time, any day for emotional support — all at no cost."

Anyone feeling down or experiencing a bad day is invited to text their troubles to the line to receive encouraging responses and references for help, if necessary.

The most frequent concerns include struggles with breakups and job loss; worries about school and bullying; LGBT issues; relationship topics involving parents, friends and family conflicts; abuse concerns, and troubles facing veterans and service men and woman.

The line's text number has been changed to 741741, said Bigalke, whose center also includes drop-in support groups for veterans, service men and women and their families, support groups for suicide survivors, educational/informational presentations on suicide prevention and mental health issues.

The line has handled more than 15,000 text messages from every area code in Wisconsin, Bigalke said.

#### **IF YOU TEXT**

Anyone who is troubled or seeking emotional support can text HOPELINE at 741741, with its expanded schedule to 24/7, beginning Monday.

The nonprofit Center for Suicide Awareness in Kaukauna in east-central Wisconsin sponsors the line.

For more information, go to the center's website at [www.centerforsuicideawareness.org](http://www.centerforsuicideawareness.org).

### Mike Tighe

Mike Tighe is the Tribune newsroom's senior citizen. That said, he don't get no respect from the cub reporters as he goes about his duly-appointed rounds on the health, religion and whatever-else-lands-in-his-inbox beats. Call him at 608-791-8446.

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