

Suicide-prevention service gets grant to expand into county schools

HOPELINE uses texting to reach younger generation

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A SPARK Grant of \$5,000 has been awarded to HOPELINE, allowing the initiative to expand into Washington County at schools in West Bend and Slinger.

HOPELINE is run by the Center for Suicide Awareness and is a service that provides emotional support through text messaging for any Wisconsin resident dealing with mental health issues, suicidal thoughts or other challenges.

The grant was given by Diversified Insurance Solutions and will allow the organization to market at Badger Middle School and Silverbrook Intermediate School in West Bend, along with Slinger Middle School. The grant is intended to spark "community change"

"HOPELINE is literally a lifesaving service that we're overjoyed to support with a SPARK Grant. It's a non-threatening resource that allows kids, teens, parents, veterans and even seniors to get help and support anonymously," said Jim McCormack, co-founder and chairman of Diversified Insurance Solutions, in a news release.

Suicide is the second-leading cause of death for those aged 13-34 in the U.S. according to the Center for Suicide Awareness.

The program started in Wisconsin in 2014 and was



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Students at Badger Middle School and Silverbrook Intermediate School will now be able to text officials with HOPELINE for suicide prevention help.

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— Barb Bigalke

Center for Suicide Awareness executive director

education. "That's the right way to do it," she added.

HOPELINE can give schools posters and other promotional materials to place around schools.

When a student texts the service at 741741 they are connected to a trained responder who can dispatch first responders if necessary. They typically spend three hours working with each person.

In one case this year first responders were dispatched as someone was attempting suicide and they were ultimately saved. According to Bigalke they texted "I know you'll do the right thing."

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the 13th statewide program to start in the nation. Since it started, more than 35,000 people have texted HOPELINE and it is estimated 28 lives have been saved.

Though anyone can use the service it is mainly aimed at the younger generations, members of which often spend more time texting with their phones rather than talking.

"So many of our youths are texting prior to attempting suicide," Center for

Suicide Awareness Executive Director Barb Bigalke said.

Though the resource is already available to students at all schools in the county, the organization is continuing efforts to inform students about the service and also help eliminate the stigma around speaking about mental health.

Bigalke said they come to schools and spend money on resources and talk about it so the school can focus on

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