

SOURCES OF STRENGTH

The Healthy Teen Minds Project, a grant-funded initiative of the Northeast Wisconsin Mental Health Connection, is working to improve the mental health of ALL teenagers in the tri-county region (Outagamie, Winnebago and Calumet counties) using an upstream approach to mental health promotion and suicide prevention.

Healthy Teen Minds, in partnership with The Boys & Girls Club of the Fox Valley and the UW-Extension – Winnebago County, is working with area high schools to implement Sources of Strength, a mental health wellness program that utilizes the power of peer social networks to change unhealthy norms and culture to ultimately prevent suicide, bullying, violence, and substance abuse. It's one of the nation's most rigorously researched peer leader programs and is presently on SAMHSA's National Registry of Evidence-based Programs and Practices.

With funding support from Medical College of Wisconsin's Advancing a Healthier Wisconsin Endowment, The Connection is making Sources of Strength more affordable and accessible for high schools in the region to adopt. Having developed a regional "trained trainer" model, the Healthy Teen Minds project now has its own nationally certified regional trainers, reducing the cost of implementation by 75 percent, to roughly \$4,000 per school for a three-year implementation. A total of 22 area middle and high schools have joined this initiative and have adopted Sources of Strength.

About Sources of Strength

The program is based on a relational connections model that uses teams of peer leaders mentored by adult advisors to change peer social norms and encourage students to individually assess and develop strengths in their life.

Radically positive, Sources uses peer leaders to spread messages of "Hope, Help, and Strength" to change school culture by improving help-seeking behavior, breaking down codes of silence, and improving perceptions of adult support. These strength-based messages are strategically designed by Sources of Strength and the local peer teams to engage school culture and impact their peers throughout their school and community.

The model promotes and focuses on connectivity, school or community bonding, peer-adult partnerships, protective factors and the promotion of help seeking behaviors.

Trained peer leaders use their network of friends to:

- Have one-on-one conversations with friends and peers
- Develop "Hope, Help, Strength" messages, such as posters, public service announcements, and school activities
- Present peer-to-peer presentations
- Develop and share messages on social media

The program is designed to be a multi-year project with ongoing peer messaging and contacts growing over time.



The curriculum is rooted in eight "strengths" – factors that research has shown are protective against suicide risk, including: family support, positive friends, mentors, healthy activities, generosity, spirituality, medical access, and mental health.

Fidelity to the Sources of Strength model for positive cultural change requires a three year start-up process in which peer leaders and adult advisors receive a four- to six-hour highly interactive training once per year and then continue to meet, plan, and spread activities/messages throughout each school year.

How much does it cost?

Sources of Strength Cost Model				
Time line	Year 1 School/HTM	Year 2 School/HTM	Year 3 School/HTM	Year 4
Flat fee for annual trainings/ongoing support	\$2,750	\$2,500	\$2500	\$500
High School and Healthy Teen Minds split costs:	\$1,375/\$1,375 (includes \$750 licensing fee)	\$1,250/\$1,250 (includes \$500 licensing fee)	\$1,250/\$1,250 (includes \$500 licensing fee)	\$500 - ongoing licensing fee to be paid by High School
Total paid by High School	\$1,375	\$1,250	\$1,250	\$500
Total paid over three years of implementation:				
Healthy Teen Minds Grant: \$3,875				
High School: \$3,875				

TOTAL: \$7,750				

The cost for three years of implementation per school is \$7,750, of which the Healthy Teen Minds grants pays half of, leaving each participating school to pay just **\$3,875**. This cost can be spread over the three years: \$1,375 for year one; \$1,250 for year two, and \$1,250 for year three. Included in this price is the national Sources licensing fee.

How does it work? What are the steps?



1. Awareness and Buy-In

This can include a “pre-training” presentation and overview of the Sources of Strength program to school stakeholders, including school boards, district administrative staff, building administrators and/or school staff. Learning and understanding what Sources of Strength is, the evidence and science behind it, and how it can positively transform school culture are key ingredients to building support and buy-in for the program. Contact Wendy Magas, director Healthy Teen Minds, for more information and to schedule a presentation.

Once schools decide to adopt Sources, the next step is to review and sign a Memorandum of Agreement with Healthy Teen minds, and schedule the Adult Advisor training, and the Peer Leader training.

2. Review and sign MOA with Healthy Teen Minds

We have a standard memorandum of agreement that we sign along with participating schools that outlines each parties' requirements and responsibilities. There is a three-year training/implementation schedule that is expected, and the total cost for three years of implementation is \$3,875 per school building. (The Healthy Teen Minds matches the other half of the cost).

3. Review referral protocol

Prior to implementing Sources of Strength, schools must complete a review of their protocol and referral process for handling a distressed or suicidal student. This includes identifying distressed students, addressing the mental health and social needs of such youth, and tracking those referrals. If this protocol has not been formalized, we will work with your school team to develop a comprehensive protocol that ensures students' safety.

4. Schedule Adult Advisor training

This is about a three- to four-hour training. For the first year of implementation, we encourage schools to invite ALL STAFF to this training. It is a very fun and interactive training, and by including many staff -

teachers, administrators, and support staff - you will set your school up for a greater success with Sources because more adults will be speaking the same language around Sources of Strength, mental health, resiliency, being a trusted adult, etc. We also encourage schools to identify a handful of key Adult Advisors who will be the lead champions and project coordinators for Sources. We strongly encourage a process in which adults volunteer for the role rather than being assigned to it.

Adult advisors can be school counselors, teachers, school resource officers, and often are a mix of school staff that have high relational connectivity and positivity with students.

Best time for training: We encourage schools to schedule the Adult Advisor training in late summer (before school starts) or early fall.

5. Schedule Peer Leader training and recruit peer leaders

This is a four- to six-hour training. Roughly 10 percent of students should be recruited as peer leaders. The lead Adult Advisors will spearhead the recruitment of diverse peer leaders, including obtaining parental consents; and must attend the entire peer training and be actively engaged. It is mandatory that lead adult advisors participate in the peer leader training.

Sources of Strength attempts to have a diverse group of peer leaders positively impact a wide range of cliques within a school or community. Often during a first year start-up, teachers or adult staff will nominate a diverse group of students that they feel would fit this role. This process is usually approved by a school administrator. In a second year program the new recruitment and nomination process is often led by the peer leaders from the previous year.

Students are actively recruited through group informational meetings, one-on-one conversations and by using peers to encourage uncommitted students. While suicide prevention is a significant part of the training, we generally highlight that the training will focus on strengths and fun activities. Students are usually extremely positive about the training, stating it was “not what I expected,” “interesting,” “fun,” and “empowering.” Even students who have lost friends and family to suicide generally do not experience the training as a “down” or “depressing” experience.

Best time for training: We encourage schools to schedule the Peer Leaders training in fall – ideally in September or October. This prepares Peer Leader teams to hit the ground running in the fall with messaging campaigns.

Step 5: Peer Leader Recruitment & Training

Nominate



Nominate diverse students with influence:
Race, Ethnicity, Religion
Gender, Sexual Orientation,
Social Groups

Invite



Send out invitations to nominated students

Recruit



Pitch the program to nominated students & recruit 10% of student population

Train



4-6 hour Peer Leader Training

6. Peer-to-Peer Messaging Campaigns

Sources of Strength Campaigns

Campaign Templates for Peer Leaders

GETTING THE WORD OUT

I AM STRONGER

TRUSTED ADULTS

THANKFULNESS CHALLENGE

WHAT HELPS ME

SOURCES OF STRENGTH WEEK

After the initial trainings, the peer leaders and adult advisors begin a three- to six-month series of conversations with other trusted adults and their 5-10 closest friends as well as create a wide range of Hope, Help, Strength messaging activities targeting a wider and diverse peer group. Sources of Strength provides a recommended step-by-step guide of peer leader activities but teams are able to adjust these actions steps based on their readiness level and perception of what will work best in their setting.

A pattern of meeting together, planning, problem solving, and then going out and activating a variety of strategies is used in all settings. Some teams meet as often as once a week, others less frequently, but all peer teams are encouraged to complete several of the recommended strategies.

The framework is grounded in Hope, Help, Strength messaging rather than shock, trauma, or sad messaging. Sources of Strength templates and resources are provided to assist peers in connecting with adults and their friend groups. These templates include examples of local faces posters, local voices audio, videos, presentations, text forwarding and internet social networking messaging. Peer teams are

encouraged and expected to share their creative efforts with other teams across the country via Sources of Strength webpages, Facebook, Twitter, etc. Every group is required to provide honoring and recognition events for the peer leader teams at the close of the year.

Is Sources of Strength evidence based?

Yes! Sources of Strength has participated in one of the nation's largest rigorous randomized trials of a youth suicide prevention effort. In 2009 Sources of Strength was listed on the National Best Practices Registry by the Suicide Prevention Resource Center (SPRC) and The American Foundation for Suicide Prevention (AFSP).

The Best Practices Registry (BPR) of SPRC lists interventions that have undergone rigorous evaluation and have demonstrated positive outcomes. Then in 2011 Sources of Strength was listed on SAMHSA's National Registry of Evidence-based Programs and Practices (NREPP).

NREPP is SAMHSA's online registry of interventions that have demonstrated effectiveness in the prevention or treatment of mental health and substance use disorders, including some interventions that address suicide, such as Sources of Strength. The NREPP registry only lists a handful of programs and is the Gold Standard of prevention in the United States.

Sources of Strength was the subject of one of the nation's largest studies on peer leaders and their impact in suicide prevention. The results of this study were published in 2010 in the American Journal of Public Health, showing:

- Increase in peer leaders' connectedness to adults;
- Increase in peer leaders' 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 thoughts;
- 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.

In 2010, Sources of Strength and the University of Rochester began a 6-year randomized trial using Sources of Strength with more than 40 high schools to measure the impact of 1,500 peer leaders on approximately 15,000 adolescents; this ongoing study is being funded by the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH) as part of the National Peer Leadership Study.

Sources of Strength has engaged in additional research and evaluation efforts with Stanford University, Johns Hopkins University, University of Manitoba, The Black Dog Institute in Australia, amongst others. Over the past decade Sources of Strength has become one of the most rigorously evaluated and researched suicide prevention and mental wellness promotion programs in the world.

What is the time commitment for staff and students?

Adult advisors can expect to spend approximately 40 hours over a four- to six-month program. This includes the initial mandatory Adult Advisor training and brief monthly teleconference support meetings with Sources of Strength staff, though most of this time is spent supporting the peer teams. Peer leaders spend from 15 to 50 hours over a four- to six-month program, including the initial Peer Leader training. Most adult advisors will spend around an hour per week working with Sources of Strength.

Ongoing Support and Technical Assistance

National Sources of Strength staff provide ongoing teleconference support as well as planning materials and resources for each step of the way. Four to six national training webinars are provided each year by Sources of Strength. These webinars focus on continued training, resources, and ideas for adult advisors. Additionally, our two regional trainers are available for coaching, answering questions, and are just a phone call away. Project staff from The Connection, meanwhile, will provide logistical and technical support throughout implementation, including evaluation support, helping ensure implementation meets fidelity, sharing knowledge among the participating schools in the form of informational e-newsletters; moderating a Facebook group for adult advisors in the region; and convening three support meetings per year for adult advisors.

Sustaining Sources of Strength

To prepare for sustainability, and to ensure that schools receive the maximum positive impact of Sources for years to come, we encourage that school leadership consider supporting Sources with financial support and/or other resources after the grant period concludes.

Below is a list of examples of how other schools support and sustain Sources within their schools:

- The Hortonville Area School District, which adopted Sources in 2014, for example, has appointed two teachers, who serve as the district's lead Adult Advisors, who each have a paid planning period – a contracted hour – per day dedicated to working on Sources of Strength. The cost of this funding strategy will vary based on teachers' education level and years of experience.
- Many Sources schools pay their lead Adult Advisors a stipend from their co-curricular budget. This can range from \$1,000 to \$3,000 per year, for example.
- Schools can opt to contract with our regional Sources trainers to do “a la carte” trainings. After the three-year implementation process, schools can contract with the certified trainers to do custom trainings, such as training new Adult Advisors and Peer Leaders, or a mini Sources training for all staff at a school.

For more information, contact:

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