

2009

**SOURCES OF
STRENGTHS
CORE
PRINCIPLES**

- **Bring together and train both peer leaders and caring adults. One without the other lacks prevention power.**
- **Use peer leaders to break down codes of silence and increase peer help seeking with caring adults.**
- **A core emphasis on strengths that goes beyond a simple focus on suicide risk and warning signs.**
- **Multiple sources of support are encouraged—moving beyond a singular focus on mental health referrals.**
- **Hope, Help, and Strength messages are developed with local voices and faces—saturating local schools and communities with stories of resiliency instead of traumatic stories.**

Sources of Strength

2009

A Connections Model

The Sources of Strength program operates out of relational connections or a “communication model.” Most suicide prevention efforts are based on a “surveillance model” that focuses on warning signs, and how to intervene and refer a suicidal person to mental health services. Many gatekeeper models begin and end with that



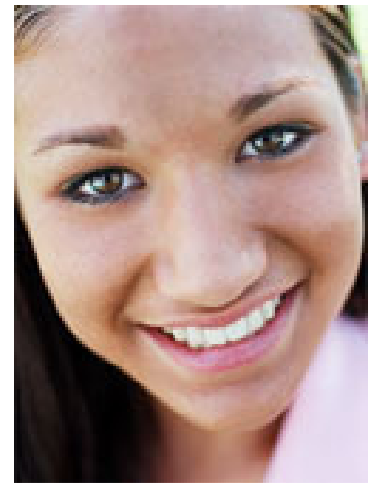
“mental health” intervention in mind.

Sources of Strength compliments and expands on surveillance-based prevention efforts, but focuses heavily on a strength-based approach. A key goal is to increase youth social norms that encourage teens to connect with supportive adults during times of emotional distress. Local peer leaders with adult advisors are trained and supported to use their peer connections to spread positive social norms. Warning signs and mental health referrals are addressed during training, but 3-4 times as much energy is focused on eight sources of

strength. Rather than focusing solely on suicide, the program asks how do people stay healthy and make it through tough times—like struggles with substance abuse, trauma, depression, anger, and also suicide. This project encourages a cluster of strengths and supports, that include, but move beyond a singular focus on mental health referrals. The

project represents a holistic model that highlights village-based strengths as highly as treatment services.

A core principle of Sources of Strengths is to empower, train, and mentor peer leaders with adult support. Our most hurting young people state clearly that many don’t trust adults and only talk to their peer group. Sources



of Strength brings diverse peer leaders and links them with caring adults. The Sources of Strength program is intentional about increasing positive social norms—it’s strategic in empowering local peers to saturate their schools and communities with messages of Hope, Help, and Strength. It’s also purposeful about engaging peer leaders and their peer friends in naming a variety of caring adults that live in their local neighborhood, housing project, or work at their school.

It’s all about connectedness—using diverse peers and caring adults and tapping into the power of their relational connectedness. We welcome you to join us in spreading strength throughout your home area.

Mark LoMurray

Director

Sources of Strength

The Sources of Strength Process



Sources of Strength founder Mark LoMurray and peer leaders

A step by step process toward implementing the Sources of Strength Program usually follows this pattern. School-based is most common, but faith, cul-

tural, and community-based teams are also developed.

1. **Awareness**— connect with key leaders and school administrators
2. **Protocol Review** - check with school or

community entity on whether several suicide intervention protocol steps are in place.

3. **Adult Advisors**— Identify and train key adults that will mentor peer leaders (2-6 hrs training)
4. **School Staff** - training for school staff or other key adults on basics of Sources of Strength. (20 minutes to 1.5 hrs.)
5. **Peer Leaders**— recruit and provide initial training for peer leaders, this can be middle, high school, or college teams. (3-4 hrs initial training)

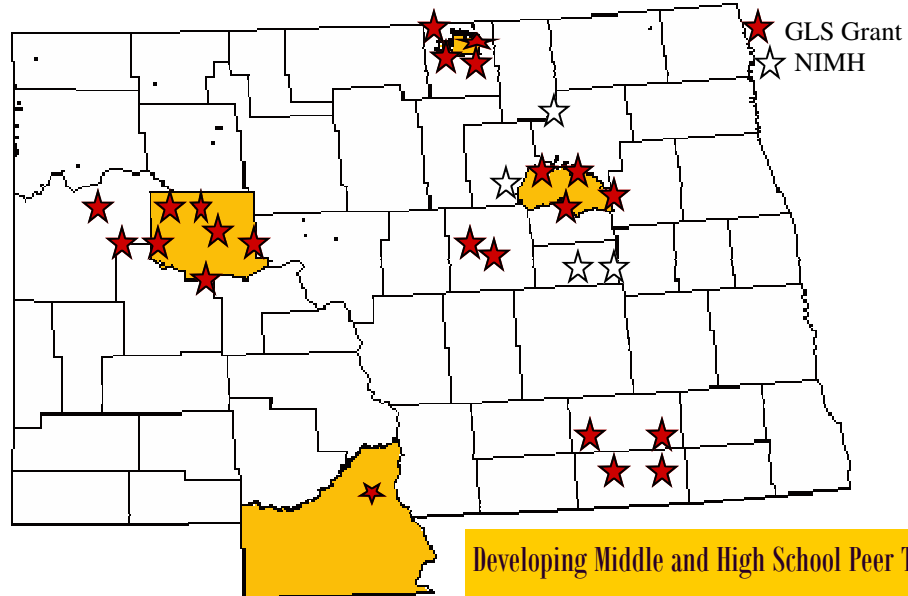
Follow-up Action Steps

1. Peer Leaders contact named caring adults
2. Peer Leaders connect with 5-10 friends— generate other adult names for public poster
3. Peers Create Public Service Announcements for radio or local school announcements
4. Peer to Classroom Presentations
5. Hope, Help, Strength Messages saturate community using posters, create video, internet, texting messages.
6. Celebration/Honoring and peer messages to parents.

2005

**National
Public Health
Practice
Award**
American Public
Health
Association—
Epidemiological
Section

North Dakota Model: Building 22 Local Peer-Adult Teams Saturating Tribal-Rural Areas with Peer to Peer Messages



Developing Middle and High School Peer Teams, plus Tribal College teams

Community-Research Partnership



Peter Wyman, PhD
University of Rochester, NY

The Sources of Strength Program has had the great opportunity to partner in 2007-08 in a rigorous randomized research project in Cobb county, Georgia, funded by the JDS Foundation and SAMHSA. Following that has been a NIMH funded research project for 2008-09 on the Sources of Strength project in rural schools in upstate New

York and North Dakota.

The early results from the Cobb County study have shown some encouraging results on Sources of Strength impact on peer leaders.

- Coping skills based on Sources of Strength ($p < 0.05$)
- Help seeking from trusted adults ($p < 0.05$)
- Knowledge of helping suicidal peers ($p < 0.01$)

The fact remains that only a very tiny fraction of all suicide prevention programs have participated in rigorous evaluation. At present 18 high schools in Georgia, New York, and North Dakota are participating in rigorous evaluations of Sources of Strength. To learn IF and HOW Sources of Strength

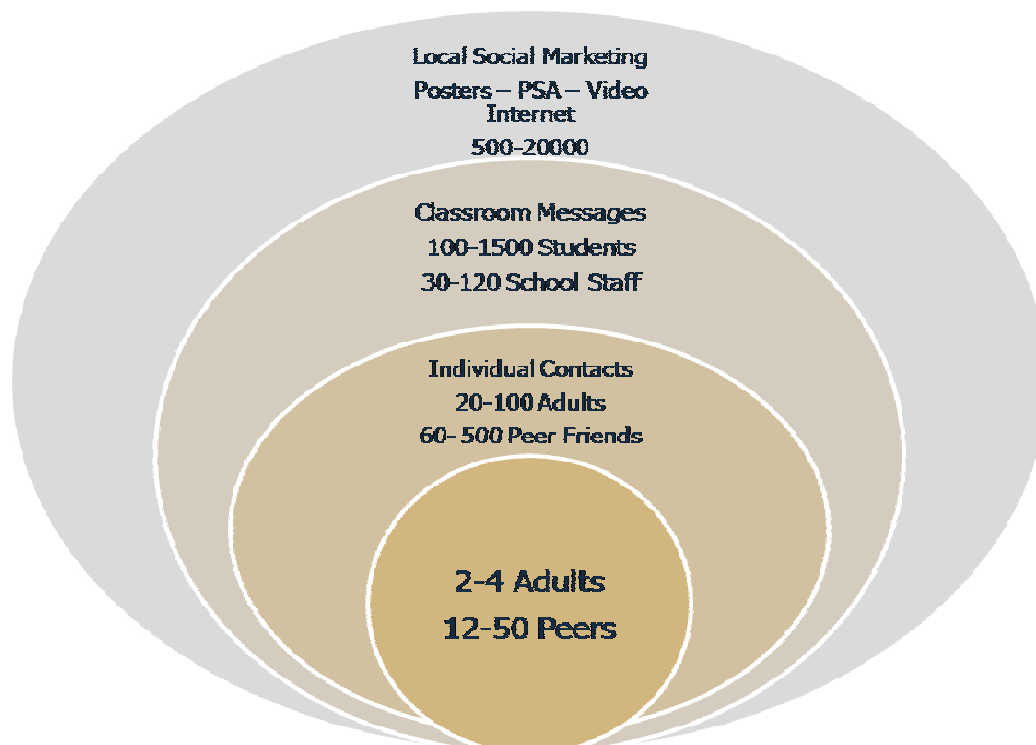
affects suicidality in high school students another 24 schools will need to participate in community research evaluation. To determine if Sources of Strength actually reduces suicide rates in young people will require at least 100 high schools.

Most suicide prevention research have focused on treatment programs with few projects rigorously evaluating community and population based suicide prevention efforts. Engaging significant numbers of schools or communities in rigorous evaluation projects like Sources of Strength is a critical step in moving the knowledge of effective suicide prevention forward.



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Power in Prevention: The Relational Connectedness of Peers



Sources of Strength



Bring Sources of Strength to your area

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