

Devoted To:

- Improving academics
- Deterring violence
- Fostering resiliency
- Enhancing coping skills
- Reducing risk
- Preventing suicide

# Budget relief in Wyoming

## [community linkages boost schools in tight times]

A faltering economy and Wyoming's need for fiscal restraint require school administrators to consider cost efficiencies more than ever. Return on resources invested—in programs, services, staffing and more—must fulfill schools' mission to educate.

Ted Adams knows this better than anybody.

As superintendent for Laramie County School District #1, Adams directs one of the state's largest districts. Competition for resource allocation is rigorous—all the more reason Adams looks to build capacity by forging community partnerships that work.

One notable alliance is between Laramie County Schools and Youth Alternatives. A department of the City of Cheyenne, Youth Alternatives delivers probationary and family counseling services for children age 18 and younger, and is integrated into the area schools in a results-driven way.

### Cheyenne's YOUTH ALTERNATIVES: Linking schools and families



Providing family counseling and probationary services for area youths, Cheyenne's Youth Alternatives is well integrated with Laramie County School District #1. This alliance between schools and their communities is a model for how Wyoming schools can cost-effectively address emotional needs of at-risk student populations.

This includes a district-funded position at Youth Alternatives, plus two staff members from Youth Alternatives who are located on site at Johnson Junior High School. This connectedness among school staff, students and families with Youth Alternatives poses unique and compelling benefits that other Wyoming schools systems can benefit from knowing more about.

"When we have a situation with a child at risk, all of our principals, guidance counselors and social workers have tried and tested support systems to connect with immediately," notes Adams. "What we've learned is that this works. It helps students and their families. And that **helps us achieve our primary goal of education** for each and every child."

In the absence of such connectedness with community resources, Adams flinches to think of potential gaps in best serving students, school systems, families and the community.

"The most dangerous thing is to know that something is wrong, but to have no access to solve these problems soundly and swiftly," he adds.

"Suicide is the most graphic example of this. There's nothing worse than wringing our hands afterward over the hopelessness of the situation, instead of having the kinds of efficacious resources that a program like Youth Alternatives offers to districts."

MARK YOUR CALENDARS FOR FRIDAY, APRIL 3rd at 1:30 PM MST FOR AN INFORMATIVE WEBINAR ON WORKING WITH YOUTH ALTERNATIVES IN YOUR DISTRICT—SEE PAGE 4 FOR DETAILS.



**WHO:** Ted Adams, Supt. of Schools  
**WHERE:** Laramie Cty. School District #1  
**WHAT:** Builds capacity in tight economic times with unique community alliance to advance emotional well-being of students and families. **WEBINAR INFO ON PAGE 4**

### A policy bulletin for WYOMING EDUCATION LEADERS

- School Board Members
- Superintendents & Principals
- Curriculum Committees
- Student Services Directors
- Central Office Administration
- Wyoming Policymakers

inside

### URGING YOU TO BE Well Aware



"...WHEN THAT SUICIDE LOSS IS A CHILD OR TEEN, OUR HEARTS ACHE ALL THE MORE."

A message to Wyoming *Well Aware* readers from Kathryn Power with the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services

[it doesn't add up]

30%

Gay and lesbian youth who report attempting suicide at least once.

SOURCE: Suicide Prevention Resource Center. (2008). "Suicide Risk and Prevention for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Youth." Newton, MA: Education Development Center, Inc.

1700%

Increased long-term risk of suicide for persons who engage in deliberate self-harm (DSH) (i.e. cutting) when compared to expected suicide rate for non-DSH population.

SOURCE: Hawton, K. Harriss, L. Zahl, D. "Deaths from all causes in a long-term follow-up study of 11,583 deliberate self-harm patients." *Psychological Medicine*. 36(3):397-405, 2006 Mar

30-40%

9th Grade Latino girls reporting suicidal thoughts in the past year.

SOURCE: Family and Racial Factors Associated with Suicide and Emotional Distress Among Latino Students. Garcia C, et. al., *Journal of School Health* 2008 Sep;78(9):487-95.

## URGING YOU TO BE **Well Aware**

*A message from A. Kathryn Power, M.Ed.  
with the U. S. Dept. of Health and Human Services*

**I applaud Wyoming citizens and policy leaders for their noteworthy actions in youth suicide prevention.** You



recognize well that no longer is it enough to respond after a student takes his or her own life. Experience, public policy and science all point us in a new direction, one that promotes health and prevents disease.

As Wyoming school administrators and thought leaders,

you are the vanguard of a cultural shift in your state that says none of us is healthy unless all of us are healthy. This is particularly true in frontier states like Wyoming, when suicide can reverberate through close-knit rural communities, where it's likely many know the victim well. When that suicide loss is a child or adolescent, our hearts ache all the more. We're talking about school-age children who are losing hope in themselves and their future. This is youth suicide: tragic, shocking, incomprehensible.

All children in America must look forward to a lifetime of promise and fulfillment of their academic and personal potential. Key to this is creating environments, at school and beyond, where students can learn and thrive. That's why the federal government has called out the State of Wyoming as a recipient of youth suicide-prevention funds under the Garrett Lee Smith Memorial Act. Named after the college-age son of former U.S. Senator Gordon Smith (R-OR), this act brings youth suicide prevention to the community level in states nationwide, including Wyoming. And the community level is where public policy is transformed into public action—and real opportunities to save lives occur.

Director, Center for Mental Health Services (CMHS)  
Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration  
U.S. Dept. of Health and Human Services

**“We’re talking about school-age children who are losing hope in themselves and their future. This is youth suicide: tragic, shocking, **INCOMPREHENSIBLE.**”**

— A. KATHRYN POWER, M.Ed., U.S. Dept. of Health and Human Services

## Indicators of potential for suicide in adolescents

### A RECENT SIGNIFICANT LOSS

Breakup of an important relationship; loss of a parent due to divorce, death or rejection; academic or sports related loss; threat of incarceration; financial or job loss etc. These significant losses can bring on feelings of purposelessness, inadequacy, abandonment or feeling trapped with no way out.

### RECKLESS OR ERRATIC BEHAVIORS

Significant alcohol consumption, use of illegal drugs, inappropriate prescription drug use, gambling/sexual/Internet addictions, running away from home, school absenteeism and/or detention. Other reckless behaviors, with seeming little regard for personal welfare, can include promiscuity, driving fast, academic failure etc.

### ACCESS TO LETHAL MEANS

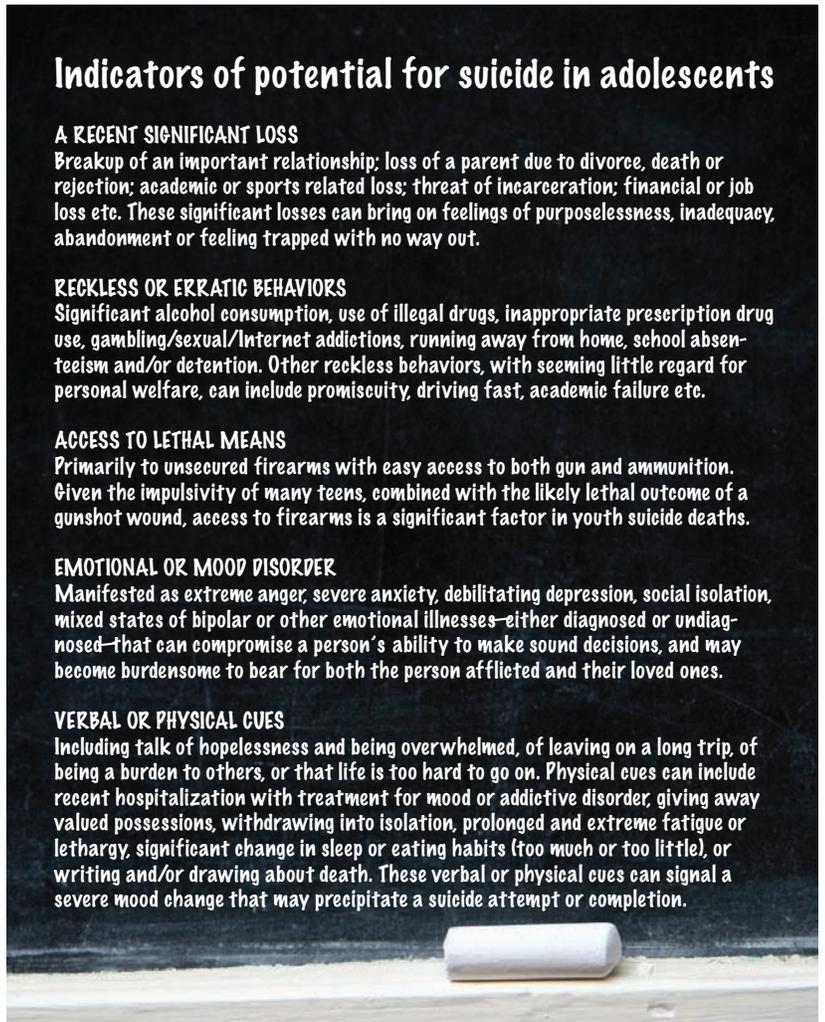
Primarily to unsecured firearms with easy access to both gun and ammunition. Given the impulsivity of many teens, combined with the likely lethal outcome of a gunshot wound, access to firearms is a significant factor in youth suicide deaths.

### EMOTIONAL OR MOOD DISORDER

Manifested as extreme anger, severe anxiety, debilitating depression, social isolation, mixed states of bipolar or other emotional illnesses—either diagnosed or undiagnosed—that can compromise a person's ability to make sound decisions, and may become burdensome to bear for both the person afflicted and their loved ones.

### VERBAL OR PHYSICAL CUES

Including talk of hopelessness and being overwhelmed, of leaving on a long trip, of being a burden to others, or that life is too hard to go on. Physical cues can include recent hospitalization with treatment for mood or addictive disorder, giving away valued possessions, withdrawing into isolation, prolonged and extreme fatigue or lethargy, significant change in sleep or eating habits (too much or too little), or writing and/or drawing about death. These verbal or physical cues can signal a severe mood change that may precipitate a suicide attempt or completion.



## 4 Preventing Teen Suicide: SCHOOL-BASED STRATEGIES types of programs

Alarmingly, three times as many teens kill themselves today as in the 1950s (CDC). So it's likely many Wyoming youths know a suicidal peer. These “helper” teens can receive text messages, notes or phone calls from youths contemplating suicide. Some may feel they've “talked down” their at-risk friends, yet later learn that this



youth died by suicide. It's a heavy burden of guilt for youngsters to bear—and a tragic loss of young lives for Wyoming to endure. That's why schools throughout the state are considering best-practice educational curricula that can weave suicide prevention into classroom learning.

How can Wyoming curriculum committees choose a best-practice program? Consider the newest development in school-based suicide prevention—hybrid/composite curriculum programs that have recently spurred much interest at a national level. These include Lifelines™ (student and gatekeeper/adult curriculum) and SOS® Signs of Suicide (screening and curriculum). Positive effects from these new ‘composite’ curriculum programs may overcome long-standing reluctance to implement any curriculum-based strategy, say experts.

## Living Art in Sweetwater

**"Art is a wound turned into light."**

— GEORGES BRAQUE, 20th Century painter and sculptor

Celebrating with creative expression why they love to live, 22 Sweetwater County youths ages 11-24 created art that heals the soul for the 2008 LIVING ART contest. In its second year, this life-affirming competition gives youths a healing outlet for their grief, one nurtured by community and personal creativity. Tragically, Sweetwater County is in the top 10 percent of counties in the U.S. for completed suicides. LIVING ART is sponsored by the Sweetwater Suicide Prevention Coalition in cooperation with the Wyoming Dept. of

Health, U.S. Dept. of Health and Human Services, Community Fine Arts Center and Southwest Counseling Service of Rock Springs.



Shania Schilder proudly displays her entry in the Sweetwater County Living Art Contest.

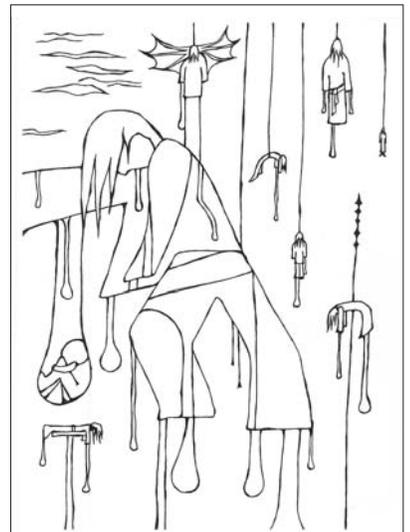
# Creativity and suicide [lessons learned]

The link between creativity and mood disorders has long been pondered by experts. In fact, more than 20 research studies suggest an increased rate of bipolar and depressive illnesses in highly creative people. From Ernest Hemingway to Sylvia Plath and Vincent Van Gogh to Kurt Cobain, creative individuals can exhibit emotional disorders. That's why teachers and administrators in middle- and high-school settings should be attuned to expressions of creativity in students, because these might suggest a need for help.

"Especially art teachers, plus music and English teachers," notes Keith Hotle, who oversees suicide prevention efforts for the state through the Wyoming Dept. of Health. "These teachers may see highly creative students who are hypersensitive, brooding or medicating their feelings with drugs or alcohol. These may suggest a child at risk for self harm."

Emotional disorders do not necessarily cause creativity, nor does creativity necessarily contribute to these disorders, say experts. But a certain brooding type of personality may contribute to both mental health issues and artistic expression.

The call to action for adults who engage with youths? Awareness and vigilance, says Hotle. "Knowing what signs to look for in kids, signs that may place them at risk for self-injurious acts that at their worst could culminate in suicide."



*This pen drawing is one of hundreds created by a young man who died by suicide at age 18 in the first month of his senior year of high school. He made many drawings like this one for friends, who failed to see in these more than his creativity, but instead a youth whose depression had led to hopelessness that had put him at risk for suicide.*

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For more information on these programs, see [www.nrepp.samhsa.gov](http://www.nrepp.samhsa.gov)

## 1 SUICIDE PREVENTION AWARENESS/ EDUCATION CURRICULA

To facilitate self-disclosure, and increase teens' identification of at-risk peers.

### EXAMPLES:

#### Lifelines™

CURRICULUM ON WARNING SIGNS OF SUICIDE, HOW TO RESPOND TO A SUICIDAL PEER, HELP-SEEKING AND SCHOOL RESOURCES. TARGET AGES: 12-17.

#### SOS® Signs of Suicide

CURRICULUM AND SCREENING FOR YOUTH, EDUCATIONAL MATERIALS FOR STAFF AND PARENTS. TARGET AGES: 14-18.

## 3 GATEKEEPER TRAINING

To engage community helpers (adults and peers) to detect signs for suicide risk in someone; to help them develop knowledge, attitudes and skills to identify at-risk youth, manage situation and make referrals.

### EXAMPLES:

#### Lifelines™ (SEE 1 ABOVE)

#### QPR: Question, Persuade, Refer

[WWW.QPRINSTITUTE.COM](http://WWW.QPRINSTITUTE.COM)

#### ASIST: Applied Suicide Intervention Skills Training

[WWW.LIVINGWORKS.NET](http://WWW.LIVINGWORKS.NET)

## 2 SCREENING

Based on the valid premise that suicidal adolescents are under-identified, these programs identify youths with mood disorders, suicidal thoughts and attempts, and/or drug/alcohol abuse.

### EXAMPLES:

#### TeenScreen®

TO ASSIST IN EARLY IDENTIFICATION OF PROBLEMS THAT MIGHT NOT OTHERWISE COME TO THE ATTENTION OF PROFESSIONALS. PARENTAL ACTIVE CONSENT IS REQUIRED.

#### SOS® Signs of Suicide (SEE 1 AT LEFT)

## 4 SKILLS TRAINING

To build problem-solving, coping and cognitive skills in at-risk youth—skills that may provide a "immunization" effect against suicide.

### EXAMPLES:

#### American Indian Life Skills Development Curriculum

SKILLS DEVELOPMENT INCLUDING MANAGING STRESS, ANGER AND DEPRESSION; IMPROVING COMMUNICATIONS; INCREASING GOAL SETTING; BOOSTING ABILITY TO REFER AN AT-RISK FRIEND.

#### Reconnecting Youth

SEMESTER-LONG CLASS FOR YOUTHS WITH AT-RISK BEHAVIORS; TEACHER AND PEER GROUP SUPPORT ARE CORE HYPOTHESES.

Curriculum committee members can maximize benefits and minimize risks to schools by choosing the right prevention program. Schools have been shown to be an appropriate setting for youth suicide prevention, but be sure to select an evidence-based program to promote positive outcomes.



## MARK YOUR CALENDARS!

### WEBINAR FOR SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS

#### Capacity Building through Stronger School-Community Alliances:

The Laramie Schools – Youth Alternatives Partnership for Student Progress

#### FEATURING:

- >> Ted Adams, Supt. of Schools, Laramie County School District #1
- >> Dick Berry, Executive Director, Cheyenne's Youth Alternatives Program
- >> Cheyenne Municipal Court Judge Ronn Jeffrey, founding Executive Director of Youth Alternatives

WHEN: FRIDAY, APRIL 3rd AT 1:30 PM MST

LEARN: How Supt. of Schools Ted Adams taps unique resources and forges community alliances to boost student emotional well-being and academic success

FEE: Free of charge; sponsored by the Wyoming Dept. of Health and Wyoming Dept. of Education

REGISTER TODAY: Space is limited! Email [webinarWY@wellaware.org](mailto:webinarWY@wellaware.org) by March 30th EOD.

# [resources and help] Be well aware

## A PICTURE'S WORTH A THOUSAND WORDS

Looking for short videos to show to middle or high school youth to accompany a program such as SOS Signs of Suicide? Look to the website for AAS, the American Association of Suicidology ([www.suicidology.org](http://www.suicidology.org)) under "Media" for videos and DVDs that have been viewed, scored and recommended (or not) by AAS.

## CHOOSING A PROGRAM THAT WORKS

"A Systematic Review of School-based Interventions to Prevent Bullying" was published in the Archives of Pediatric and Adolescent Medicine in January 2007. Researchers found school-based interventions that involve multiple disciplines showed better results. To obtain a copy of this study, email us at [talkback@wellaware.org](mailto:talkback@wellaware.org).

## ASSISTANCE FOR SCHOOLS

To assist Wyoming schools, the State Dept. of Health (WDH) provides free suicide-prevention training for school personnel. To learn more, contact Keith Hotle at 307-777-3318 or at [keith.hotle@health.wyo.gov](mailto:keith.hotle@health.wyo.gov)

## Well Aware

### A Suicide Prevention Policy Bulletin for WYOMING EDUCATION LEADERS

- School Board Members ■ Superintendents
- Principals ■ Student Services Directors ■ Central Office Administration ■ Deans of Students

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## [talk back]



**What is your biggest barrier to addressing suicide prevention in your school?** Time ... resources ... training ... comfort level ... support from supervisors, policymakers or parents? Let us know at [talkback@wellaware.org](mailto:talkback@wellaware.org). And tell us what you think of the **Well Aware** bulletin, a suicide-prevention information resource for Wyoming school administrators, thought leaders and state policymakers.

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