Youth leaders to develop messaging for Colorado Crisis Services during COVID-19 emergency

April 8, 2020 (DENVER) — About 40 Colorado youth leaders will develop new marketing messaging during the COVID-19 outbreak that directs young people in need of mental health or substance use services to Colorado Crisis Services, the state's behavioral health crisis response system managed by the Colorado Department of Human Services, Office of Behavioral Health (OBH).

The youth are members of the Below the Surface (https://belowthesurfaceco.com/) Leadership Program, an initiative of Colorado Crisis Services that empowers young people to customize mental health and substance use prevention messages and manage outreach campaigns in their schools and communities. With schools shifting to online instruction, the focus of the Leadership Program has shifted, too, so that the participants are creating messaging addressing COVID-19 concerns and driving use of the Colorado Crisis Services text line — a free, confidential line that connects clients to trained crisis counselors 24/7.

“We know it is an isolating time for Coloradans, and for many, the stress may lead to anxiety, depression or an increased reliance on substances,” said Robert Werthwein, director of OBH. “I am proud to see these youth leaders contributing to the essential work of encouraging people to ask for help.”

The leaders’ new focus comes as more Coloradans are tapping into the Colorado Crisis Services call line. The crisis line has experienced record highs for services this spring, with last month seeing a nearly 50% increase in calls and texts compared to March 2019. Colorado Crisis Services also includes crisis walk-in centers, crisis stabilization units, mobile units and respite providers throughout the state.

Below the Surface aims to help teens successfully navigate academic and social pressures, bullying and harassment, substance use, depression and anxiety, family instability, identifying as LGBTQ+ and additional challenges. The goal is to raise awareness of Colorado’s Crisis Text Line, which is increasingly popular among teens. During the first year of the statewide campaign, Colorado Crisis Services answered 236% more texts from youth than the previous year.

The 2020 cohort includes the following students. Their high school or college and hometowns are listed below. Please note some participants chose not to disclose their names, so the list below is not comprehensive.

- Annie Dinh, Cherokee Trail, Aurora
- Mitali Desai, Cherokee Trail, Aurora
- Gabriella Black, Grandview High School, Aurora
- Peniel Owusu-ansah, Grandview High School, Aurora
- Kimberly Blough, Berthoud High School, Berthoud
- Karthik Reddy, Fairview High School, Boulder
- Teagan McNally, University of Colorado Boulder
- Saloni Agarwal, Cherry Creek High School, Centennial
- Yesenia Cruz Garduño, Atlas Preparatory High School, Colorado Springs
- Britta Sloan, Discovery Canyon Campus High School, Colorado Springs
- Malyssa Campanella, Doherty High School, Colorado Springs
- Caitlyn Tabeling, Rampart High School, Colorado Springs
- Andrew Jake LaPlaca, Youth Empowerment Champion – Pinon Project, Cortez
- Christopher Myers, Crested Butte Community School, Crested Butte

- Alexander Cooper, Denver School of Innovation and Sustainable Design/Community College of Denver, Denver
- Daijah Mijares-Morales, DSST College View High School, Denver
- Olivia Earnest, East High School, Denver
- Ellery Adams, George Washington High School, Denver
- Jolie Brisbin, GOAL Academy High School, Dolores
- Kian Edmondson, Animas High School, Durango
- Lauren Peregoy, Lakewood High School, Edegewater
- Sabrina Rittner, Estes Park High School, Estes Park
- Talia Richard-Lande, Cherry Creek High School, Greenwood Village
- Aidan McNally, Mullen High School, Highlands Ranch
- Shelnna Huynh, Littleton High School, Littleton
- Morgan Miller, Arapahoe High School, Lone Tree
- Donavan Perea, STEM School Highlands Ranch, Lone Tree
- Gavin Lindsey, Olathe High School, Montrose
- Emily Doyle, Legend High School, Parker
- Madeline Proctor, Regis Jesuit, Parker
- Rebecca Moser, Pueblo Community College, Pueblo
- Ryan Albright, The Vanguard School, Pueblo
- Dulce Trujillo, Salida High School, Salida
- Sarah Kratzer, Horizon High School, Thornton
- Annalysa Marie Cordova, York International, Thornton

Below the Surface was created in 2017 in response to a wave of teen suicides in Colorado Springs. Developed by the National Alliance on Mental Illness Colorado Springs and the Design Rangers creative firm, the campaign recruited a youth advisory board to craft messages from real stories and experiences. Following the campaign's success in El Paso County, OBH invested in the initiative to expand it statewide in October 2018.

If you or someone you know is in crisis or needs help dealing with one, call this toll-free number 1-844-493-TALK (8255) or text TALK to 38255 to speak to a trained professional. Chat services are also available from 4 p.m. to 12 a.m. daily at coloradocrisisservices.org (http://coloradocrisisservices.org).

MEDIA CONTACT:
Madlynn Ruble
Deputy Director of Communications
madlynn.ruble@state.co.us (mailto:madlynn.ruble@state.co.us)
303.866.341

Recent

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Press Release

The Colorado Department of Human Services connects people with assistance, resources and support for living independently in our state. Colorado has a state-supervised and county-administered human services system. Under this system, county departments are the main provider of direct services to Colorado's families, children and adults. For more information about our organization, visit the CDHS organizational structure page (/about-cdhs/organizational-structure).

Our mission

Together, we empower Coloradans to thrive.

Our vision

To serve Coloradans through bold and innovative health and human services.

Our values

People-first approach. Balance. Accountability. Transparency. Ethical. Collaboration.

Our motto

We're the people who help people.

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