

Payne County Youth Services Announces New Program, *Building a Competent Community for Suicide Prevention*

Payne County Youth Services has announced a new and critical program coming to Stillwater and Payne County this fall, *Building a Competent Community for Suicide Prevention*. This initiative of PCYS will target not only children and youth but will also serve to educate members of the community regarding how to help reduce the escalating rate of suicides for all ages in our area.

“The rates of suicide have risen to critical levels throughout the country” stated Janet Fultz, PCYS Executive Director. “Oklahoma’s rate of suicide is significantly higher than the national average and it is time that we come together as agencies, schools, civic groups, faith-based organizations, law enforcement, first responders, and the general public to make a concerted effort to stop children, youth and adults from dying from this tragedy.”

Since 1999, the increase in the rate of suicide for Oklahoma is a staggering 37.6%. Nationwide, statistics range from a singular decrease in suicide rates in Nevada of -1 %, to the highest increase in suicide rates in North Dakota of 57.6% (Centers for Disease Control (CDC) Vital Signs Report, June 7, 2018).” Also noted in the CDC report, suicide is the 10th leading cause of death nationwide and is one of just three causes that are on the rise. CDC Principal Deputy Director, Anne Schuchat, M. D. stated, “from individuals and communities to employers and healthcare professionals, everyone can play a role in the efforts to help save lives and reverse this troubling rise in suicide.”

The new program at PCYS, *Building a Competent Community for Suicide Prevention*, will implement the evidenced-based curriculum, QPR, which stands for Question, Persuade, Refer, and is produced by the QPR Institute in Spokane, Washington. The fundamental premise of QPR takes into account that most persons at-risk for suicide do not self-refer. To locate these individuals, identify their suicidal risk and ideations, and get them to much needed professional services is at the heart of the QPR approach to suicide prevention.

“What this will mean for our local communities in Payne County,” continued Fultz, “is that PCYS will train as many citizens as we can reach to be the citizen gatekeepers to our at-risk neighbors, co-workers, family members, and others. We will do this through an organized process of partnering with schools, churches and other faith-based organizations, civic clubs, professional organizations, book clubs, individuals, businesses, Chambers of Commerce, and others to bring in our trainer on the PCYS staff to educate the public on how to be competent, informed, and feel empowered to reach out to a person who may be demonstrating symptoms of being at-risk for suicide.”

“QPR trained citizens obviously do not replace or do the same tasks as mental health professionals, counselors, doctors, first responders, or others who provide treatment to suicidal individuals,” she continued. “QPR trained citizens will, however, increase the chances that someone at-risk for suicide may be noticed and assisted to obtain professional help. It may only take that one moment in time for someone to notice and to take action, question, persuade, and refer, to truly save a life. “

PCYS has received a grant of \$25,000 from the prestigious Sarkeys Foundation, in Norman, OK, to provide for some of the costs of this new program. Additional funding is being sought from various grants and contracts, foundations, and the public. Donations are tax-deductible.

PCYS requests that persons in our area who are trained in QPR, those who are Trainers in QPR, as well as organizations and individuals who would like more information on how to be trained in QPR, contact PCYS to see how you can assist in rolling out this program or to get on our training list. PCYS is also accepting resumes for the Coordinator position for this new program.

“As we move forward with this important prevention/intervention effort, we will also be working with Resilience Payne County (RPC), a group of whom PCYS is one of the 7 founding agencies and who is working to prevent Adverse Childhood Experiences, one of many factors linked to suicidal behavior,” stated Fultz. I think we would all like to work ourselves out of being needed, as that would mean many types of abuse, neglect, poverty and marginalization of humans would have been eliminated,” she continued. “Until then, we must all find our way to work to make this world a better place.”

To contact PCYS, you may call them at 405-377-3380, email the Executive Director at janetf@pcys.org, visit their website at www.pcys.org, or find them on Facebook and Twitter. PCYS is a tax-exempt, 501©3 organization.