



YOUTH SUICIDE AND DEPRESSION TASK FORCE

DEFINING THE NEED

Many children and families are affected by mental health problems. For example, at any given time:

- ✓ One in five children and adolescents may have a mental health problem.
- ✓ An estimated two-thirds of all young people with mental health problems are not getting the help they need.
- ✓ 95 percent of people who commit suicide have a diagnosable mental illness.

Fairfax County's children and families are no exception. In 2001, issues related to children's mental health were identified in the Fairfax Communities That Care Youth Survey administered in the county's high schools. When questioned about if they had felt sad or hopeless for days or weeks at a time over the last 12 months:

- ✓ 35.9 percent of the youth responding acknowledged such feelings;
- ✓ 18.5 percent reported that they had considered suicide;
- ✓ 3.6 percent indicated one suicide attempt; and
- ✓ 4.6 percent indicated more than one attempt.

HISTORY

In response to these startling statistics, in January of 2004, the Youth Suicide and Depression Task Force (YSAD) was formed as an initiative of the Fairfax Partnership for Youth, an organization dedicated to bringing the community together to reduce youth violence and promote positive youth development.

PURPOSE

YSAD's purpose is to provide leadership and advocacy in creating a coordinated system of services that incorporates education, prevention, identification, intervention and treatment programs to address youth suicide and depression.

YSAD MEMBERSHIP

YSAD is comprised of representatives of child serving agencies, child advocates, parents and mental health professionals. Participating organizations include: The Fairfax Partnership for Youth, Fairfax County Public Schools, Fairfax-Falls Church Community Services Board, Community and Recreations Services, Juvenile and Domestic Relations Court, Department of Family Services, CrisisLink, the National Mental Health Association, Reston Community Coalition, and Northern Virginia Family Services.

YSAD INITIATIVES

YSAD has identified that there are families in Fairfax County whose children are in need of mental health services, but who do not pursue them. To address this population, it has conducted or is planning the following activities:

- ✓ Development of a community training program about suicide and depression that targets parents and adults who work with youth
- ✓ Sponsorship and coordination of the first Annual Interfaith Mental Wellness Observance Week in May of 2006
- ✓ Creation of an Interfaith Mental Wellness Tool Kit for use by faith leaders during "Mental Health Month" in May
- ✓ Consultation on mental health questions for the 2005 Youth Survey administered in Fairfax County Public Schools
- ✓ Production of two "Top Priority" cable television shows, one focused on the signs of depression and suicide, and the other on multicultural issues related to teen suicide and depression
- ✓ Expansion of the use of depression screenings in the County by hosting screening sites during National Depression Screening Day in October
- ✓ Creation of media materials to be used to educate the public about suicide and depression, including an article featured in organizational newsletters throughout the County
- ✓ Development of an in-service training program on depression and suicide for Fairfax County Public Schools

