Resource Assessment

The significance of inventorying an agency’s available resources early in the development of a suicide prevention program cannot be overstated. This assessment of resources involves determining which and how much of a number of different assets are available for use in your prevention program. Assets can be human capital, such as how many mental health professionals, peer support personnel and chaplains are available to assist in program development and implementation. Assets also include available reproductive abilities such as access to printing equipment, audio and video creation and technological abilities (e.g., Intranet access). Additionally, an agency’s monetary budget and/or access to cash and in-kind donations can be extremely important in ensuring the successful creation, implementation and sustainability of a suicide prevention program.

The totality of the human resources available may be the most important asset and can often be used to compensate for the lack of other resources. Critical to any suicide prevention program is the ready availability of licensed professional mental health personnel. These individuals can provide insight for both program development and evaluation. When agency personnel are found to be suicidal, professional assistance is an absolute. Furthermore, mental health personnel may also play a role in reducing risk exposure. More and more agencies have either an internal or external Employee Assistance Program (EAP). EAP personnel, many of whom are department peers, can be instrumental in many aspects of the program. Chaplains often have special training that can be very useful during times of crisis and well-trained peer support personnel can be an extraordinarily effective first line of response. It is important that an agency’s chief executive and senior staff be involved as they can and should play a major role concretely supporting any suicide prevention program. All of these individuals may, either directly or indirectly, play a role in the development and provision of training and production of communication pieces.

Most suicide prevention programs will require that certain culturally sensitive or agency-specific communication materials be reproduced and distributed to employees. Having knowledge of your agency’s ability to fund and reproduce the printing of fliers, posters and brochures from the onset helps guide how you develop your intervention strategies. Typically larger agencies have some audio and video production abilities housed within their department; smaller agencies may find it helpful to utilize existing, well-tested materials already available on the subject of suicide prevention. The key is to weigh time and costs associated with creating a whole new video or other materials against the benefits that an agency-specific product will be more effective at preventing suicide. The extent to which agency personnel have timely access to electronic medium (viz., Intranet) is also an important to assess. An agency’s Intranet can provide a fast and efficient means of communicating health messages as well as facilitating e-Learning. If the nature of employees’ assignments limits access to primarily senior staff and administrative personnel, this may not be the most efficient communications method.

Finally there is the ever present matter of money. Suicide prevention programs cost money. Whether you are paying an employee for their time, using consulting services, reproducing materials or developing training, there are hard costs associated with these programs. We contend that the benefits to human life significantly outweigh the costs. Departments may have to plan months in advance to specify budget items for a suicide prevention program. If funding has been exhausted or is otherwise not readily available through the agency, monetary donations may be available from local boosters, business and private interests. There are also some low or no-cost alternatives available if funding is extremely scarce. The Los Angeles Police Department has been successful in obtaining professional consultation from one of the largest advertising agencies on the West Coast who will assist in the development of communication material. National and local non-governmental organizations (e.g., Suicide Prevention Center) can be an invaluable source of material and great ideas. Certainly this IACP suicide prevention resource reflects just a portion of the information available to agencies who wish to address the problem of suicide.