



NEWS RELEASE

Contact: Heather Handyside
Phone: 907-301-3481
Email: hhandyside@gci.com

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Sept. 22, 2017

'Sources of Strength' bolsters suicide prevention efforts on Kenai Peninsula *Nine programs funded through the GCI Suicide Prevention Grant*

ANCHORAGE, Alaska – With support from the [GCI Suicide Prevention Grant](#), the Kenai Peninsula Borough School District launched an initiative to raise student awareness about suicide prevention strategies through "[Sources of Strength](#)," the nationally-recognized youth suicide prevention program.

"This is the first really solid thing I've seen that really can have a district-wide, positive impact," said Pegge Erkeneff, communications liaison with KPBSD, whose family has been impacted by suicide. "As I see this program spread into more of the high schools and do more of these trainings for students, it's going to save lives."



Sources of Strength is a suicide prevention program designed to build protective influences among youth. Activities within the program aim to reduce the acceptability of suicide as a response to distress, increase the acceptability of seeking help, improve communication between youth and adults and develop healthy coping attitudes among youth.

"We were doing some research about suicide trends and we were overwhelmed when we found out that we actually had five suicides just on the Kenai Peninsula in 2015," said Melissa Linton, curriculum coordinator, KPBSD. "Sources of Strength provided training for our peers; they were focusing on kids' strengths and what they should be doing. Without that funding, we would have never been able to implement Sources of Strength."

Funded through a \$100,000 donation, the GCI Suicide Prevention Fund includes intentionally broad criteria to empower Alaskans to propose solutions that would work in their community. More than 40 organizations applied for funding, and GCI, with the help of the [Alaska Community Foundation](#), awarded grants to nine Alaska organizations.

"Suicide is a tragedy that affects far too many Alaska families," said Pam Lloyd, vice president of GCI Government, Healthcare, and Education. "We hope that our contribution can make a difference by giving families, schools, and communities the tools they need to keep their friends and loved ones safe, secure and well supported."

According to a report by the Alaska Department of Health and Social Services, in 2015, the state's suicide rate was 27.1 per 100,000 residents – compared to the U.S. national rate of 13.3 per 100,000.

“Research shows that forging connections in communities, among peers and across generations, reduces suicide ideation and promotes wellness,” said Katie St. John, director of programs & grants, Alaska Community Foundation. “The Kenai Peninsula Borough School District’s project to bring the Sources of Strength program into their schools will forge those connections and save lives.”

Last school year, KPBSD introduced Sources of Strength in Kenai Alternative High School, Homer Flex High School, Seward Middle School and Seward High School, which included training for more than 50 peer leaders and over 20 adult mentors. KPBSD plans to expand the program to the rest of the district’s middle and high schools.

Eight other programs received funding through the GCI Suicide Prevention Grant, including: Covenant House Alaska, Alaska Child & Family, Perseverance Theatre, Wellspring Revival Ministries, Juneau Youth Services, Alaska Native Tribal Health Consortium, the Native Village of Paimiut and the Native Village of Tununak.

[Click here](#) to watch a video about the Kenai Peninsula School District’s “Sources of Strength” program.

About GCI

GCI delivers communication and technology services in the consumer and business markets. Headquartered in Alaska with additional locations in the U.S., GCI has delivered services for more than 35 years to some of the most remote communities and in some of the most challenging conditions in North America. Learn more about GCI at <http://www.gci.com>