

WELCOME TO THE 2020 OPRA CONFERENCE AND TRADE SHOW



New Partnerships Parks Can Make Today to Save Lives Tomorrow

Make a list of proven ways to support a person's mental health and wellbeing, and it will read like an Ohio parks program book: green, natural settings that reduce stress; safe spaces to move and learn; group activities that increase social connections; and informed staff who are ready to help. Ohio parks have emerged as unexpected leaders in mental health, and are now positioned to save lives as the state puts a focus on suicide prevention.

“Our brand is about being a healthy, family-friendly, safe space,” said James Ziemnik, director of Lorain County Metro Parks (LCMP). “We saw an opportunity to do even more for mental health.”

In Lorain County, rangers receive training in crisis intervention for someone suffering from a mental illness or substance use disorder, offered through the Mental Health, Addiction and Recovery Services (MHARS) Board. For that type of intervention to occur, both the ranger and the person in distress must cross paths. What about someone in distress in a remote location in the parks? Or if an interaction occurs with someone other than a ranger?

Together, the MHARS Board and Metro Parks launched a collaborative suicide prevention campaign, sharing the Crisis Text Line and local crisis hotline information throughout the parks. In Ohio, anyone can text 4HOPE to 741741 to immediately connect to a crisis counselor. It is free and confidential. The park district placed more than 250 crisis stickers on trail markers in remote locations, including places where individuals have taken their own lives. Crisis



Text Line posters were placed at trailheads and in restrooms.

That partnership earned a 2018 OPRA First Place Award in the Law Enforcement category and spurred more collaboration. Parks staff and patrons are now trained in basic suicide prevention through ongoing classes offered for free. Also, a major effort to bring a Local Outreach of Suicide Survivor (LOSS) Team to enhance ranger crisis

response resources and follow-up when a suicide occurs in the parks is set to launch within Lorain County Metro Parks.

In 2019, the Lorain County parks system experienced no suicides or suicide attempts on their grounds for the first time in four years. This is a trend in the right direction, coinciding with Gov. Mike DeWine’s announcement of the first-ever collaborative Suicide Prevention Plan for Ohio.

Ohio Announces Plan to Save Lives

Ohio’s first-ever collaborative Suicide Prevention Plan was announced on February 28, 2020, by Gov. Mike DeWine and the Ohio Suicide Prevention Foundation. It includes five strategies to reduce suicide deaths in Ohio:

Strategy 1

All Ohioans will recognize the warning signs and risk factors of suicide and respond appropriately.

Strategy 2

Ohio will concentrate efforts on integrating suicide prevention practices and suicide care, including postvention, into high-impact systems including health care, public safety and education.

Strategy 3

Ohio will build suicide prevention capacity and infrastructure at the organizational, local and state levels.

Strategy 4

Ohio will concentrate prevention efforts on groups that current data has identified as being high risk for suicide, including:

- Youth, ages 10-24
- Males, ages 25-59
- Veterans and military members
- Residents of highest-risk Appalachian counties
- Community population focus as identified by local data

Strategy 5

Ohio will standardize, gather and utilize data to continuously inform and evaluate its approach.

The full plan is available at bit.ly/oh-sp-plan.

