



CaIMHSA Program Partner Spotlight: Family Service Agency of the Central Coast and Family Service Agency of Marin

Following her husband’s suicide, Mary* found the support she needed from an unexpected source.

After her husband’s death, Mary didn’t know where to turn for help. The painful experience left her feeling isolated and alone. Though she was hurting, she felt she had to reassure everyone she was “fine.”

During a Family Service Agency training at the non-profit where she worked serving at-risk youth, Mary realized she too needed help.

Though the training focused on recognizing signs of suicidality among the non-profit’s clients, Mary felt empowered to open up about her own experience and reach out. She shared her story with the presenter who connected her to someone she could talk to and reminded her of the crisis line. She realized the importance of getting support for herself and talking with her students about where to turn for help, “so, hopefully, they won’t have to go through the same isolation [that I felt].”

One of the keys to Family Service Agency’s success is its ability to reach out to the community and make the connections that empower people to seek help. This requires trust and a long-term commitment to the community. The Family Service Agency of the Central Coast and the Family Service Agency of Marin are each working to prevent suicide, reduce stigma and encourage help-seeking behavior in California coastal communities so people like Mary can get the help they need.

Family Service Agency of the Central Coast

The [Family Service Agency of the Central Coast](#) has been providing mental health and suicide prevention services to the communities of Monterey, Santa Cruz and San Benito Counties since 1957. As a result, the FSACC has its roots deeply embedded in the community. “Our connections to the community—fostered over a long history of offering services—enable us to reach out to individuals who may need help through the

* Name changed for privacy



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crisis line, support groups and by providing training on mental health topics,” said Carly Galarneau CalMHSAs Grant Coordinator for the FSACC Suicide Prevention project.

The Family Service Agency of the Central Coast supports the region through a suicide crisis line, group support to survivors of suicide loss and extensive community outreach to ensure community members are aware of the services available to them and to reduce the stigma that prevents many from seeking help.

Suicide Crisis Line

Suicide and suicidal ideation are increasingly common in our nation. According to a [UCLA study](#), about 2.4 million adults in California have seriously contemplated suicide in their lifetime. FSACC operates and promotes a suicide crisis line for individuals at risk or concerned friends and family members.

Operating 24 hours a day, the suicide crisis line receives an average of 400 calls a month.

“Our line is a safe place for callers to express their thoughts of suicide and receive support,” said Carly. “Our goal is to connect with callers and help them feel less isolated, express the painful feelings they are experiencing, and de-escalate to a point where they are able to move towards safety and away from suicidal risk.”

The line operates on a peer-based model, with support from a large and diverse volunteer base. “The diversity of our volunteers accurately reflects the community,” said Carly.

Around 88 volunteer responders are trained to answer the crisis line. Part of an ongoing commitment to strengthen the program, FSACC recently launched a new, hands-on training effort in which experienced responders help train and supervise the new volunteers. The program started in the fall and has been successful, with the new volunteer responders demonstrating greater proficiency and skill.

“One focus of our CalMHSAs contract is to ensure all aspects of how we train, recruit, screen, evaluate and monitor responders is the best it can be so we can deliver a consistent, high quality response.”

FSACC conducts robust community outreach to raise awareness about the crisis line, reduce stigma and recruit volunteers. The extensive community outreach includes training at local school districts and community organizations, media outreach and marketing.



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"One of the most rewarding experiences of this work is to realize how often someone will reach out for help if they feel that there is a safe place to call, with a caring person on the other end of the line."

Family Service Agency of Marin

Further up the California coast, the [Family Service Agency of Marin](#) is empowering the North Bay communities of Marin, Sonoma, Napa, Lake, Mendocino and Solano to promote mental wellness and prevent suicide by building a regional suicide prevention network through hotlines, crisis response and support. The [North Bay Suicide Prevention project](#) is expanding Marin's accredited, locally responsive suicide prevention crisis line to five North Bay communities with the goal that by 2014 all people living in the region will have local access to immediate, confidential, high-quality and effective 24/7 Suicide Prevention Hotline services.

Amy Faulstich, Project Coordinator for the North Bay Suicide Prevention Project (NBSP) described their efforts, "we are making connections across six counties with communities that have been historically underserved or identified as high-risk."

In its inception, The North Bay Suicide Prevention Project determined key goals:

- Build a system of suicide prevention through a 24/7 Hotline that addresses immediate crisis response and follow-up support through coordination with emergency service systems.
- Establish a local suicide prevention committee in each county.
- Identify community needs and build relationships by conducting surveys and focus groups with high-risk populations, and key informant interviews with emergency services personnel.
- Ensure project sustainability after 3 years.

Accredited and operating 24 hours a day, the North Bay Suicide Prevention hotline is promoted through local media, the suicide prevention committees, newsletters, presentations, marketing materials and extensive community outreach.

Additionally, the NBSP recently hired a Suicide Prevention Community Education Coordinator to expand community outreach efforts. The Coordinator has trained 93 California National Guardsman in Santa Rosa, facilitated a bullying and suicide



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prevention workshop for middle school students in Marin, and led a Suicide Prevention training for North Bay Clergy.

“The events not only connect participants to one another, they inform the community that there are resources available,” said Amy.

Community Engagement

In an effort to accurately represent each unique county’s needs, NBSP has worked with County Behavioral Health to establish committees made up of representatives and local stakeholders. The committees determine their community’s unique needs and subsequently develop action plans.

The importance of this tailored approach became clear following a series of Native American youth suicides in Sonoma County.

The suicide rate for Native American youth in the United States is troubling. According to the Office of Minority Health, suicide is the second leading cause of death for American Indians and Alaskan Natives aged 15-24.

To address this need, the Sonoma County Indian Health Project recently partnered with NBSP to target at-risk Native American youth in the North Bay and provide suicide prevention training for Native American leaders and community members in the region.

“We are empowering the communities we serve through approaches tailored to the regions’ unique needs,” said Amy.

Through extensive community engagement and outreach, the North Bay Suicide Prevention Project is nearing its goal to ensure all persons living in the North Bay have access to accredited, locally responsive Crisis Hotline services.

Connected Communities

The Family Service Agency of the Central Coast and the Family Service Agency of Marin-North Bay Suicide Prevention Project are actively engaging their communities to promote mental health, prevent suicide and reduce stigma. This community engagement is saving lives in the North Bay and Central Coast.