

## How the West Central Colorado Threat Assessment Team (WCC TAT) Formed and Implemented a Standardized Suicide Risk Assessment Model



**Summary** - The Center for Mental Health (CMH) partnered with the Montrose County School District (MCSD), Montrose Police Department (MPD), and other agencies regionally to create a threat assessment team. Based on the Salem-Keizer model, the West Central Colorado Threat Assessment Team (WCC TAT) aims to support youth who are making threats to others or themselves with the goal of reducing expulsions, suspensions, and preventing youth suicides.

**Why** - Responses to the increase in threats directed to our local schools were not coordinated by school district, mental health, and law enforcement agencies. Agencies did not share common goals, and as a result, were not serving the needs of our youth and their families.

In addition, there were two important community safety concerns:

**The growing youth suicide rate**

**The need for a structured response to student threats against our schools**

### Goals of the WCC TAT

Increasing the psychological safety of school staff, students, and their families.

Reduce suicides and violent acts in students and young adults.

Safely return students to school as quickly as possible following a suspension, expulsion, or psychological crisis.

**What** - Consulted with the FBI who recommended the threat assessment model developed by the Salem-Keizer school district in Salem, Oregon, which aligns with the National Council for Mental Well Being guidance on threat assessments.

Recommended developing a multi-disciplinary threat assessment team as the best model for prevention of violence and increased community safety.

**How** - Site visit to the Salem-Keizer school district and observed the use of a common language for assessing threats, a structured team and plan for mitigating risk, and shared liability and responsibility across agencies.

Implemented both the Suicide Risk Assessment (SRA) and the Threat Assessment (TA) tools.

150 community members across six counties were trained and WCC TAT was formed as a partnership among school districts, mental health professionals, law enforcement, human service agencies, medical professionals, probation, family resource center, and other related agencies.

Two levels in the threat assessment process for both threats to others and threats to self.

The level 1 team is comprised of school staff, mental health, and law enforcement. If that team decides that additional supports are needed they refer it to the level 2 team.

A level 2 assessment for suicide risk includes a referral to CMH for further evaluation, a level 2 threat assessment is referred to a community based team for investigation and review.

Team members work together to ensure youth are appropriately assessed and matched to interventions to address behavioral and other needs of the youth and their families to help the student safely return to school.

### Staffing and Program Costs

- MCSD hired a full-time program coordinator and the UnBOCES hired a part time coordinator to oversee the program in their schools as well as conduct Level 2 assessments.
- CMH hired a Masters-level clinician to serve as the school-based coordinator to oversee the implementation of the program.
- Original regional training costs for 150 people were \$18,000.

### Outcomes

- Added **school-based counselors** in the MCSD.
- Created an **academic engagement center** to help students return to school more quickly.
- Families have been able to **quickly access mental health** care and have become familiar with the services offered at CMH.
- Since implementation in September of 2019, **297 youth have been assessed for suicide risk** (SRA) and **132 youth have been assessed for threats** toward others (TA); 24% of SRAs and 27% of TAs go to a Level 2.
- CMH conducted **156 crisis assessments** and oversaw **90 crisis stabilization admissions** for youth. In the 2019-2021 school years, 160 meetings were held with at-risk students, their parents/guardians, CMH and school staff.
- **Reduced routine expulsion** length from a 365-day standard to an “abatement” that results in a return to the home school or an alternative placement within three weeks for threat to others.
- Families got the support they needed, and **several students avoided being expelled or suspended from school.**