

**Program Title: West Central Colorado Threat Assessment Team**

---

**Organization: The Center for Mental Health (The Center)**

---

***Program Abstract (50 words max, please):***

The Center partnered with the Montrose County Schools, Montrose law enforcement, and other agencies regionally to create a threat assessment team based on the Salem-Keizer model to support youth who are making threats to others or themselves with the goal of reducing expulsions, suspensions, and preventing youth suicides.

***Program Description (Include program development, program information, staffing requirements, pertinent data and start-up costs.): \*Please limit to 2 pages, and remember to address all criteria specified.***

**Program Development:** In the spring of 2018, after the shooting in Parkland, Florida our region received a record number of threats directed at our local schools. In our responses to these threats, we realized that our school district, mental health, and law enforcement agencies did not coordinate their response, did not share common goals, and were not serving the needs of our youth and their families. The result was frustration and miscommunication. Local leaders reached out to the FBI who recommended the threat assessment model developed by the Salem-Keizer school district in Salem, Oregon. This approach was aligned with guidance from the National Council for Mental Well Being who defines threat assessment as an ongoing assessment process with interventions designed to prevent violence. They recommend developing a multi-disciplinary threat assessment team as the best model for prevention of violence and increased community safety. While threats towards others are a concern for our communities, our youth are much more likely to die from or attempt suicide. Suicide is one of the leading causes of death among youth ages 10-18 between 2013 and 2017 and the Office of Suicide Prevention noted in their 2020 Annual Report that the suicide rate for youth is rising.

In the spring of 2019, representatives from The Center for Mental Health (CMH), Montrose County School District (MCSD), and the Montrose Police Department (MPD) visited 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. We decided to implement both the Suicide Risk Assessment (SRA) and the Threat Assessment (TA) tools and expand our collaboration to include strong coordination of care for youth and their families.

Our community came together to assert that as a community we prioritize youth safety and recognize that youth who are making threats toward themselves, or others need support and intervention to recover and decrease the risk. In the fall of 2019, 150 community members across six counties were trained and The West Central Colorado Threat Assessment Team (WCC TAT) was formed. This team is a partnership among school districts, mental health professionals, law enforcement, human service agencies, medical professionals, probation, family resource center, and other related agencies.

**Program Information:** The team identified two important community safety concerns: (1) the growing youth suicide rate, and (2) the need for a structured response to student threats against our schools when they occur. The goals of the program include increasing the psychological safety of school staff, students, and their families, reducing suicides and violent acts in students and young adults, and safely returning students to school as quickly as possible following a suspension, expulsion or

psychological crisis. 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. In our community, any student can be referred for a threat assessment by anyone that is concerned. Concerns can be brought forward by students themselves, peers, teachers, parents, neighbors, counselors, or through a report made to Safe2Tell. Safe2Tell is a youth-friendly service that provides an easy, anonymous way for people to report concerns about their safety or the safety of others.

There are two levels in the threat assessment process for both threats to others and threats to self. The Level 1 team is at the school level and includes school staff, and the Level 2 team is at the community partner alliance level and includes participation from a wider number of community agencies. After completing a Level 1 risk assessment, if the school-based team finds that further evaluation of the student is needed to keep a student safe, they escalate it to the community for a Level 2 assessment. A Level 2 assessment for suicide risk includes a referral to CMH for further evaluation and potential placement to our stabilization unit. From there, CMH coordinates with the school to help the student safely return to school. For threats to others, the WCC TAT community-based multi-agency team consults to determine risk and identify community resources needed to mitigate risk and support recovery. At every point in the process, the youth and family are engaged and supported.

Through the implementation of this program, the multi-agency WCC TAT has been able to identify barriers and needs that were missing in our community. Since the initiation of the program the partnerships have led to added school-based counselors, creation of an academic engagement center to help students return to school more quickly. In addition, families have been able to quickly access mental health care and have become familiar with the services offered at CMH. This prevention-based model has demonstrated that successful early intervention can mitigate risk factors and increase protective factors, showing that success relies upon strong community partnerships.

**Staffing:** Originally the program was absorbed into existing positions. As it grew and was successful, 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 investigations. CMH has hired a Masters-level clinician to serve as the school-based coordinator to oversee the implementation of the program. All agencies continue to participate as members of the level 2 team.

**Program Costs:** Original regional training costs for 150 people were \$18,000  
In-kind costs were contributed by each partner agency to support participation in the meeting.

**Pertinent Data:** Since implementation in September of 2019; throughout the schools 297 youth have been assessed for suicide risk and 132 youth have been assessed for threats toward others. We learned that 24% of SRAs and 27% of TAs go to a Level 2. During this time, CMH conducted 156 crisis assessments and oversaw 90 crisis stabilization admissions for youth residing in the school district. In the 2019-2021 school years, 160 meetings were held with at-risk students, their parents/guardians, The Center and school staff. We 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 and have been able to get students connected with mental health support in schools with coordinated care after a crisis assessment or mental health admission. Families got the support they needed, and several students avoided being expelled or suspended from school. Significantly, we have not experienced a suicide death in this school district since implementation to current. SRA/STAT video: <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1jH7b64aO-LndTuvS21U2K050LJA6sVRy/view>