

OREGON TASK FORCE ON SCHOOL SAFETY



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'Lines for Life' YouthLine Aims to Provide Early Warning for School Violence

At its November 17 meeting, the Oregon Task Force on School Safety (OTFSS) heard from Dwight Holton, the chief executive officer for Lines for Life — a non-profit organization that operates several crisis telephone lines that address a range of issues, such as: substance abuse, suicide prevention, veterans issues and problems facing young people.

In total, the organization receives more than 35,000 calls each year, including 13,000 suicide calls. Of these, 98 percent are de-escalated successfully without needing to involve law enforcement or emergency medical services.

Total call volumes for other services include: 9,000 to the drug and alcohol help line, 10,000 to the military crisis line — both from veterans and their families — as well as more than 3,000 to its support line for young people.

Lines for Life was established as the Oregon Partnership in 1993 by three separate non-profit organizations coming together to address substance abuse issues on a statewide basis. In 2012, it adopted its current name, reflecting its oldest and best-known service: its 24-hour crisis line program.

Holton's presentation to the OTFSS specifically addressed its YouthLine, and its potential to reduce school violence. He stressed that an excellent response is not enough: that authorities must be able to identify and address potential threats before a critical incident even begins to prevent deaths and injuries. Anonymous tips provided by young people through Lines for Life could play a crucial role in early detection.



Dwight Holton

He cited statistics from a Federal Bureau of Investigation study that looked for trends among past episodes of school violence. Among its key findings:

- Incidents of targeted violence are rarely sudden or impulsive;
- Others knew prior to the attack;
- Most attackers do not threaten their targets directly;
- No useful demographic profile emerged, however: most attackers showed signs that caused concern among others about the risks they posed to themselves or others;
- Most attackers have difficulty coping with significant losses or personal failures.
- Many have suicidal ideation or have attempted suicide.
- Many attackers feel bullied, persecuted or personally injured prior to an attack, which prompts a desire for revenge.

To Holton, several of these — the fact that attacks are seldom impulsive, that others know ahead of time, and attackers show outward signs that other people notice — point to the potential for anonymous tip lines to be an effective way to mitigate incidents of school violence.

He emphasized some of Lines for Life's key advantages as a potential partner in addressing the threat of violence in schools: anonymity for callers; experienced call counselors, including youth counselors on the Youthline; extensive partnerships with law enforcement, schools and mental health agencies; a statewide footprint; a seamless system to prevent fragmentation; as well as a track record of effective advertising and promotion for its services.

Task Force Makes Progress on Terminology, Procurement in Final Meeting of 2014



Members of the Oregon Task Force on School Safety (OTFSS) met at the North Clackamas School District offices on Lake Road in Milwaukie on November 17. The task force canceled its December meeting for the winter holidays and will next meet on January 13, 2015.

On November 17, the Oregon Task Force on School Safety (OTFSS) met at the North Clackamas School District offices in Milwaukie. This was the last meeting of the task force held in 2014, with its monthly schedule set to resume on January 13, 2015.

Among the issues discussed at this meeting were an update from the Subcommittee on Terminology, led by Eriks Gabliks, the director of the Oregon Department of Public Safety, Standards and Training (DPSST). The subcommittee's goal is to identify key common language and definitions of emergency response terminology to be used in a statewide, standardized response protocol.

Members of the subcommittee include: Kevin McDonald and Jessica Hull of the Beaverton Police Department, Kevin Sutherland of the Beaverton Public School District, Sue Graves of the Lincoln County School District, Dave Novotney of the Willamette Education Service District, Geoff Spalding of the Beaverton Police Department, Tom Worthy of the Oregon State Police, Mark Prince of Hillsboro Fire & Rescue, Ted Kunze of the Oregon Fire Chiefs Association, as well as Gary Ninman and Todd Anderson of DPSST.

At its previous meeting, the subcommittee sought to establish four or five key elements that need to be included in each school's emergency plan, as well as outlining a program for initial responders — firefighters and police officers in the community where the school is located, and therefore likely to be the first to respond in a crisis — to work with and conduct training exercises at each school. To facilitate the timely and efficient use of additional resources arriving from outside the local area (such as neighboring fire departments and law enforcement agencies), a list of no more than ten key terms would be identified and utilized statewide.

Schools which do not have existing safety plans could look to models such as the "I love u guys" Foundation, the U.S. Department of Education, the U.S. Department of Homeland Security and the Lincoln County School District.

Gabliks also described the desirability of developing a statewide repository of emergency plans for all schools in Oregon, but acknowledged this might be difficult to achieve, as a practical matter. He did, however, point out the importance of sharing plans regionally — within a geographic area where first responders

could reasonably be expected to respond to a major incident at a local school.

At the same meeting, Captain Tom Worthy of the Oregon State Police (OSP) gave an update on the procurement process for the task force's main project: to create a database that includes maps of every school statewide, accessible to first responders via the Internet, to facilitate rapid response in emergency situations.

The first step is to create a Request For Information (RFI) document, to gather the basic facts from vendors about how such a system might be created and maintained. This requires the hiring of a project manager and a business analyst — a process that moved forward in late November.

Their work is being overseen by a joint team of representatives from the OSP and the Oregon Department of Education. The governor's office is working with Deputy Superintendent of Public Instruction Rob Saxton to have both positions report directly to the OTFSS.

The completion of the RFI process will allow the project to move forward to the Request For Proposals (RFP) stage in 2016, with the goal of commencing work on the project in local schools in mid-2017 and completing the project by the end of 2019.

Task force member Matt Utterback, the superintendent of the Confederation of Oregon School Administrators, reported on the implementation of the "Standard Response Protocol" provided by the "I love u guys" foundation.

He said that the program was easy to roll out in schools that didn't have an existing safety plan, and that its simplicity was well received by students and staff. He had not encountered any pushback on the plan, although students were struggling somewhat with the drills. Utterback also highlighted the need for additional resources to help schools recover after a critical incident.

Among the subjects OTFSS plans to address moving forward is the threat assessment program developed by the Salem-Keizer School District.