

24-7



CONTRA COSTA
CRISIS CENTER

Quarterly Newsletter ■ Spring 2012

Coming Soon: Crisis Chat

Technology is changing rapidly, and so is our agency. Thanks to two new grants, we'll be launching an online counseling service this spring. The service is designed to increase options for people in crisis, resulting in greater access to our life-affirming services.

Initially, "crisis chat" will be offered four hours per day, Sunday through Thursday, in the evenings. Experienced counselors—staff and volunteers—who are trained in ASIST (Applied Suicide Intervention Skills Training) will respond to all communications. If users try to access the service during other times, or if our counselors already are engaged in multiple chats and can't handle more, people will be asked to try again later or, if they're in immediate crisis, to phone our toll-free, 24-hour crisis lines.

This new service is possible because of grants we received recently from the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline and CalMHSa. The Lifeline grant, for \$70,000, with funding provided by the federal Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), facilitates a rapid startup. Our agency was one of 10 crisis centers in the U.S. to receive Lifeline funding to develop and launch crisis chat, and the service will be in place here by March 1, 2012.

The CalMHSa grant, \$100,000 per year for the next three years, funds several services, but the main one is online counseling. It will enable us to expand chat in the near future, as well as ensure its short-term sustainability. A portion of the funding also will pay for the marketing of our crisis intervention and suicide prevention services in rural areas of Contra Costa County.

Initially, crisis chat will focus primarily on youths at local high schools. Over time, we plan to increase the scope as well as the hours and days that the service is available. Ideally, if future funding allows, crisis chat will grow to become an around-the-clock adjunct of our crisis lines. In addition, we'll include a texting component.

The Lifeline and SAMHSA will be promoting crisis chat nationally. From March to

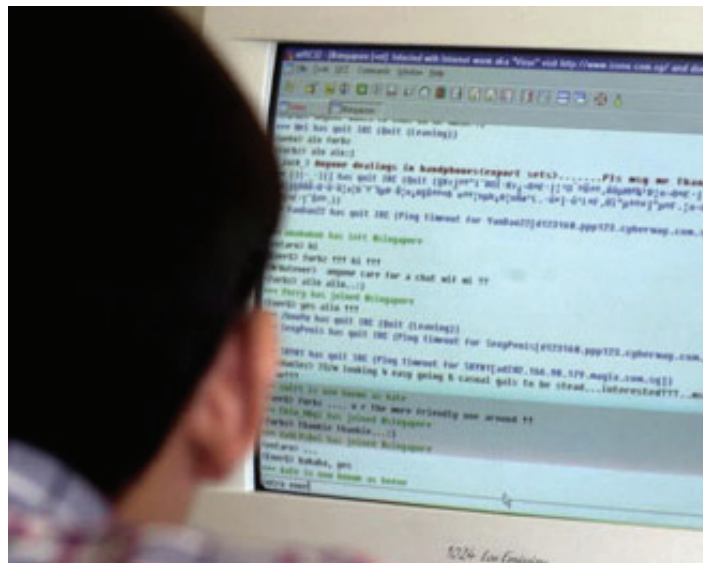
September 2012 our agency will be part of a queue with the other funded agencies, responding to people who access the service via the Lifeline's website (www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org). After that, our focus will narrow to Contra Costa County specifically.

It's all new territory for us, and we have a lot to learn. Fortunately, there are other crisis centers who already are doing this, and we're benefiting from their experiences.

Crisis chat represents another way for people in distress to communicate with our counselors. As in telephone support, our goal will be to actively engage and encourage the cooperation of clients in keeping them safe and feeling connected. It's going to be challenging, but we look forward to it. ■



New Tool, Same Goal
As in telephone support, our goal with crisis chat will be to actively engage and encourage the client's cooperation in keeping him or her safe.



Online Help
Crisis chat will be another way for people to access our life-affirming services.

With
help
comes
hope.



Call Center Index

2011 Service Statistics

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Total calls handled	65,361
Suicide calls	5,116
Child abuse calls	4,618
Elder abuse calls	1,059
211 calls	37,146
Average time to answer crisis calls	7.3 sec.
Average time to answer 211 calls	5.3 sec.
Abandonment rate on crisis lines	5.2%
Abandonment rate on 211 line	3.0%
Percentage of crisis calls from people of color	46%
Percentage of 211 calls from people of color	64%
Crisis callers whose mood improved	87%
211 callers whose mood improved	94%

\$50,000 Grant

We're pleased to announce receipt of a new grant. The grant, for \$50,000, is from Kaiser Permanente, Northern California division. It supports our 211 service.

211 is the national, toll-free, three-digit phone number that people call day or night for information about local health and social services. All 50 states have it, as do 28 counties in California. Our agency is the authorized 211 provider for Contra Costa County.

Several years ago Kaiser Permanente launched a special initiative to support 211. Annual funding has been provided to our agency and other 211 providers to continue and expand the service. In 2011, we answered 37,000 calls to 211.

Grief Survey

Our grief counseling program is one of the oldest, largest, and most diverse bereavement services in California. Founded in 1972, and serving nearly 1,000 people per year, it provides individual and group

counseling to youths and adults who are mourning the death of a loved one.

Recently we mailed a client satisfaction survey to 527 people who completed grief counseling at our agency. The purpose of the survey was to determine how important the service was to them and whether it made a difference in their lives. The survey was anonymous, and modeled after a Columbia University research project that assessed the effectiveness of our suicide follow-up call program.

A total of 141 people responded to the survey. More than 97 percent said that grief counseling was helpful. In particular, people appreciated the compassion and expertise of their counselors. Clients in support groups said that they valued hearing different perspectives and receiving support from others.

When asked to what extent grief counseling had a positive impact on their lives (for example, helped the family communicate better, helped keep individuals hopeful, and helped stabilize their lives

during a difficult time), 88 percent said that it helped "a lot" and 12 percent said that it helped "a little." The most common responses were, "I can't imagine how I would have coped without you," and "It helped keep me hopeful." Six people said, "It helped me through a dark time and kept me alive," while others noted that grief counseling gave them the tools to carry on with a more productive outlook on life, helped validate their feelings and decisions, and provided much-needed stability.

Another question asked "How would you say things are for you now?" More than 61 percent said they're "much better" and 34 percent said they're "somewhat better." Only 4 percent said they're "unchanged."

When asked whether they would recommend the service to someone mourning a death, all but one—99 percent—said yes, many emphatically. Numerous people said they already had.

Finally, 86 percent rated the service "very helpful," 10 percent rated it "helpful," and 4 percent rated it "somewhat helpful." Many surveys ended with words of praise and thanks.

New Staff Member

Stephan Clifford joined our staff recently as a crisis line specialist whose primary focus is crisis chat. He's a crisis line volunteer who worked previously as an afterschool teacher in El Cerrito and a respite provider in Oakland. Currently he's enrolled in the master's program in social work at Cal State East Bay. ■

Beacons of Light

Donations of \$100 or more received between December 1, 2011 and January 13, 2012

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CRISIS CENTER

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Fax: 925.939.1933*

Executive Director's Message

John Bateson



Websites

*www.crisis-center.org
www.211database.org
www.211contracosta.org*

24-Hour Numbers

*Crisis/Suicide: 800.833.2900
Crisis/Suicide: 800.273.TALK
Crisis/Suicide: 800.SUICIDE
Crisis/Suicide: 888.628.9454
Grief: 800.837.1818
Homeless: 800.808.6444
Child Abuse: 877.881.1116
Elder Abuse: 877.839.4347
Information & Referral: 211
TTD/TTY: 925.938.0725*

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It's hard to say good-bye, especially to a job one lives intensely and enjoys enormously. Nevertheless, the time has come.

When this newsletter reaches you, my tenure as executive director of the Contra Costa Crisis Center will have ended. The board has worked out a transition plan, and the separation is mutually agreed upon and amicable.

After 15 years here, I need a change and so does the agency. Now is a good time because financially the Crisis Center is in the best shape it has ever been in, the staff is skilled, and programs are operating efficiently and effectively. I can leave knowing that the agency is positioned well for the future.

On one hand I regret not being able to see through some exciting developments. Crisis chat, described on the first page, is going to usher in a

whole new era of service for the Crisis Center. Also, discussions are underway to expand the partnership between our 211 program and the county Employment and Human Services Department. In addition, we're in the early phases of implementing several state suicide prevention strategies at the local level.

Still, there are other things I want to do. I have a new book coming out soon (my third) and I want to be able to promote it. Titled *The Final Leap*, and published by the University of California Press, it's about suicides from the Golden Gate Bridge. Also, I've started researching another book, tentatively titled *The Last Battle*, about military suicides from the Civil War to the present, and need more time to write.

An interim executive director, Cory Pohley, is taking over while the board conducts an extensive search for a

permanent executive director. Cory has more than 30 years of experience in the nonprofit sector, including 10 years of executive leadership. She has worked to meet the needs of people impacted by homelessness, foster care, the juvenile justice system, mental health challenges, child abuse, homophobia, and poverty.

I want to take this opportunity to thank everyone who has helped make these past 15 years so rewarding. The wisdom and dedication of colleagues, compassion and commitment of co-workers, skill and grace of volunteers, generosity and faith of donors, and love and support of the people I'm closest to have been inspiring.

I'm grateful for the privilege of directing the Crisis Center these past 15 years and contributing to its success. I wish everyone connected with the agency best wishes in continuing its important work. ■

Our mission is to keep people ALIVE and SAFE, help them through crises, and connect them with culturally relevant resources in the community. We have five core values:

- **Compassion:** We aim to alleviate the emotional pain, distress, and needs of our clients.
- **Integrity:** We respect and honor our clients and colleagues through trustworthy actions.
- **Inclusion:** We affirm the value of differing perspectives and are committed to representation from—and service to—all members of our diverse community.
- **Accessibility:** We believe that people in need should be able to get help 24-7.
- **Collaboration:** We're committed to developing strong, lasting partnerships with community members to achieve common goals.