



TEEN-LED ACTIVISM TO REMOVE THE STIGMA OF
MENTAL HEALTH AND PREVENT YOUTH SUICIDE

SPONSOR PROSPECTUS

SURGEON GENERAL'S ADVISORY

“Youth are experts on their own lives, so it is important to engage youth in community-based mental health efforts. Involve young people in all phases of programming, from ideation to implementation. Gather feedback to understand what is and isn’t working.”

– Dr. Vivek Murthy, 2021 Surgeon General’s Youth Mental Health Advisory


This
matters!

Executive Summary

There are #ZeroReasonsWhy
we can't create change.

INTRODUCTION

There are many reasons teens struggle with mental health. There are Zero Reasons Why they should struggle alone. Zero Reasons Why® is a teen-led storytelling and community mobilization campaign working to prevent teen suicide and drive productive conversations that remove the stigma around mental health struggles. Created by Overflow, with the guidance of mental health experts and community partners, this promotional Campaign has shown promise as one way to help decrease the teen suicide rate in the communities where it has been deployed.

PROBLEM SUMMARY

According to the National Council for Behavioral Health, 8.7% of youth will be diagnosed with a depressive disorder and 8.3% with an anxiety disorder during their lifetime. Along with many other factors, this has contributed to an alarming uptick in suicide attempts and deaths by suicide amongst teens in recent decades. Educators, civic leaders and parents often feel helpless and isolated when addressing these issues and might even avoid mental health discussions altogether for fear of exacerbating the problem. Mental health stigma must be dismantled so that no one feels alone in their struggles, too ashamed to ask for help or unaware of where to turn for resources and support.

SOLUTION SUMMARY

While the medical and scientific communities have conducted many studies that give insight into this complex issue, we believe teens have the knowledge, peer influence and energy to put insight into action. Zero Reasons Why equips teen activists with the tools and public platform they need to drive change through strategic storytelling to build societal empathy. It's a teen-led movement delivered via social media through a stigma-dismantling Storytelling Campaign and in person through Community Mobilization activities. We have seen – and research affirms – that when mental health stigma is removed, teens are more likely to display help-seeking behavior that can save lives.

WHAT'S NEXT?

We believe the Campaign framework can scale to achieve similar results in more communities by building a national network of school-based Zero Reasons Why Clubs, along with the content and technology to easily deploy it. Understanding that school administrators typically have small budgets for mental health promotion, our vision is that no school would have to pay to launch a chapter. To accomplish that, we are seeking financial support to launch and promote a national chapter model, to train and onboard new chapter sponsors and to implement the technology that will bring the power of Zero Reasons Why to teens and mental health advocates everywhere.

Testimonials



I have worked in community mental health for almost 30 years. The most valuable lesson I've learned over my career is that suicide is not a community mental health center issue, or a school issue or a faith-based issue. It's a community issue and it takes the entire community coming together to address it.

The Zero Reasons Why Campaign has provided our community the opportunity to collaborate and take action to prevent suicide and promote mental wellness. With student leaders at the helm, this Campaign has brought religious leaders, health professionals, mental health clinicians, elected officials, schoolteachers, students, parents and community members together to share real stories of mental health crisis and recovery.

As more people have shared their mental health stories through the Campaign, the more open our community has become to other suicide prevention efforts. Zero Reasons Why built community momentum around mental health education and inspired more students to seek help from peers and professionals. It is truly creating a suicide safer community.

The Campaign won't look the same from one community to the next, but I believe the outcomes will be the same. It is my hope that Zero Reasons Why provides the foundation for community to support teens and their mental wellness.

Tim DeWeese

Director, Johnson County Mental Health

Testimonials



This Campaign began in 2018 with a group of six school superintendents who came together to address teen suicide and mental health. As we each shared our own stories about teen suicides in our respective communities, we acknowledged current efforts, while well-intended, were not working. We needed to invite people into a community conversation so that collectively our thoughts, ideas and actionable solutions would stop any teen from choosing to die rather than live.

The first countywide mental health convening brought together leaders who were already working in this space – mental health professionals, parents, faith-based leaders, elected officials and health professionals. The synergy that existed was undeniable. Whiteboards in the room were quickly filled with issues, barriers and possible solutions. However, at one point, someone asked a question, the right question, that completely changed the conversation. “I wonder what our kids would think about this list?” That simple question, launched a movement we know today as Zero Reasons Why – a teen-led effort fueled by the mantra, “Nothing about us, without us!”

The Zero Reasons Why Campaign assists you in the “how” and “what” of addressing the mental health challenges our communities face, while also building the capacity of the next generation of leaders in every community – our children. Plans will undoubtedly be unique to communities, yet still part of this greater movement to address teen suicide and mental health. Best wishes as you face the wind and join this movement.

Dr. Todd White

Former Superintendent, Blue Valley School District

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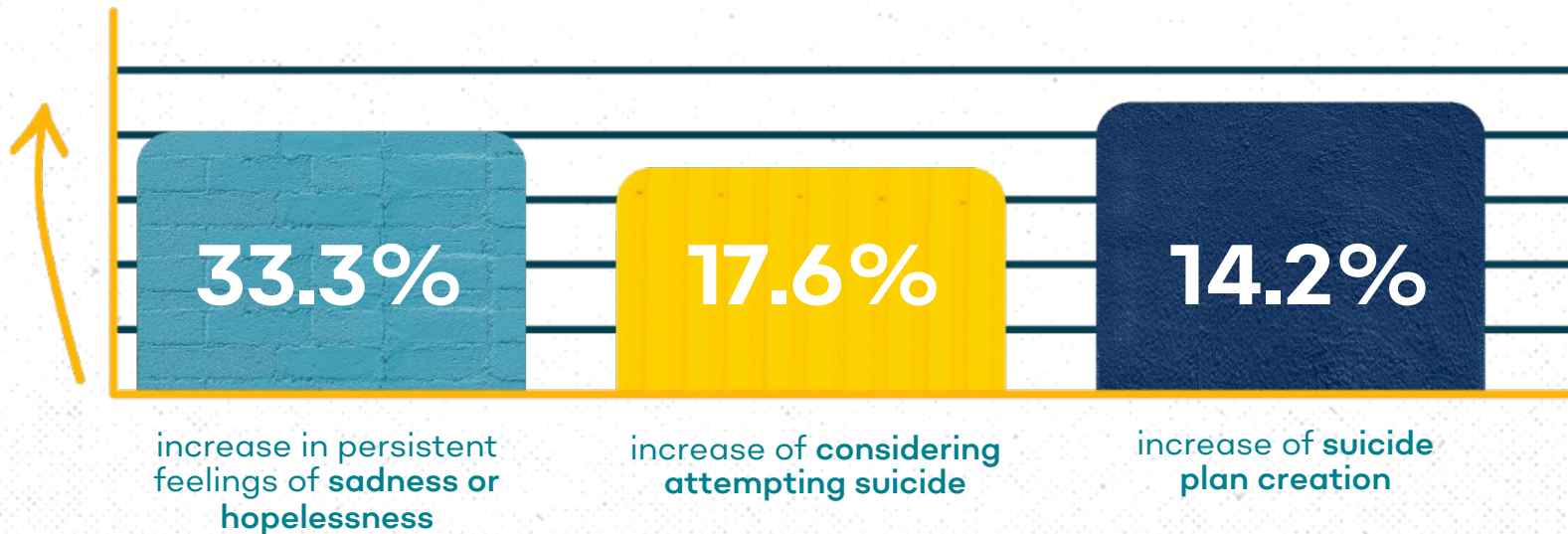
DISCLAIMER - LEGAL STATEMENT: The Campaign enables grassroots teen-led activism to remove the stigma of mental health to help prevent youth suicide across the U.S. The campaign for Zero Reasons Why is not provided by mental health professionals and information and services provided under the Campaign do not constitute mental health advice and should not be relied upon to treat mental illness or thoughts of suicide. The Campaign, stories, and community activities that Zero Reasons Why mobilizes are not forums for personal disclosure of suicidal thoughts or behaviors. Those who struggle with mental health issues or suicidal thoughts or behavior, should seek medical assistance from a licensed professional or contact the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline by texting HELLO to 741741 or dialing 988.



WHAT IS THE
YOUTH MENTAL
HEALTH CRISIS?

Youth Mental Health Epidemic

From 2013 to 2023, high school students reported:



The modern teenage experience is unlike anything previous generations have lived through. Along with the conveniences that a more connected society brings, teens are navigating uncharted, complex territory, with many factors contributing to the mental health epidemic in recent years. The data is clear that teens are struggling. Suicide is the second leading cause of death for ages 10-24. The risk is even greater for LGBTQ+ high school students, who report attempting suicide at a rate five times higher than heterosexual classmates. Yet, in many spaces, youth are met with dismissive attitudes that stem from the social stigma that surrounds mental health discourse. They are too often told to “get over it,” “toughen up” or made to believe that they’re “just looking for attention.”

Teenagers in Crisis

Mental Health and Suicide-Related Behaviors Worsening in U.S.

PERCENTAGE OF HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS WHO:	2013 Total	2015 Total	2017 Total	2019 Total	2021 Total	2023 Total	Trend (all years available)
Experienced persistent feelings of sadness or hopelessness	30	30	31	37	42	40	
Experienced poor mental health [†]	-	-	-	-	29	29	-
Seriously considered attempting suicide	17	18	17	19	22	20	
Made a suicide plan	14	15	14	16	18	16	
Attempted suicide	8	9	7	9	10	9	
Were injured in a suicide attempt that had to be treated by a doctor or nurse	3	3	2	3	3	2	

Key: In wrong direction

No change

In right direction

[†] Question introduced in 2021

School-Based Opportunities to Address the Crisis

It's evident that young people are experiencing a level of distress that calls for action. A CDC report on youth mental health "raises urgency for the need to invest in schools as a lifeline to help struggling youth." Data show that school-based mental health education and support can make a profound difference.

Effective approaches include *connecting teens to their peers and communities through clubs and community outreach*, and providing safe and trusted adults, such as trained teachers/counselors – increasing the belief among students that they are cared for, supported and belong.

Equipping high school students with essential skills, such as managing emotions and asking for help, and fostering school connectedness with classmates and staff, makes them less likely to experience poor mental health.



U.S. Surgeon General Calls for Action

A recent Surgeon General's advisory affirms the crisis and the need for teens to be included in the conversation.

The 2021 Advisory, “Protecting Youth Mental Health” encourages teen involvement in positive change and calls attention to this urgent public health issue. It provides recommendations for how this crisis can be addressed to support the mental health of children, adolescents and young adults. It also outlines why systemic change is vital – providing recommendations for schools, community organizations, health care systems, technology companies, media, funders and foundations, employers and government.

In other words, while institutions and individuals all have an important role to play in supporting the mental health of youth, the youth themselves must be elevated to positions in which they can inform and influence systemic change.

We've seen the success of this model happen regionally, and we believe our approach will spark change on a national level with Zero Reasons Why teens leading the charge.



Key Findings

- National surveys of young people show alarming increases in the prevalence of certain mental health challenges.
- Mental health is shaped by many factors, from genes and brain chemistry to relationships with family and friends and larger social forces and policies.
- Young people are bombarded with messages through the media and popular culture that erode their sense of self-worth.
- Technology platforms can reinforce negative behaviors like bullying and exclusion and undermine the safe and supportive environments young people need and deserve.

Zero Reasons Why Origin Story

During the first six months of 2018, teen death by suicide nearly doubled in Johnson County, Kansas, which includes several Kansas City-area suburbs and six school districts. This alarming epidemic mirrored a nationwide trend of increased suicides amongst teens.

The six superintendents of the county school districts brought together health professionals, government leaders, nonprofit voices, the faith community and parents to form the Johnson County Mental Health Convening. They enlisted the help of Overflow, a Kansas City-area idea adoption firm, to help establish and propel a movement to prevent teen suicide. Out of that work, **three themes** were identified:

- **Teen voice should be amplified**
- **Stories need to be shared**
- **The entire community must take action**

These became the foundational ideas of Zero Reasons Why®. The Campaign gained momentum through partnership with the mental health professionals at Johnson County Mental Health Center, whose support helped it grow, while providing teens with direct access to mental health support. The once-local Campaign is now setting the pace for our communities, showing what can happen when an entire community is willing to work together, try something new and amplify teen voice.

The Campaign's impact has been deepened by partnerships and with additional funding from organizations like AT&T of Kansas, Blue Cross Blue Shield (via BlueKC) and other regional county mental health organizations and community supporters. The Campaign currently serves 50+ public school districts, 110 high schools and reaches into 11 states.

Zero Reasons Why was born out of crisis but sets its focus on equipping teens to create a better future for themselves and their communities. Teens are ready to lead the way. They just can't do it without adult support.





A teen-led storytelling and community mobilization campaign to remove the stigma of mental health and prevent teen suicide.

The 3
Campaign
Pillars



**Remove
the Stigma**



**Build Community
Support**



**Commit to
Education**



Stigma Prevents Help Seeking Behavior

There are many factors that contribute to the mental health crisis teens experience today and many barriers to receiving support. We can't claim to know what causes the teen mental health epidemic, but Zero Reasons Why is built on addressing two key factors: **reducing mental health stigma** and **increasing help-seeking behavior**.

REMOVE THE STIGMA

Mental health stigma prevents teens from seeking help.



INCREASE HELP-SEEKING BEHAVIOR

Reducing mental health stigma can increase help-seeking behavior.



DECREASE TEEN SUICIDE

Increased help-seeking behavior is a key factor to decrease teen suicide.

What are mental health stigma and help-seeking behavior?

Mental health stigma, according to Mayo Clinic, is when a person is viewed in a negative way because of a distinguishing characteristic or personal trait that is thought to be, or actually is, a disadvantage (a negative stereotype), and goes on to say that “negative attitudes and beliefs toward people who have a mental health condition are common.” This happens to young people every day with dismissive statements they hear from peers, parents, educators or media.

Help-seeking behavior is a person's ability to self-identify when they need support and to ask for help, whether by calling or texting a crisis line, telling a friend they're struggling, talking to a parent or seeking support from another trusted source.

We believe removing mental health stigma **starts with story.**



STORYTELLING FOR SOCIAL CHANGE

Who is Overflow?

Overflow is a Kansas City-based idea adoption agency that created the Zero Reasons Why® framework and powers the ongoing Campaign.

Overflow helps changemakers create stories and experiences to get ideas adopted – often around complex topics of significant societal importance. The Overflow process begins with the belief that the power to influence change begins with a well-told story.

Overflow uses strategic story, experience design and creative multimedia production to shift perceptions and influence behaviors. These practices are informed by diffusion of innovations theory, behavior change principles and story structure which are described in more detail throughout this document.

The Zero Reasons Why Campaign applies the practices of idea adoption to the youth mental health crisis. The Campaign is built on sharing stories and creating experiences to remove the stigma of mental health, thereby increasing the likelihood teens seek help, and, in turn, reduce teen suicide.



Stories Dismantle Stigma and Build Empathy

Stories have the power to remove stigma, even in complex social topics like mental health and suicide prevention. When stigma is removed, a struggling teen is more likely to seek help for their mental health concerns. Then, as help-seeking behavior increases, the likely result is a reduction in teen suicide – a noble, lofty goal, but not an unreachable one.

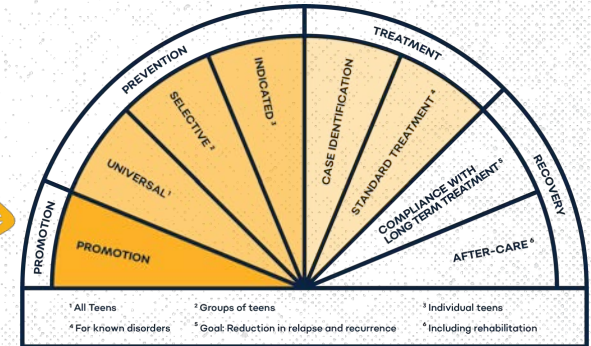
Emerging research supports this theory. Sharing personal stories has even been used as an intervention method for people struggling with mental health. It has “led to a reduction of self-stigma and stigma” as one study notes. Another 2022 study published in the Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology found that digital narrative-based bibliotherapy increases “feelings of perceived shared experience and optimism” and that participants in the study “reported lower desire to die.”

While Zero Reasons Why is not mental health treatment, and will never be, it takes the same concept of narrative sharing and moves it upstream on the continuum of care – out of the treatment phase and into promotion. The goal is to use storytelling to promote positive mental health and elevate the topic before someone moves further along the continuum.

This is the work of stigma removal. By bringing stories to the forefront – not just those in treatment behind closed doors – the conversation becomes proactive and the same feelings of shared experience, optimism and reducing of stigma can be felt before someone needs mental health treatment. Through first-person narrative, we open the dialogue for real change.

Learn more about storytelling and our role on the continuum of care throughout this document.

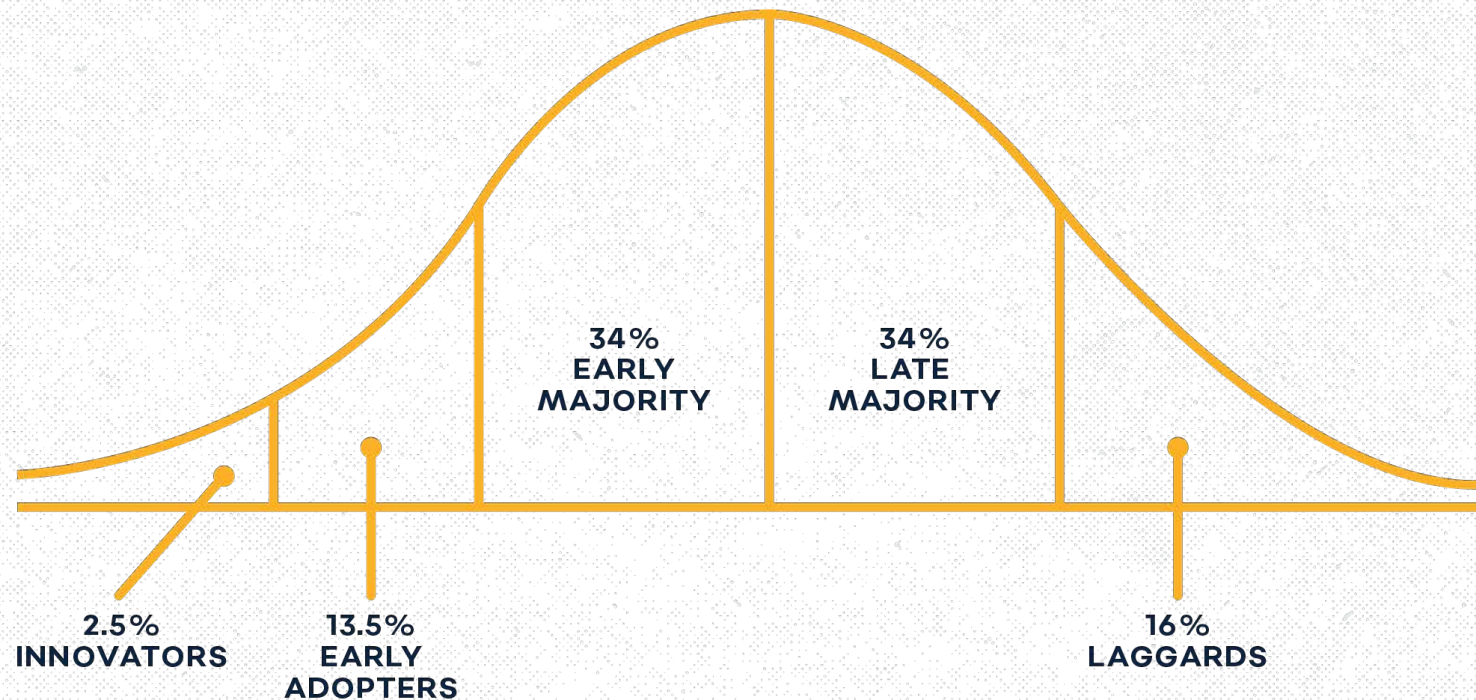
OUR FOCUS



Remove the stigma of mental health.

Idea Adoption in Theory

When we use story to help get a complex idea adopted, Overflow starts with looking at what – or who – allows an idea to spread in the first place. Understanding the types of people who are likely to latch on to a new idea and help it grow is key. Diffusion of Innovations, a theory by Everett Rogers, defines the concept as **“the process by which an innovation is communicated through certain channels over time among the members of a social system.”** The illustration shows the idea adoption curve organized by group within a social system. Idea adoption is an individual action, and when an idea is adopted by an individual it is directly related to their personal beliefs, not necessarily the organization or movement. Individuals who adopt an idea then influence others to do the same. During the initial deployment, the Campaign defined who would help the idea spread – the innovators, early adopters and early majority.



Idea Adoption in Theory

Innovators

Individuals who recognize the problem and take immediate action to explore change. Willing to question organizational standards, eager to prototype and test something new. Innovators of Zero Reasons Why are generally personally impacted by mental health and recognize the increasing numbers and support the extreme need for action.

Examples include:

- Teens, especially those on the Teen Council
- Forward-thinking School Administrators
- Mental health practitioners
- Parents with personal experience

Early Adopters

Largely motivated by the potential of a teen-led campaign, this group expresses early support for the Campaign and helps create the first wave of activity by using their influence to garner support through promoting, sponsoring or advocating on behalf of the campaign.

Examples include:

- More teens engaged by the Teen Council
- Educators & School Counselors
- More parents who care about mental health
- Non-profit and community partner organizations

Early Majority

A more pragmatic group, these individuals provide the next wave of support once the Campaign has more exposure. They expand the Campaign's visibility to a larger, metro-wide audience. They observe the momentum and want to be a part of it.

Examples include:

- Local news media outlets
- Community businesses who provide space for awareness or host events
- Politicians or government employees
- Large corporate donors with social responsibility initiatives
- Some faith community leaders

Shared characteristics include:

- Believe in allowing teens to lead
- Believe teen stories are necessary to build empathy, connection and a better understanding of the issue
- Believe teen suicide is not just a school issue, but a community issue
- Believe the conversation should include teens, parents, educators and health practitioners
- Believe a broader community plan should be implemented, alongside mental health programs and services

Idea Adoption in Theory

Late Majority

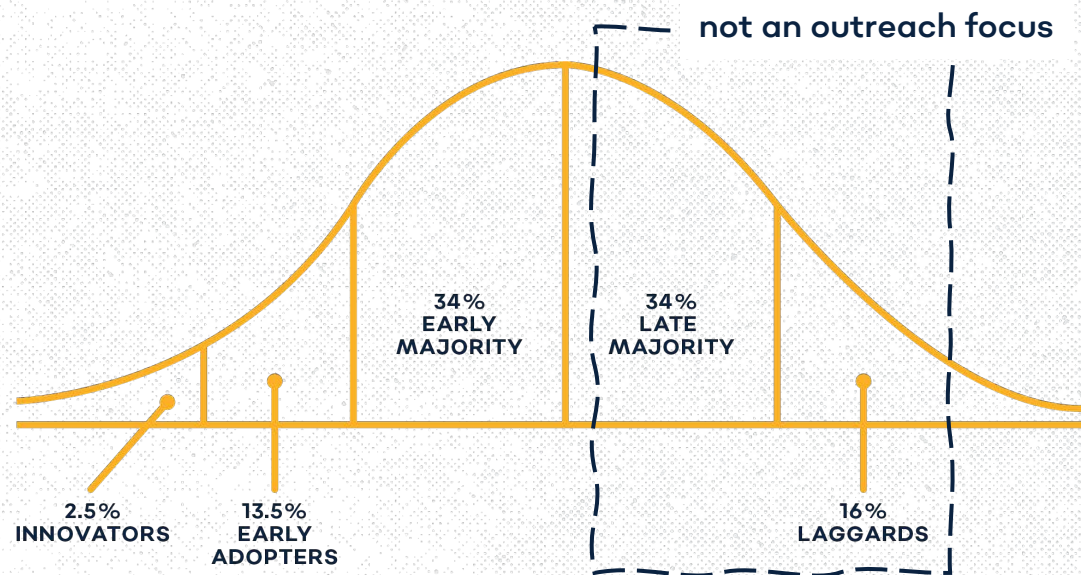
A more cautious group of traditional thinkers who will only adopt the Campaign after the average community member paves the way. They want to see demonstrable results and need reassurance of little risk in becoming a part of the movement.

Examples include:

- Some school administrators
- Some parent groups
- Community members who have never interacted with mental health topics

Laggards

A more cynical group that is resistant to change. This group only adopts new ideas if forced to do so.



Shared characteristics include:

- Believe that talking about suicide will put ideas in someone's head
- Believe "teens today" just aren't "tough enough" or are "too soft"
- Believe there is one singular reason causing the problem (i.e., social media)
- Only willing to adopt scientific research-based or evidence-based programs
- Uncomfortable with losing control and allowing teens to voice their viewpoints

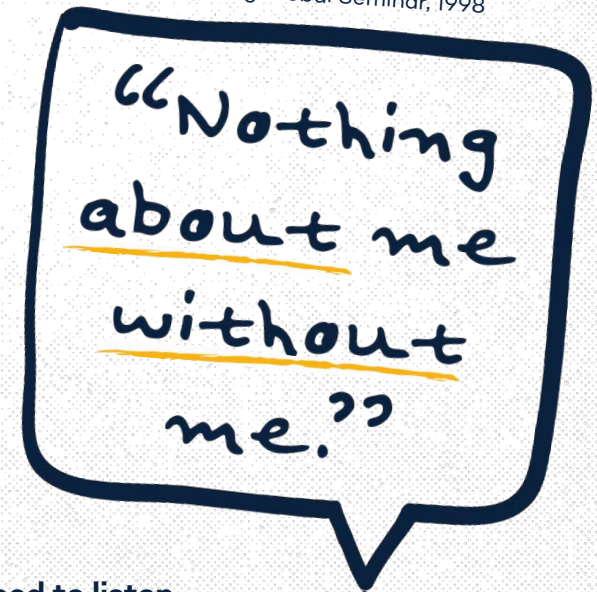
Early Adopters are Peer Influencers

When we consider the idea adoption curve, the Innovators and Early Adopters must be able to speak to their peers within their social system. As Everett Rogers states, “An important factor regarding the adoption rate of an innovation is its compatibility with the **values, beliefs, and past experiences** of individuals in the social system.”

In other words, the idea needs to be shared by peers for others to buy in. This means giving teens the ability to use their voice. Adults have historically been the decision-makers and primary voices on the topic – educators, health professionals or parents have determined what to say, how to say it and when (or if) the topic will be addressed. **Teens deserve a seat at the table – and we need to listen.**

With Zero Reasons Why, teen voice is brought to the forefront of the conversation. They want to help make decisions about what will positively influence their mental wellbeing. They want to support their peers and feel seen, heard and validated. They know better than anyone else what teens are facing and what kind of support will help them and their peers. We just need to ask.

In addition, peer-to-peer conversation and allyship is the way to generate actionable change and real conversation. This generation of youth is primed and eager to use their voices for causes they believe in. They have grown up in a movement-centered, connected world. They are digital natives. They understand how to spread a message and advocate for what they believe in. When we amplify their voice and allow the community to engage in the conversation, we see perspectives shift and stigma reduced.



The Stories We Tell Ourselves

To understand what kind of storytelling makes an impact, we must first understand who is receiving those stories and what perspective they bring into the conversation. A story happens in the mind of the receiver. Facts don't matter as much as they should. Your story, and how you interpret others' stories, is based on your unique prior experiences and knowledge. It is how you connect the dots and interpret the world.

During the initial fact-finding stage of the Campaign, we heard some repeated statements from four main peer groups that had to be considered. Some of these statements contribute to ongoing stigma or lack of action, while others are a call for support. Understanding where different audiences are coming from helps accelerate peer-to-peer conversations in each audience group.

TEENS

"I feel responsible for my friend."
"Why is everyone afraid to talk openly about it?"
"What's the most I can say without alerting my parents?"
"I hate when friends do badly on a test and say they're going to kill themselves."

EDUCATORS

"I feel helpless."
"I need more time to really listen to students."
"Learning should be second to good mental health."
"We need support outside of the school building."
"How can we help students with everything they carry with them into the classroom?"

PARENTS

"How did I miss it?"
"My child doesn't have an issue."
"They need to toughen up and figure it out."
"Don't put ideas in my child's head."
"I don't want anyone to know."
"I feel like I failed."

HEALTH PROFESSIONALS

"We want to help, but we need more access to students."
"Teens have a great deal of exposure and knowledge about suicide and are utilizing more lethal means."
"There is a lot of work going on, but it's in silos."
"While more resources are needed, there is also a lack of teens accessing the already available resources."

What Story Are We Telling?

Poor mental health thrives in darkness, when people fear sharing their struggles. It thrives in confusion and misunderstanding, perpetuating harmful myths that prevent help-seeking. Allyship, such as sharing stories, can remove stigma and encourage help. Sharing invisible stories brings conversations into the light, solidifying their importance and relevance.

Major mental health organizations promote this idea. The National Suicide Prevention Lifeline's [storytelling guide](#) [emphasizes](#) sharing diverse mental health experiences and coping mechanisms to help others find hope and meaning. Peer-to-peer sharing is even more validating, building empathy among those who may not have previously understood.

The media and entertainment often focus on the negative and shocking, especially in mental health and suicide prevention topics. Excluding specific suicide attempt methodologies is crucial. A partnership of prominent mental health and media organizations published a [Guide to Mental Health Storytelling](#), encouraging positive portrayals and best practices to avoid negative stigma. They aim to depict real help and more people addressing mental health.

Our stories acknowledge struggles, validate conditions, focus on help-seeking, and call for change. They provide hope, making help feel possible and offering a path forward.



Stories
are

powerful.

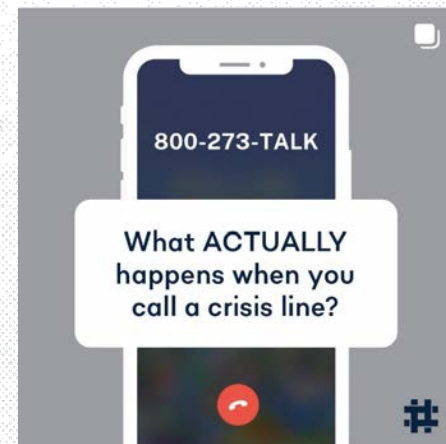
How Are We Telling It?

There are many ways to communicate today. Teens have never known a world without constant access to media, connectivity, and digital communication. While social media has challenges related to mental health, it also accelerates the movement towards positive mental health.

The digital delivery of positive mental health stories allows for wider reach – both in an increase in stories collected and shared. The ongoing, easily accessible conversation can spread and involve anyone, from teens and parents to educators and community members.

Studies show that teens and young adults [seek out health information on social media sites](#). People with stigmatized illnesses, like mental health conditions, often avoid seeking healthcare or education but use the internet for support. Delivering stories to these spaces meets them where they are and helps them find content that can make a difference.

[Benefits](#) of using social media for health communication include increased interactions, more available and tailored information, peer, social, and emotional support, and the potential to influence health policy. Zero Reasons Why provides similar benefits, including peer-to-peer interaction and support, tailored information for campaign-specific locations, and the ability to influence public perception and policy change.

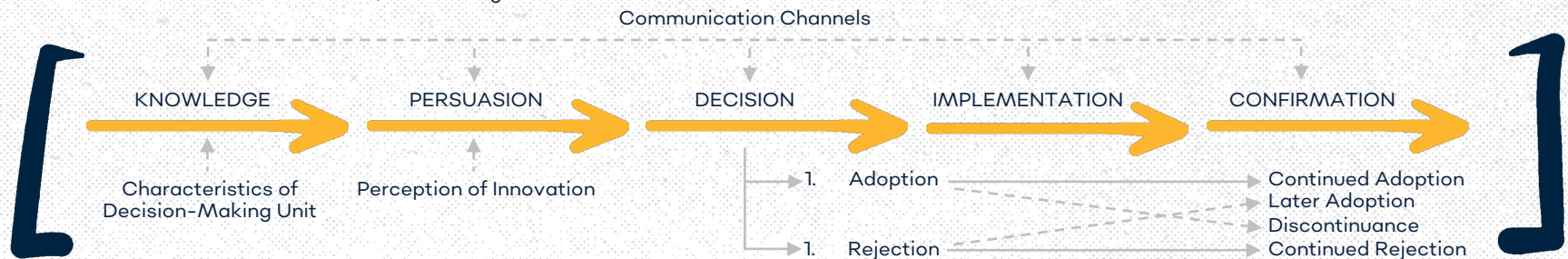


Packaging Influence: Story, Content & Delivery

In creating the story campaign approach, Overflow's goal is to accelerate the adoption of ideas surrounding teen mental health and suicide prevention. The approach involves a sociological view in designing what it takes to move large groups of people toward change. The process of change is defined by moving people through the five stages of the innovation-decision process as reflected in the graphic below.

Rather than focus on only the production of traditional public service announcements or similar media, Overflow designed an approach to comprehensively package influence in a story campaign, based on a teen-led strategic plan, with delivery methods to meet audiences where they are.

FIVE STAGE INNOVATION-DECISION MODEL
Diffusion of Innovations: Fifth Edition, Everett Rogers



STORY

Personal stories, ideas and perspectives from teens, parents, educators and health professionals. Intended to add narrative to help address the strategic plan's intentions, obstacles and desired outcomes.

CONTENT

Engaging and consistent content that furthers the teen-led strategic plan through videos, photojournalism, written stories, educational posts and calls to action in social media-friendly content tailored for all peer groups.

DELIVERY

Mediums of delivery to meet the audience where they are in visual, verbal or written formats. Delivery methods and content framing is tailored to various platforms that appeal to different audiences.

Packaging Influence: Branding a Movement

To create a common banner to unite the Community Mobilization and Storytelling efforts of the Campaign, Overflow branded the Campaign as Zero Reasons Why®.

The Campaign name was chosen to challenge the whole community, speaking directly to teens as well as other peer groups who are interested in teen suicide prevention. It needed to activate stories, opinions and ideas toward change.

WHAT DOES THE NAME MEAN?

It doesn't mean there are zero reasons why a teen might contemplate suicide. It doesn't mean their feelings aren't valid. There are many valid reasons a teen may struggle with their mental health – but there are zero reasons why we can't equip, empower, discuss, educate, remove stigma and come together to impact prevention, treatment and recovery.

The Campaign seeks to prevent factors that contribute to teen suicide, including the stigma surrounding mental health, the lack of community support and the need for more comprehensive, earlier mental health education.

The Campaign's name presents an opportunity for all of us to fill in the blank from our own perspective:

"There are Zero Reasons Why® _____."



*There are #ZeroReasonsWhy
a teen should suffer alone.*



Packaging Influence: Branding a Movement

WHAT DOES THE ICON REPRESENT?

Hidden inside the hashtag symbol are four structural components that represent a call to action:

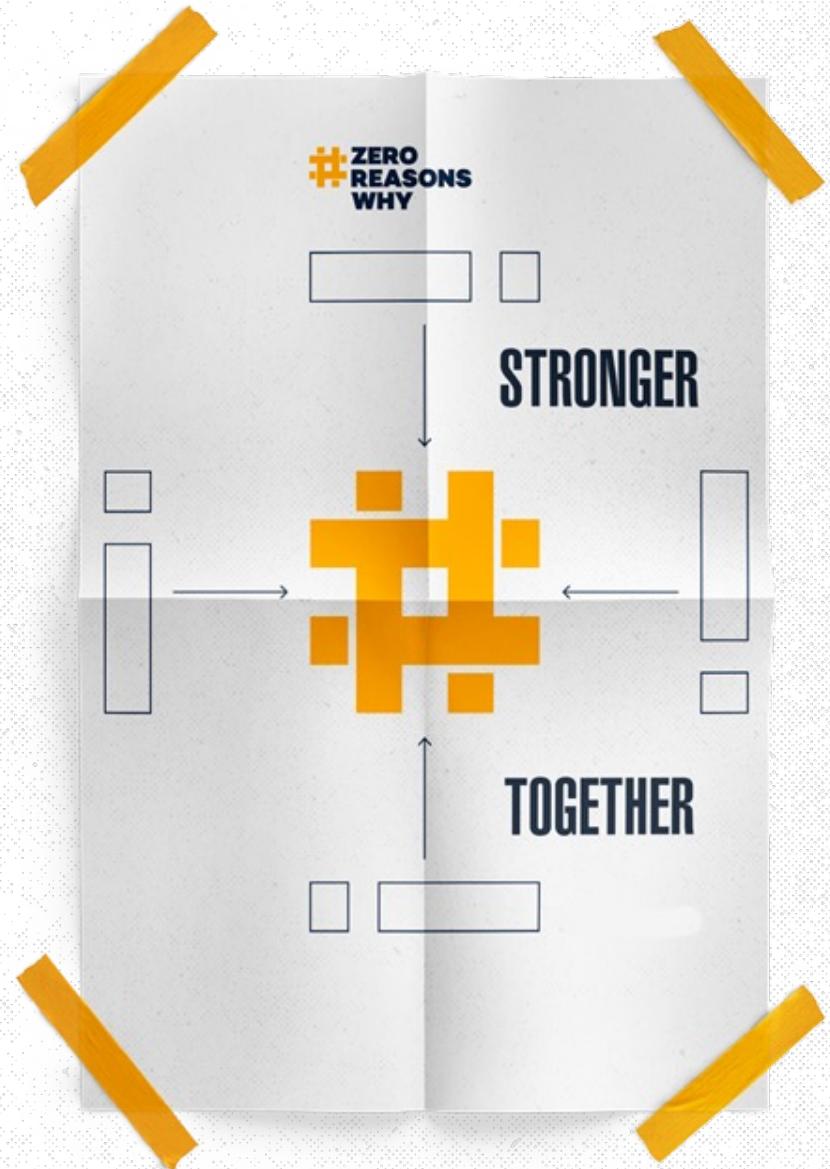
i = individuals uniting

! = immediacy of importance

The four components represent four key groups of people who should be united in teen suicide prevention: teens, parents, educators and health professionals. They unite to form the hashtag symbol, representing the urgent ongoing conversation and collective voice, while also being functional in the campaign's grassroots efforts as a social media movement.

The brand is meant to be youthful and inviting, both a visual identifier as well as an interactive call to action as various stakeholders fill in the blank for themselves.

There are #ZeroReasonsWhy
the community can't work together.





CAMPAIGN STRUCTURE

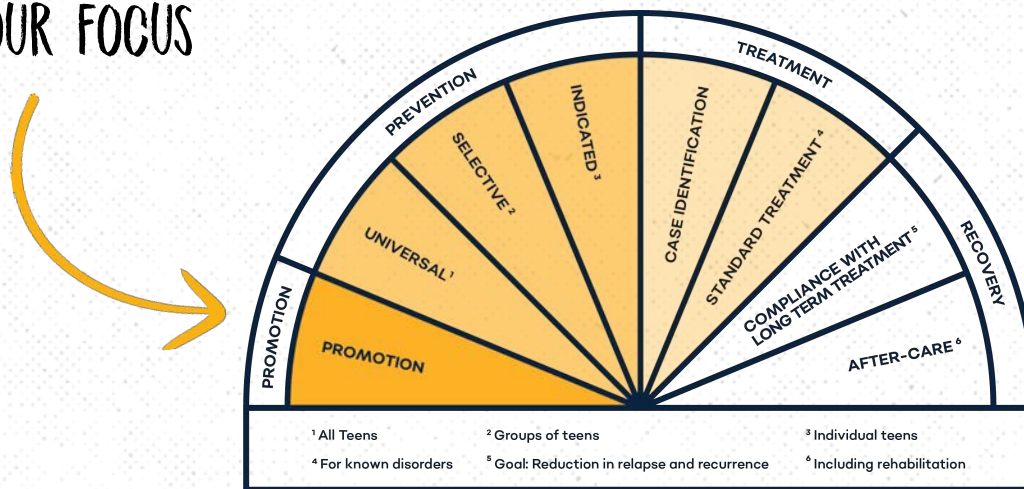
Moving the Mental Health Conversation Upstream

Within a community, mental health efforts span across the continuum of care. The mental health continuum of care includes all resources, programs, organizations and efforts to support mental health needs within a community.

Zero Reasons Why focuses where the continuum starts with widespread awareness, focused on moving upstream on the mental health continuum of care. While work is needed across the entire continuum of care, **Zero Reasons Why focuses on Promotion** in order to prevent teens from moving along the continuum and elevating the conversation before teens end up in a crisis. The three strategic pillars – Remove the Stigma, Build Community Support and Commit to Education – each have activities that lend to promoting positive mental health.

All Zero Reasons Why promotion efforts – whether the story campaign or community mobilization activities – are centered around helping further progress and bring about innovation along the entire continuum of care with community partners to prevent teen suicide. The framework provides a way for an entire community to act. This helps all stakeholders get involved no matter where they fall along the continuum.

OUR FOCUS



Three Campaign Pillars



REMOVE THE STIGMA

Eliminate the stigma associated with suicide and open the dialogue for real change.



BUILD COMMUNITY SUPPORT

Bring the community closer to spur unconditional support without judgement.



COMMIT TO EDUCATION

Improve/implement mental health (and suicide prevention) education consistently/earlier.

Overflow helped the first Teen Council define the three pillars of Zero Reasons Why during initial launch through teen-led conversations, community feedback, listening sessions, symposiums, convenings with key stakeholders, reverse hacks and dotmocracy exercises. An entire community weighed in and the Teen Council determined the three pillars that all Campaign activities would fall under. Some initiatives are taken on by community partners, while others are identified as teen-led action within the Campaign.

The three pillars continue to guide efforts and can translate from one community to the next. Communities can tailor specific initiatives or tactics for each pillar based on their primary barriers to teen mental wellness. Every community is different, but an overarching Community Plan and pillars gives a framework for new implementations to follow as they create their own specific strategies with teens in each community. The goal is to provide a launching-off point for teens and community members alike to come together under a common banner to make change.



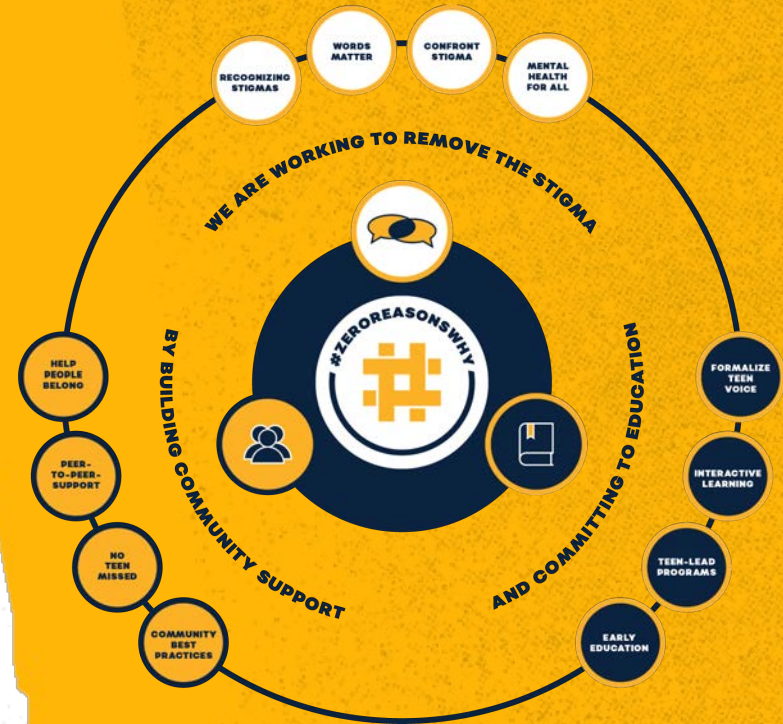
Community Plan

The three Campaign pillars provide a foundation on which to create a Community Plan and unify efforts.

One critical outcome of the Zero Reasons Why Campaign is to promote collaboration under a common movement to help break down silos between stakeholders in the community. Committing to these core strategic pillars allows the community to identify the most immediate impactful actions to collectively disrupt the rise in teen suicide. Aligning teens, educators, parents, and the mental health community in their efforts to promote mental health and prevent suicide can truly accelerate positive change.

The Community Plan can be accomplished through two primary types of Campaign activities:

1. Storytelling
2. Community Mobilization



Storytelling

The story campaign produces and distributes multimedia content with an underlying educational purpose to build empathy and de-stigmatize the conversation around teen mental health and suicide.

The Zero Reasons Why story campaign produces and distributes multimedia content to initiate peer-to-peer conversations among teens, parents, educators and health professionals.

Teen stories transcend beyond their peer group and are instigative and valuable across all audiences. Teen voice resonates with peers who might experience similar things or who want to support their friends. Teen voice also provides adults with an inside perspective and reference when deciding necessary action that affects teens or when first learning about the topic.

Original content produced by Zero Reasons Why is intended to further the strategic pillars of the Campaign. Stories are collected at in-person events and through online channels, allowing teens and others to contribute their voice to the conversation with few barriers to sharing. Using a variety of content types and delivery mechanisms, the story campaign highlights perspectives and furthers the conversation across all audiences and within each of the three strategic pillars.

While social media is a main communication tool used by the Campaign, delivery methods include visual (photography, videography, graphics, banners, bracelets, stickers and signs), written (articles, educational resources, text messages, handwritten notes) and verbal (interviews, audio podcasts, in-person events, interpersonal conversations, news coverage). Blending these delivery mechanisms ensures that the Campaign's message and the stories being shared reach a variety of community members.



“Adults have tended to be the voice of suicide prevention when it’s happening to teens. We can have a voice.”

POOJA JAIN
Teen Advocate

Community Mobilization

Community mobilization efforts focus on empowering community members to take action toward change.

Community mobilization furthers the Community Plan by facilitating or supporting programs, events and collaborative outreach efforts that create efficient ways for the community to come together to help remove the stigma surrounding mental health and increase awareness of resources.

Community mobilization begins with initial strategic planning efforts, followed by the tactical implementation, partnership development and grassroots engagement to provide increased impact and greater reach.

By starting at the local level within each community, we can assess the work already being done, increase collaboration, improve communication and reduce redundancies or blind spots. The Campaign gives everyone a common banner under which to work.

Community mobilization activities include meetings, both Campaign-hosted and those hosted by partner organizations, as well as strategic initiatives, such as school events or public rallies, and public relations efforts with media. Each community event or meeting presents new opportunities for sharing the work of the Campaign, finding new partners and increasing opportunity for additional collaboration, storytelling and resource-mapping.

“Participating in Zero Reasons Why gave me the opportunity to channel my passion for mental health into impactful work through public speaking, event planning, and community outreach.”

ROARIKER SWENSON

Teen Advocate



Organizing and Equipping Teens

PURPOSE

To strengthen and formalize teen voice, Zero Reasons Why builds Teen Councils. From developing initiatives and suggested tactics to speaking at public events and encouraging peers to join the conversation, Teen Councils actively engage in deployment strategies to prevent teen suicide.

They collaborate and share their perspective with adults to improve social and emotional wellbeing for teens across the county. They talk with their peers and encourage open dialogue in their schools.

Any teen interested in joining the cause can join a Teen Council if one exists in their community. Once they join, they are equipped with training and resources that help them engage in this topic in a safe, responsible, and effective way.

ROLES & EXPECTATIONS

As representatives of the greater teen population, Teen Council members accept many opportunities to voice their insights in the community. They present ideas and/or provide feedback to civic leaders, parent groups, education representatives, health professionals, community groups and faith leaders. The full support of the Campaign team, as well as their school district superintendents and principals, helps members manage obligations. Monthly Teen Council meetings allow for regular progress in the campaign and a connection point for teens who participate.



Collaborating with Health Professionals

PURPOSE

Health Professionals are mental health, behavioral health or physical healthcare providers – they may work inside or outside a school building, for a healthcare system, non-profit organization, private practice or governmental health organization. These are visible professionals and trusted adults who assess, guide, and support the mental health of teens in our schools and community every day. They work in collaboration with Educator advocates and Teen Council members.

ROLES & EXPECTATIONS

Health Professionals participate in the following activities to further the Campaign goals:

- Attend Teen Council meetings or other events to serve as a trained, professional voice in the mental health space
- Share their stories and perspectives about teen suicide prevention and mental wellness in the story campaign
- Collaborate with individuals responsible for analyzing, purchasing, designing and delivering mental health curriculum
- Promote the conversation in their professional and personal circles
- Serve as a resource for mental health care information



“There are zero reasons why we cannot come together to empower teens and make a difference in their lives.”

JOAN TAMMANY

Executive Director,
COMCARE of
Sedgwick County

Partnering with Educators

PURPOSE

Principals, vice principals, teachers, coaches, librarians, bus drivers, cafeteria workers and administrative personnel – many adults who work with teens in schools every day wish to advocate for teen suicide prevention and promote mental wellness. Educator advocates are visible and active at the school building level and have the unique opportunity to serve as trusted adults for teens as they advocate that positive mental health is foundational to learning.

ROLES & EXPECTATIONS

Educator Representatives perform key functions in the Campaign to help further the campaign goals:

- Encourage teens to join Teen Councils or clubs
- Help teens plan and implement in-school events
- Provide permission for Teen Council members when appropriate to participate in Campaign events and speaking opportunities

There are #ZeroReasonsWhy we can't improve mental health education.

"If we work together as a community, **we can change this narrative**. There should be zero reasons why we can't make a difference and change this conversation for the social wellbeing of our children."

FRANK HARWOOD

Former Superintendent,
De Soto School District



Educating and Engaging Parent Advocates

PURPOSE

Parent Advocates are parents who care. Many have made a commitment toward change because of their own personal experience or a child who has faced mental health challenges. Some have seen the struggle of navigating the process of getting professional help. Parents have even formed nonprofits as a result of these difficult experiences.

Because of the open framework of the Campaign, Parent Advocates can add their voice to the conversation by sharing their story or get their own organization involved in the effort.

Parent Advocates work to promote peer conversations and action. They drive awareness across the community and with other parents. They talk openly about mental health to set an example for other parents who may not know how to engage.

ROLES & EXPECTATIONS

Parent Advocates can choose to be as involved as they want. Each Parent Advocate can define the depth of their role as a Campaign representative in the community.

The most active Parent Advocates seek out opportunities to voice their insights and either volunteer or participate in large and small events. Parent Advocates can also choose to be casually involved by regularly wearing a Campaign t-shirt or wristband, sharing field journalism posts on social media, and talking to their peers about the Campaign.



There are #ZeroReasonsWhy adults should hesitate to talk about mental health.



COMMUNITY
ACTIVATION

Getting Started with Zero Reasons Why

With teens always at the center, adults such as educators, health professionals and parents can come together to pave the way, remove barriers and amplify teen impact. These groups are critical to the success of the Campaign in any community.

Overflow provides options to equip these community groups with the resources, training and materials to implement the Campaign themselves, with our help, or in the case of Full Implementations, our Zero Reasons Why Campaign Team manages all local activity on behalf of that community to accelerate deployment.

Join the
movement.

#ZeroReasonsWhy

There are three ways to launch Zero Reasons Why. The cost difference between each implementation type is tied to who is doing the work, at what scale and at what speed within a community.

DO IT YOURSELF

Club

A Club is a 100% volunteer-driven, hyper-localized (typically school-based) deployment.

Cost: Free to community

DO IT WITH OUR HELP

Community Jumpstart

Overflow's Campaign Team provides a workshop-based training and scheduled ongoing support to help a partnering community organization launch a local or regional Campaign, primarily powered by its own staff.

Cost: \$22,500+

WE DO IT FOR YOU

Full Implementation

Overflow's Campaign Team powers every element of a Campaign deployment on behalf of a partnering community organization, accelerating its launch and maximizing impact from the outset.

Cost: \$200,000+

Implementation Requirements & Features

	LOCAL CLUB (Free)	COMMUNITY JUMPSTART (Minimum \$22,500)	FULL IMPLEMENTATION (Minimum \$200,000)
OPERATIONS & LABOR REQUIREMENTS			
Campaign Management	--	Community Partner Organization (Mental Health Center, School District, Nonprofit or Government Agency)	Overflow (on behalf of community sponsor)
Management of Local Club or Teen Council	Local Volunteer	Community Partner Organization	Overflow
Management of In-School and/or Community Events	Local Volunteer	Community Partner Organization	Overflow
CAMPAIGN FEATURES			
Zero Reasons Why Digital Portal (see following page for details)	X	X	X
SWAG	Ordering Instructions	Ordering Instructions	Ordering & Inventory Management
Onboarding Training Tools	Portal Resource	Jumpstart How-to Guide	Planning & Facilitation
Community Jumpstart Workshop	--	Overflow Facilitated	--
Annual Teen Orientation	--	Jumpstart How-to Guide Or optional add-on	Planning & Facilitation
Total Consulting	--	100 hours	--
Storytelling*	Portal Resource	Portal Resource	Field Journalism
In-School Events	Portal Resource	Jumpstart How-to Guide	Planning & Facilitation
Community Events	Portal Resource	Jumpstart How-to Guide	Planning & Facilitation
Social Media	Portal Resource	Portal Resource	Channel Management, Outreach & Reporting
Custom Content Creation	--	--	X
Custom Video Production	--	--	X

* Students are welcome to submit stories through our VideoAsk platform for inclusion on our national channels.

Zero Reasons Why Digital Portal

The Zero Reasons Why Digital Portal** will support every implementation type. The resources, templates and tools provided are meant to give a unified Campaign experience to anyone deploying the campaign. A local Chapter can utilize any number of the resources provided, such as templates or pre-packaged content for a DIY approach. A community organization deploying the Jumpstart model can use platform content, along with consulting from Overflow, to further engage their community. In a Full Implementation, Overflow deploys all resources on behalf of a local community, in addition to creating custom options.

DIGITAL PORTAL CONTENTS	
General Resources	Teen Outreach Resources
ZRW Branding & Download Licenses*	Annual Teen Engagement Plan* (monthly topics, meeting agendas and more)
Implementation Training Videos*	Teen Orientation & Training Guide*
Collateral Library Downloads (release forms, print materials and more)	SWAG Design Templates & Ordering Guide*
Campaign Messaging Guide*	Mental Health Video Library
Community Event Planning Templates* (convenings, rallies, pop-ups, advocacy days and more)	In-School Activity Templates* (concepts, instructions, publicity guides, social media templates, supply lists and more)
Local Partnership & Fundraising Guides*	Poster & Flyer Downloads
Storytelling & Social Media Resources	Educational Resources
Social Media Content Templates & Influencer Kit	Back-to-School Toolkits (Teens, Parents, Educators*)
Social Media Management Guidelines* & Storytelling Guidelines*	Crisis Series Videos & Discussion Guides* (Teens, Parents, Educators*)

*Final content to be created or repackaged from existing resources

**Digital Portal to be created

Annual Cycle

Overflow's Zero Reasons Why Campaign Team created an annual cycle to equip communities with the training, resources and opportunities to advocate for change. Regardless of implementation type, the annual cycle unfolds throughout an academic school year.

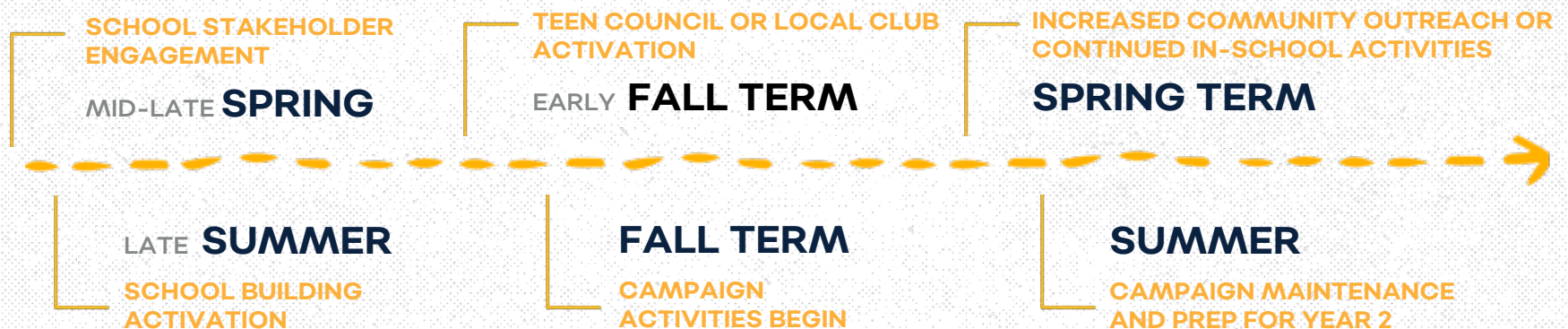
At the beginning of each year, resources are provided to help the Campaign gain momentum. As the year progresses, Teen Council or school-based Chapter meetings provide opportunities for teens to identify tactics for changes they'd like to accomplish. They collaborate on how to bring about change in their schools and communities and to put those tactics into action throughout the remainder of the year.

Campaign activities, such as the examples below, involve teens throughout their high school tenure, with new content and activities to maintain interest and provide opportunities to incorporate new research, and approaches.

- Summer Orientation & Training
- Monthly Teen Council Meetings
- Campaign Subcommittees
- Themed In-School Events

- Community Convenings
- Political Advocacy Days
- Storytelling Opportunities
- Social Media Activism

- Media Engagements
- Public Speaking Opportunities
- Community Partnerships



Sample Digital Portal Resources

BACK TO SCHOOL RESOURCES



Students

Download



Parents/Caregivers

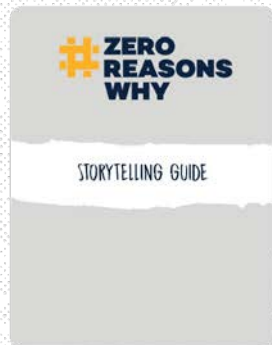
Download



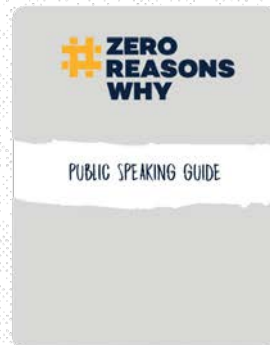
Educators

Download

INFORMATION & TRAINING



Download



Download



Download

AWARENESS VIDEOS



Suicide Warning Signs



Teen Activism



Many Reasons, Zero Reasons



Three Pillars Explained

PARENT RESOURCES



A Conversation with Your Teen



Anxiety and Overwhelm



Worried About a Friend



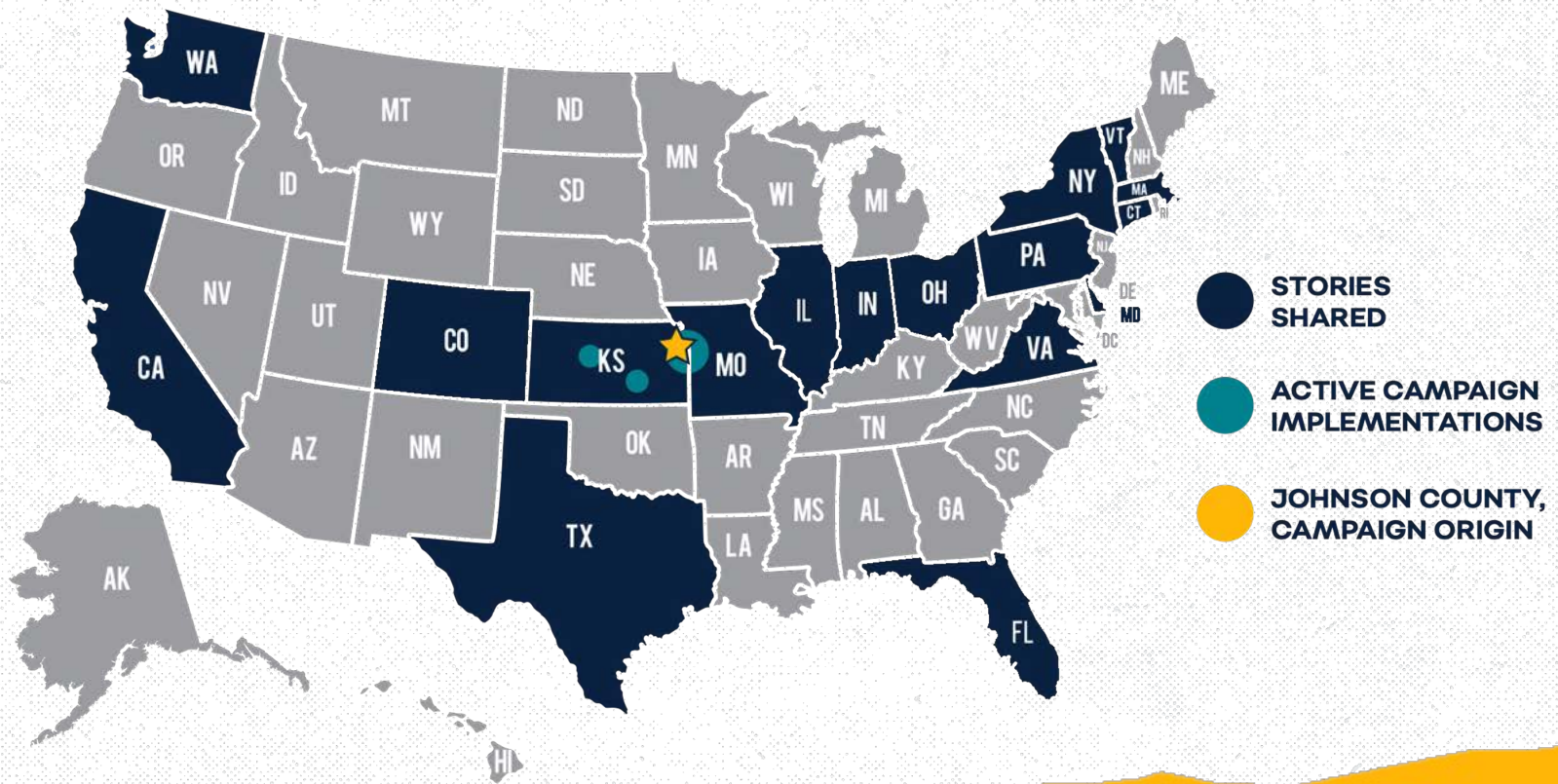
To All The Parents



REACH & IMPACT

Regional Deployment with National Reach

Between its beginning in 2018 and 2022, Zero Reasons Why has launched active campaigns in communities throughout Kansas and Missouri. In addition, stigma-removing stories have been collected and shared from 11 states through the storytelling platform on ZeroReasonsWhy.org or through interest on social media.



Reach Snapshot

#MentalHealthMatters

50+
school districts
activated

550+
stories shared

38K
social media
followers

25M
social media
impressions

633K
social media
engagements

...and counting!

Social media metrics include totals across all channels (Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, Twitter and TikTok) and all current chapters (Zero Reasons Why National, Johnson County, Kan., Sedgwick County, Kan., and Central Kansas) as of July 2025.

#ZeroReasonsWhy

Impact Snapshot

Reach is an important component of measuring success, but what matters most is that the teens and community members who have encountered Zero Reasons Why in a community where it is active believe that it makes a difference.

When **community members** were polled during a Mental Health Community Convening:

81%

believe it has removed
stigma of mental health
and suicide

96%

believe it has elevated
discussion and made
teens feel supported

When **teens** were polled during a summer orientation and training event in 2022:

75%

believe since ZRW launched
in 2018, students are more
comfortable asking for help

87%

believe ZRW has helped
students' willingness to
participate in mental
wellness programs

84%

believe ZRW has been
instrumental in starting to
remove stigma of mental
health and suicide

What Others are Saying

“Zero Reasons Why has provided our student leaders with the necessary tools to promote healthy lifestyles for their peers. This group along with other mental health initiatives has helped to end the stigma of talking about mental health and helping to get the word out on resources for students. Blue Valley Schools is very happy to have Zero Reasons Why as an option for our students!”

Tonya Merrigan, PhD.,
Former Superintendent
Blue Valley Schools

“You cannot tell me – no one will ever convince me – that Zero Reasons Why hasn't saved some lives.”

Kyle Kessler, Executive Director
Association of Community Mental Health
Centers of Kansas, Inc.

“In the midst of a pandemic, our community saw a 33% reduction in teen suicide from 2019 to 2020. Their work makes a difference.

These teens and this movement will leave a legacy in our community and beyond that has a lasting positive impact resulting in many lives saved.”

Tim DeWeese, Executive Director
Johnson County Mental Health

“What their work leading up to this point has done is, it's de-stigmatized it. It's allowed people to know it's ok to not be ok. They're reaching out for help, but they're maybe not getting to that point of attempting or completing suicide.”

Elizabeth Holzschuh, Epidemiology Director
Johnson County Department
of Health & Environment

Campaign Accomplishments

KEY PARTNERSHIPS & SPONSORSHIPS

Cumulatively, the Zero Reasons Why Campaign has received more than \$2.2M in funding to develop and deploy the campaign across Kansas and Missouri.

DEVELOPMENT & EXPANSION OF ZRW CLUB MODEL

Launched ZRW Clubs in 2023 as a turn-key way for teens to bring mental health awareness and resources directly to their schools. Currently in the process of expansion through grant funding from the Kansas Department for Aging and Disability Services.

SXSW EDU FEATURED PRESENTATION

Invited to present at SXSW EDU 2022 on the topic of “Storytelling as a Suicide Prevention Tool”

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF COUNTIES AWARD

Awarded 2022 NACO Excellence Award for innovating county-sponsored behavioral health initiatives

COMMUNITY SERVICE AWARD

Awarded 2019 Excellence in Community Service Award by United Community Services of Johnson County

COMMUNITY PLAYBOOK

Released a 118-page Narrative Playbook (2018) that educates readers about the Campaign and offers tactical steps to bring the movement to life in their area





EXPANSION PLAN & TIMELINE

Spreading the Impact: National Club Network

We have many reasons to be encouraged by the effectiveness of Zero Reasons Why through our current Community Jumpstarts and Full Implementations. We have no plans on slowing down; however, this kind of grassroots work is time consuming, labor intensive, geographically restrictive and costly. Since the Campaign's launch, we have received messages from school districts, mental health centers and nonprofit organizations across the United States who want to be a part of the Campaign. They have a heart for teen mental health, but they need tools to deploy.

We want to reach teens across the U.S. through our free, school-based club model.

The Zero Reasons Why Club Model is a digital portal that equips student leaders and educators with free, ready-to-use content, resources and tools to start and sustain in-school mental health clubs. Overflow is seeking funding to strengthen and scale the club model to impact more students, reach more communities and drive ongoing mental health advocacy and awareness.

Funding will support:

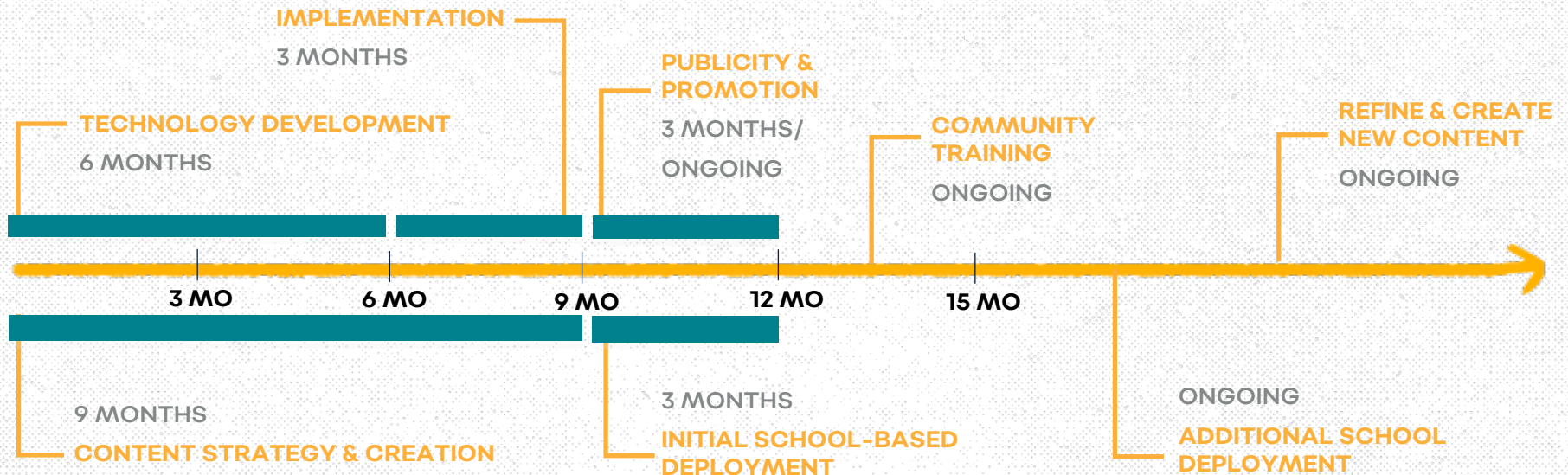
- **Ongoing expansion of the Club Portal**, adding more robust and relevant content and materials over time.
- **Production of additional video content** tailored for both teens and school club sponsors.
- **Creation of swag starter kits** to help new clubs launch and build visibility within schools.
- **Staff support** to manage sponsor onboarding, demos, and inquiries.
- **Editorial support** to review and publish student stories as campaign engagement grows.
- **Spanish translation** of materials to reach and support a broader audience.
- **Advertising, PR, and outreach efforts** — including speaking engagements and conference participation — to raise awareness and drive national adoption of the Club Model.

As the Campaign proliferates and creates national reach through a Club Model Network, we expect more regional organizations will launch Community Jumpstarts and Full Implementations to further the impact of Clubs that have launched within their catchment areas.

Club Network Creation Timeline

Once fundraising objectives are met, we plan to launch the creation of the technology platform and content included within as outlined below, before moving into publicity and promotion during an initial school-based deployment period. Once the initial launch has occurred, training for new communities, additional school sign-ups and refining or creation of new content will occur as needed.

Our goal is to start this timeline during the first quarter of 2024 or sooner.



Club Model Growth

With the barrier of cost removed and interest in teen mental health resources at an all-time high, Zero Reasons Why is positioned for steady and scalable growth. Additional development for the Club Model is currently underway, with four years of content scheduled for completion and available for use by mid-2026. Our next priority is to deepen engagement and adoption across Kansas by late 2026 and into 2027, while preparing for broader national rollout as funding allows.

CLUB EXPANSION GOALS

To guide this growth, we envision two primary phases:

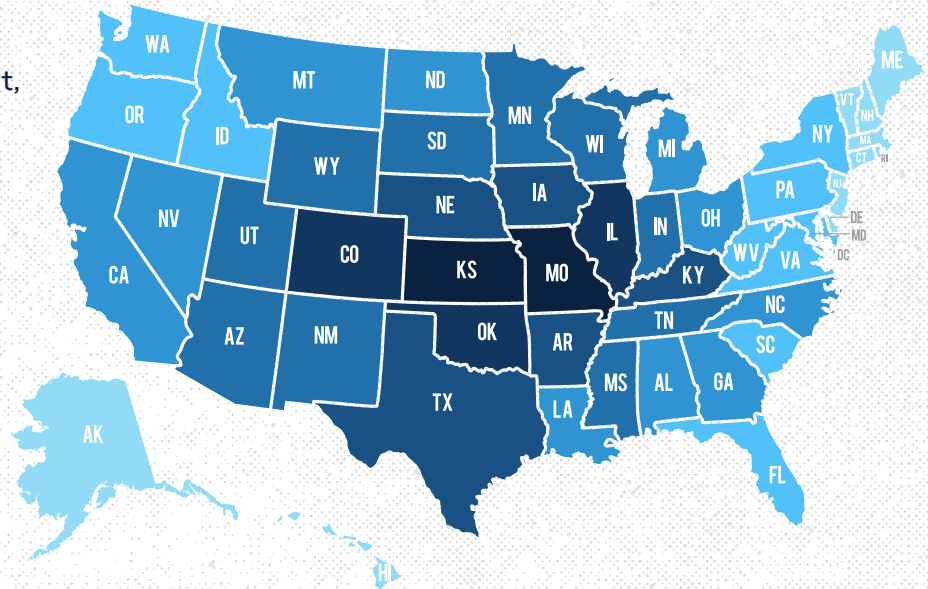
Phase 1 – Initial Content Development (In Progress):

Finalize and launch four years of turnkey club content, refine the digital platform, expand club participation and educator engagement throughout Kansas.

Phase 2 – Nationwide Expansion & Content

Enhancements: Scale outreach and implementation efforts nationally, produce additional content and video assets, integrate new features and translations to support diverse audiences.

Our long-term goal is to establish a Zero Reasons Why presence in all 50 states within five years of launching Phase 2, ensuring that every school has access to free, ready-to-use tools that empower teens and educators to lead mental health advocacy in their own communities.



Contact Information

LET'S CONNECT

We are grateful to partner with mental health professionals, educators, community partners and sponsors to further the movement—sharing stories and spreading ideas that encourage help-seeking behaviors in young people. This is our role to play to help combat the teen mental health epidemic.

To learn how your **sponsorship can support the campaign's expansion**, or to **bring Zero Reasons Why to your community**, reach out to us at zrw@overflowco.com



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SOCIAL MEDIA

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 [/zeroreasonswhy](https://www.facebook.com/zeroreasonswhy)

 [Zero Reasons Why](https://www.linkedin.com/company/Zero Reasons Why)



Acknowledgements

THANK YOU

Thank you to the following organizations and individuals who were early adopters and partners of the Zero Reasons Why efforts:

- Blue Valley School District
- Former Superintendent Todd White
- Gardner Edgerton School District
- Former Superintendent Pam Stranathan
- Olathe School District
- Former Superintendent John Allison
- Shawnee Mission School District
- Former Superintendent Mike Fulton
- Spring Hill School District
- Former Superintendent Wayne Burke
- USD 232
- Former Superintendent Frank Harwood
- Johnson County Mental Health
- Johnson County District Attorney
- Johnson County Department of Health & Environment
- KidsTLC
- Responsive Centers for Psychology and Learning
- Children's Mercy
- AdventHealth Shawnee Mission
- HCA Midwest
- University of Kansas Health System Marillac Campus
- Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Kansas City
- BV Well
- The Tom Karlin Foundation
- Speak Up
- Keep The Spark Alive
- AT&T #BelieveKC
- You Matter Festival
- Representative Sharice Davids
- Oak Park Mall
- The Bean Coffee Co.
- InterUrban ArtHouse
- Youth Volunteer Corps
- Kansas City A Cappella
- Ocean & Sea
- Church of the Resurrection
- College Church of the Nazarene
- Sondra Wallace & Jewish Family Services

It takes
all of us.



Zero Reasons Why®

A teen-led community mobilization and
story campaign to prevent teen suicide.

ZeroReasonsWhy.org



@zeroreasonswhy_



/zeroreasonswhy



Zero Reasons Why