



SOS program a light in the darkness for Crawford County Youth
Signs of Suicide, a partnership between local schools and Community Counseling Services
Information submitted by Dr. Brad Fox, Community Counseling Services

Many of us who have lived and worked in Crawford County for more than a few months are aware that our county has its challenges and struggles. Not even small-town America is immune to the difficulties that communities around the nation deal with. However, in the midst of the challenges there are also many good things happening, and it is good to reflect on the rays of hope that do shine in our community.

Among the many positive things going on across Crawford County, one in particular highlights a great partnership between families, schools, and local mental health services and has helped to significantly reduce the number of completed suicides among Crawford County youth. The S.O.S. Program (Signs of Suicide) is part of a nationwide effort to decrease the risk of suicide among America's school-age youth. In partnership with local schools, trained clinical staff from Community Counseling Services, Inc. (CCS) provide education to students in middle and high school grades about the signs of depression and suicide risk, as well as a clear method students can use to respond when they are concerned that a friend may be struggling. The acronym A.C.T. encourages students to *Acknowledge* their friend is struggling, express *Care*, and then *Tell* a trusted adult - so that the friend can be further assessed/monitored for safety. The SOS Team then returns to the school another day to provide a brief depression/suicide screening questionnaire to students who have obtained written consent from their parent/guardian and want to participate.

Since beginning with one school system in 2010, the SOS Program offered by CCS has been invited to come to five area middle and high schools. Most often, once a school experiences the SOS Program, the team is invited back on at least an annual basis to educate and screen additional grades.

CCS is grateful for the partnership and strong leadership in the local school systems as well as the Crawford County Suicide Coalition, the Ohio Suicide Prevention Foundation, and the Crawford-Marion ADAMH Board for their funding and support that allow our team to provide the SOS Program. Together with the youth and families, we are all coming together to bring awareness of depression and suicide risk as well as the availability and effectiveness of treatment and support.

To learn more, contact Cindy Wallis, Community Counseling, ccsi_cwallis@rohio.com