

SPOTLIGHT: Text-A-Tip



Background

After a high school in the Northern suburbs of Illinois experienced three suicides in the span of eighty-seven days, Linking Efforts Against Drugs (LEAD) conducted focus groups to determine which community supports were missing. The youth in the community reported that they needed a different method to receive support. They didn't feel comfortable calling a helpline and verbalizing their problems; they indicated they would prefer to text about it. With this information, LEAD created the technology for Text-A-Tip. Launched in January of 2014, Text-A-Tip is a 24/7 anonymous texting system for youth in need of immediate mental health assistance.

How It Works

Each participating community receives its own customized code. When students send a text to the given number, messages are sent using SMS number masking technology that keeps communication and any identifying information completely anonymous. Within minutes, texts are answered by teams of licensed mental health counselors who provide emotional support, follow ups, and referrals to community partners.

Working with school districts and other community partners, Text-A-Tip is marketed heavily within schools. While the line is intended for youth, anyone can use the service. Text-A-Tip is utilized for a variety of topics, including:

- Depression/Anxiety - 27%
- Relationship Conflict - 17%
- Substance Misuse - 12%
- Self Harm/Suicide - 10%
- Pressure - 10%
- Bullying - 8%

"We created this program, simply, to save lives. Over the past four years in working with communities across the country, we have been able to partner with key stakeholders in getting people the help they need in real time for a variety of issues. We couldn't do this without all the partnerships we have created, and more people are alive today as a result."

- Andy Duran, Executive Director, LEAD

- Other - 19%

How It Is Innovative

Text-A-Tip began in one small community in Illinois and is now available nationwide. Text-A-Tip is the only anonymous text hotline in the country that operates 24/7 and is supported by licensed mental health clinicians. Texting is the most common method of teen communication; they send an average of 60 texts per day. This program gives youth an outlet to get help in a manner that makes them comfortable. Communities such as Lake County, Illinois (north of Chicago) have also integrated the program into an app.

Demonstrating Success

Text-A-Tip receives over 1,000 texts a day and serves over 10 million people nationwide. Ninety-three percent of texts are answered by live clinicians in as little as three minutes.

About the Organization

LEAD is a drug prevention organization based in Lake Forest, Illinois. In addition to the Text-A-Tip program, LEAD representatives create curriculum and conduct

Spotlight Series: *A series to highlight innovative programs across the country that contribute to a comprehensive strategy to address addiction.*

presentations for students all over the county. In the 2017-2018 school year, they conducted presentations in more than 100 schools to more than 10,000 students and adults nationwide. LEAD also operates the Speak UP! Prevention Coalition, a community anti-drug coalition located in Lake Forest, Lake Bluff and Knollwood, Illinois.

The Future of the Program

The Text-A-Tip program has expanded rapidly since inception, and is continually improving its technology. The program has the technology to expand to more communities in the future, including into adult populations.

Resources

Text-A-Tip Website:<http://www.textatipline.com/>

LEAD Website: <http://www.leadingefforts.org/>

<http://www.pewinternet.org/2012/03/19/teens-smartphones-texting/>