

TXT4LIFE Evaluation Summary

TXT4LIFE is a text-message based suicide prevention program designed for youth and young adults. It operates much like a traditional suicide hotline, except that the crisis counseling is provided via text message rather than by telephone. The TXT4LIFE service was developed in Carlton County, and is currently operated throughout the state by Crisis Connections /Canvas Health. TXT4LIFE services are designed to provide users with support and mental health services in an easily accessible and supportive way. The following summary offers a brief overview of supporting literature, outreach evaluation, service use data, and feedback from follow-up surveys with TXT4LIFE service users.

Suicide in Minnesota

Suicide is the second leading cause of death for youth ages 10 through 24 in Minnesota (Minnesota Department of Health, 2011). Nationally, suicide ranks as the third leading cause of death for youth. Suicide rates are higher in greater Minnesota (14.3 per 100,000 people) than in the 7-county Metro Area (10.9 per 100,000 people). It is too early to determine whether implementation of the TXT4LIFE program correlates with a reduction in suicide rates in Minnesota.

However, the program will closely monitor this data as it becomes available.

Supporting literature

Providing crisis counseling via text message is a new and innovative practice. As such, little literature currently exists on the effectiveness of this model. However, an increasing body of research supports the need to adapt traditional models of youth programming to best accommodate strong preferences for text message communication.

Research suggests that youth overwhelmingly prefer to communicate via text message. TXT4LIFE offers youth the opportunity to reach out for help in a way that is comfortable and familiar to them.

- According to the Pew Research Center (2011) 63 percent of teens reported that they exchange text messages every day with people in their lives. This far surpasses how often they communicate daily in other ways, including phone calls (39%), in-person communication outside of school (35%), messaging on social networks (29%), instant messaging (22%), and emailing (6%).

- Evidence suggests that young people may be more honest and willing to reveal sensitive information through text messaging than through other forms of communication (Conrad, 2012; Schober et al., 2013).
- Texting may be a particularly useful communication tool for people who experience social anxiety or loneliness (Reid & Reid, 2004; Porath, 2011).

TXT4LIFE outreach

TXT4LIFE outreach helps youth understand how they can get help if they or someone they know is feeling suicidal. Outreach is a key component of the TXT4LIFE model. Regional Coordinators conduct outreach at schools and community events. Outreach presentations include brief education/training about suicide, information about TXT4LIFE, and resources. According to surveys conducted with 1,118 students who participated in outreach presentations, after the presentations:

- 89 percent reported they **knew more about how to get help** if someone they knew was feeling suicidal
- 87 percent reported that they **knew more about how to recognize** if someone might be feeling suicidal
- 84 percent reported **feeling more confident in identifying resources** if they or a friend was feeling suicidal
- 64 percent reported feeling more confident about **asking a friend directly about suicide**

Service use highlights

TXT4LIFE is serving thousands of vulnerable people every year, throughout Minnesota and beyond. In 2014, TXT4LIFE conducted 5,685 crisis text sessions. The program served users from 54 of Minnesota's 87 counties. In addition, the program served users from all 50 states, the Virgin Islands, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico. While outreach thus far has been limited to the planned regional rollout in Minnesota, the program serves texters regardless of location.

Sixty percent of TXT4LIFE users are women or girls, and 20 percent are men or boys. Thirteen percent of users identified as being White, nine percent as Black/African American, four percent as Asian, two percent as Hispanic/Latino, and one percent as American Indian/Alaska Native. It should be noted that race/ethnicity was unknown for three-quarters of service users (Table 1). TXT4LIFE serves users regardless of age, but most service users are between 14 and 17 years old.

DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS OF TXT4LIFE USERS

2014 Demographics	N	Percent
Gender		
Female	2,888	60%
Male	965	20%
Transgender	32	1%
Gender non-conforming	26	1%
Unknown/declined	911	19%
Race/ethnicity		
White	557	13%
Black/African American	278	9%
Asian	185	4%
Hispanic or Latino	72	2%
American Indian/Alaska Native	38	1%
Unknown/declined	3,210	74%

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Follow-up survey highlights

Follow-up surveys with TXT4LIFE users suggest that the program helps those who use it. Among 20 youth who completed follow-up surveys about their experience using TXT4LIFE:

- 93 percent felt that TXT4LIFE could help if they, or someone they knew, was upset or suicidal
- 84 percent reported that their TXT4LIFE counselor helped them with what they needed
- 82 percent reported that their counselor told them about additional ways they could get help
- **Three-quarters of survey respondents reported feeling better since using TXT4LIFE**
- Two-thirds reported that TXT4LIFE provided them with **additional resources or coping skills** that they felt would be helpful in the future

TXT4LIFE seems to be helping users connect to their natural support systems. Fifty-nine percent of survey respondents reported that they had talked with another adult (in addition to the TXT4LIFE counselor) about their thoughts or feelings of suicide since using TXT4LIFE.

Follow-up survey limitations

The anonymous and sensitive nature of TXT4LIFE services make conducting research with service users challenging. For example, users may change mobile phone numbers frequently. Given the relatively low number of follow-up surveys that have been completed thus far, results may not represent all TXT4LIFE users' experiences. However, initial results are encouraging, and further follow-up data can build on these results.

For more information

This summary presents highlights of the TXT4LIFE program evaluation. For more information about this summary, contact Darcie Thomsen at Wilder Research, 651-280-2700.

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