

Terra State Community College's Initiative to Promote Mental Health & Suicide Prevention Awareness Among Faculty & Staff



Terra State Community College, located in Sandusky County, Ohio, serves their community by providing accessible and affordable educational experiences. Although Terra State is a State Community College, the majority of their student population consists of College Credit Plus (CCP) students, who are simultaneously enrolled in both high school and college level courses. With this unique student population, Terra State finds it important to pay extra attention to statistics about youth in their community. Data from the 2019-2020 Sandusky County Community Health Needs Assessment revealed that 35% of Sandusky County youth responded as experiencing hopelessness or sadness nearly every day during the past two weeks, 15% responded that they had made a plan to attempt suicide in the previous 12 months, and 44% reported academic success as their greatest cause of stress, anxiety, and depression. These experiences not only caused youth to struggle with their day-to-day routines but caused difficulties in their academic success as well.

Seeing these statistics and knowing that all of their faculty and staff interact with students to some extent, Terra State took the initiative to train employees on mental health and suicide prevention awareness in order to ensure that each employee had the necessary knowledge and skills to promote social connectedness, identify students at risk, and intervene should a mental health crisis occur. This initiative would not only help their campus address the statistics previously mentioned but would benefit all students and employees on campus. Terra State began by providing QPR (Question, Persuade, Refer) Gatekeeper training for employees, which trains attendees to be able to question if someone is thinking of attempting suicide, persuade the person in crisis to seek professional help, and refer them to appropriate mental health resources. Additionally, the course covers common causes and warning signs of suicide. Terra State then partnered with their local National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) chapter to develop and disseminate a survey with the intention of asking campus employees what additional mental health and suicide prevention training opportunities they would like to receive. Utilizing the data from the survey, Terra State developed a training seminar to provide a day of learning for their employees and invited local community partners to attend and discuss their organization with attendees. Gretchen Hammond Clark, PhD, MSW, LSW, LCDCI, and CEO of Mighty Crow provided presentations on the impact of trauma, warning signs of compassion fatigue, and breaking the stigmas surrounding mental health and addiction. OPCSMH staff had the opportunity to attend this training seminar and found Dr. Hammond Clark's presentations very valuable and informative.

When speaking to Terra State employees in attendance, OPCSMH staff found they reported feeling more confident and comfortable in their ability to support the mental health of their students. Creating a culture of care and supporting the mental health of students takes effort from members all throughout a campus-community, not just the mental health professionals. Terra State has set an excellent example of how to achieve this, and we encourage all campuses to do the same!