

#ZeroReasonsWhy Taking National Stage at SXSW EDU

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KANSAS CITY, MISSOURI, UNITED STATES, March 8, 2022

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A teen-led mental health campaign that began in Johnson County, Kan., is featured on a national stage at SXSW EDU®.

#ZeroReasonsWhy is the case study in “Suicide Prevention Through Storytelling,” a session that will illustrate how sharing stories and perspectives of teens helps remove the stigma of mental health and increases help-seeking behavior for those who are struggling – which, in turn, reduces teen suicide rates.

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“I have the privilege to share what is possible when teens are equipped to become vocal advocates, allies and activists for their own mental health,” said Jeff Short, #ZeroReasonsWhy Campaign Director and Principal at Overflow, the Kansas City-based agency that supports the campaign’s efforts.

The session on March 7th, helped leaders from other communities learn more about the platform that was first created in Johnson County, as teens, educators, mental health professionals, parents and community leaders came together to respond to the county’s dramatic rise in teen suicide in 2018. The movement has grown year-over-year, now accessible to over 50 public school districts, along with private schools, in Kansas and Missouri.

#ZeroReasonsWhy plans to implement its framework nationally, so other communities can

experience the life-saving outcomes of letting teens lead, starting with the launch of a national website and social media presence that allows users to engage with the campaign without the constraints of geography.

"Never before, in my 30 years in community mental health, have I seen a more fresh, positive and upstream effort to increase protection and decrease risk for our local youth," said Tim DeWeese, Director of Johnson County Mental Health Center. "In the midst of a global pandemic, our community saw a 33% reduction in teen suicide from 2019-2020. Their work makes a difference."

According to Dr. Vivek H. Murthy, United States Surgeon General, everyone has a role to play in combating the mental health pandemic. "Without individual engagement, no amount of energy or resources can overcome the biggest barrier to mental health care: the stigma associated with seeking help. Only when we do will we be able to protect, strengthen, and support the health and safety of all children, adolescents and young adults—and ensure everyone has a platform to thrive." ([Protecting Youth Mental Health: The U.S. Surgeon General's Advisory: 2021](#))

The SXSW EDU Conference brings together educators, practitioners, entrepreneurs and visionaries to share groundbreaking stories, tackle complex issues and build reimaged paths forward. Other presenters at the 2022 conference include Miguel Cardona, U.S. Secretary of Education, Chelsea Clinton, Vice-Chair of the Clinton Foundation, and Darryl "DMC" McDaniels, hip-hop artist and mental health advocate.

"I couldn't be more excited to share this story of community transformation and highlight the bravery, creativity and innovation of the hundreds of teens and partners who have joined the movement so far," said Short.

For more information on the session, visit <https://schedule.sxswedu.com/2022/events/PP112436>

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About #ZeroReasonsWhy

Suicide is the second leading cause of death for youth between the ages of 10 and 24. Suicide rates among teens and young adults have reached their highest point in nearly two decades. For every one suicide, an estimated 25 people attempt suicide.

#ZeroReasonsWhy is a ted-led storytelling and community mobilization campaign to remove the stigma of mental health and prevent teen suicide. It began in 2018, after a dramatic rise in teen suicide in Johnson County, Kan. A community-wide mental health convening, led by the six superintendents in the county, formed to try and prevent future loss. It was clear that teen voice had been missing from the conversation, so #ZeroReasonsWhy was created to elevate teen voice, listen to their experiences and give them a platform to engage in advocacy and activism work to remove the stigma of mental health, increase help-seeking behaviors and reduce teen suicide. In 2019-2020, there was a 33% reduction in teen suicide in Johnson County. #ZeroReasonsWhy has expanded to other communities in the region.

The name #ZeroReasonsWhy does not suggest there are zero reasons why a teen might struggle with mental health. Instead, there are zero reasons why we can't equip, empower, discuss, educate and come together as a community to advocate for teen mental wellness.

For more information: www.zeroreasonswhy.org Robb@pspublicrelations.com 913.908.0028

About SXSW EDU

The SXSW EDU® Conference & Festival is a reflection of the world's most critical social issues as seen through the lens of education. This year's event will bring together the learner, the practitioner, the entrepreneur, and the visionary to share their groundbreaking stories, tackle complex issues, and build reimagined paths forward. As a community of diverse people who are united around a like-minded vision for the future, SXSW EDU serves as a place for attendees to renew their purpose in practice from both a personal and professional perspective. It is a place to reinforce the core principles of teaching and learning as well as an opportunity to express your creativity and passion for education. SXSW EDU is a component of the South by Southwest® family of conferences and festivals that has grown from 800 to over 8,000 registrants in the last decade. Join the passionate and innovative community at SXSW EDU, March 7-10, 2022.

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