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Partnering to Prevent Bullying: The Bullying Prevention Consultation Line



Community

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October 27 2017

In [an earlier article](#), we talked about the nationwide public health problem of bullying, and what organizations like the [Highmark Foundation](#), [Center for Safe Schools](#) (CSS), [Center for Health Promotion and Disease Prevention](#) (CHPDP) and [Pennsylvania Department of Education](#) are doing to address the problem. Now let's look in more detail at one valuable tool that has come out of the partnership between those groups:

Pennsylvania's 24-Hour Bullying Prevention Consultation Line.

Pennsylvania's 24-Hour Bullying Prevention Consultation Line



In Pennsylvania, students, parents, and schools don't have to face bullying alone. Nor do they have to spend hours trying to figure out where to turn. Thanks to the Highmark Foundation, CSS,

CHPDP and Pennsylvania Department of Education everyone can now call one centralized toll-free number, 24 hours a day, seven days a week, to get support and be directed to other resources: **1-866-716-0424**.

Pennsylvania's Bullying Prevention Consultation Line was initially created and tested with select groups in 2014 — a **full-scale public launch was announced in February 2016**.

The main goal: Give families easy access to the help they need by linking them directly to professionals trained to handle their situation. That includes people like Karla Joyce-Good, a licensed social worker with CHPDP who has been a key partner for the Highmark Foundation since 2007. She says that one benefit of the Consultation Line is that it's strengthened connections between Pennsylvania's bullying prevention resources, giving everyone a trusted, centralized resource. "There's a lot of misinformation out there that is not evidence-based, and which can actually be harmful in a bullying situation," she explains. "There was never one centralized place to go before, and people just kind of picked what they wanted, saying, 'I'll try this. I'll try that.'" Having a central, trusted resource helps parents avoid the burnout that can come from doing endless Internet searches and trying to sort through an overwhelming amount of advice — some of which may seem contradictory. The Bullying Prevention Consultation Line also provides a resource that can keep the children involved anonymous. Students sometimes fear that speaking out will lead to more bullying because they've "snitched." Similarly, parents are often concerned that bringing attention to bullying could cause even more trouble for their child.

A Collaboration Success Story

Joyce-Good notes that while there had been multiple networks of support staff and counselors throughout the state working on the problem of bullying, there was a clear need to bring everyone together.

"The CHPDP looked around the country to see if there were other hotlines, and they found a couple at the time, but they wanted something different from

what was out there,” says Highmark Foundation president Yvonne Cook. “The Highmark Foundation has been in the state for over ten years and we’ve had a range of activities to shore up bullying prevention efforts, but this Consultation Line is a huge step forward.”

The Bullying Prevention Consultation Line was initially rolled out to a limited number of schools to help gauge the demand and determine how many staff members would be needed once it was operating statewide. Once they felt the system was ready, they announced it publicly in a February 2016 [press release](#) and press conference. There was an immediate spike in calls, and that momentum has continued.



“The publicity around the Bullying Prevention Consultation Line certainly worked,” says Highmark Foundation program analyst Jane Brooks. “There was an increase of calls as a direct result of that press conference and getting the word out about the Consultation Line, and that’s what we continued to build on through last year and into this year — making sure that more and more folks are aware of the number and can call in to get the help that they need.”

[A Doorway to Diverse Bullying Prevention Resources](#)

Part of what the Bullying Prevention Consultation Line does well is direct callers to the best resources for their area or situation. That includes (but is by no means limited to) the many resources available from the groups that partnered to get the Consultation Line up and running. To list just a few:

- [Highmark Foundation and Center for Safe Schools: Bullying Prevention Toolkit](#)
- [Highmark Foundation: Warning Signs and Tips for Parents](#)
- [Highmark Foundation: Online Resources and Links](#)
- [Highmark Foundation: Bullying Prevention Initiatives](#)
- [Highmark Foundation and Center for Safe Schools: Bullying Prevention Success Stories](#)
- [Center for Safe Schools: Online and Downloadable Bullying Prevention Resources](#)
- [Center for Health Promotion and Disease Prevention: Bullying Prevention Platform](#)
- [Pennsylvania Department of Education: Bullying Prevention Resources](#)

Cook notes that the Highmark Foundation has worked with groups throughout Pennsylvania to combat bullying since 2007, including establishing its own [Bullying Prevention Institute](#) and investing \$25 million in bullying prevention and related programs. It is one of the organization's priority focus areas — and she says Pennsylvanians can count on the organization to continue working with its anti-bullying partners as long as this public health problem persists.

