

PC CARES Bulletin

January 2022

Greetings Local Steering Committee and supportive partners,

If you are new here, welcome! We intend to send these newsletters about every 2 months. Newsletters will cover our activities, what we are learning and how PC CARES is going (participant feedback or participation numbers), and, as we have results and publications to share, data about the difference we are making in people’s lives.

As we enter the new year, we have the opportunity to greet new possibilities with renewed commitment to the underlying ideas, values, and principals that inform this community-engaged project to prevent suicide.

Underlying ideas:

- It takes a village – and all organizations within it -- to prevent suicide.
- Community members are best able to prevent suicide and promote wellness.
- Scientific research can strengthen and guide village efforts.

Values and principles

- Everyone is a learner and teacher
- Works within cultural & community practices and values
- Sessions are welcoming, respectful & productive
- People know what to expect and are clear about the purpose of each session and PC CARES overall
- Aims to build a *Community of Practice* among village service providers, parents, teachers, etc.

PC CARES Communities of Practice



Virtual PC CARES

After the COVID-19 pandemic made gathering in-person impossible, PC CARES began offering virtual learning circles to school staff in Bering Strait and Northwest Arctic. We re-structured the curriculum and added a few new learning circles to fit the academic year.

In the second year of virtual PC CARES, we expanded our audience to include behavioral health and health care providers, medstaff, and other leaders in Northwestern Alaska who want to participate in training about suicide prevention, youth and community resilience, and cross-sector collaboration.

Partnering with rural and remote Alaskan school districts to adapt the Promoting Community Conversations to End Suicide (PC CARES) intervention involved a series of cascading adaptations to the model in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. These **adaptations** included changes in:

- **delivery** - from in-person to online
- **audience** - broader community to mostly teachers and school administrators
- **structure** - train-the-trainer to direct delivery between research team and participants
- **content** - addition of concepts about shifting from white dominant culture, as well as school-based postvention planning and engaging community change.

To learn more about our switch from in-person to online delivery, or what a learning circle is like, please visit: <https://www.pc-cares.org/virtual-learning-circles>

Leading & helping each learning circle



Lisa



Josie



Diane



Suzanne



Caroline



Lauren



Roberta



Tara



Tanya



Leanna

Not pictured: Notetakers Jim Chaliak and Megan Leys.

We have a large, multi-talented team helping with and leading each learning circle. While Lisa and Diane generally cover the “what do we know?” portion, our co-facilitators take small groups of participants into “breakout rooms” to discuss “What do we think?” Each virtual room has both a facilitator and a notetaker, who work together to lead and document the small group discussions. With such a large and diverse team, we are able to give participants varied experiences in breakout groups, while they have time to evaluate and apply the information to their lives. Esther Green, a Yupik elder based in Bethel, records video messages, stories and greeting to open or close the learning circle.

Attendance	LC1: Context and Youth Development	LC2: Prevention	LC3: Grief and Healing
Northwest + Nome			
School staff	27	27	20
Tribal Health Org	5	5	4
Other	9	8	2
Total	41	40	26
Bering Strait + Other			
School staff	12	13	7
Tribal Health Org	14	11	9
Other	3	1	0
Total	29	25	16

After the first learning circle, we review the “content” from the previous session and ask participants to report back about how did they used the information shared during the learning circle in their professional or personal lives since the last time we met. Here are some themes and quotes from real virtual PC CARES 2021-22 participants...

What DID you do? Review and Report back after LC1 - Themes

- Deeper reflection (especially augmented by the materials in provided on Canvas, where we post source materials, discussion notes, etc.)
“I thought about ways I could help my students feel more connected with their community (I’m thinking we’ll make Christmas cards for Elders).”
- Discussed learning circle experience or topics with colleagues, family
“I have shared this information with several colleagues who provide services in rural village settings and are seeking better ways to work collaboratively in those communities.”
- Incorporating the information into classroom assignments and lessons
“Shared cultural songs and stories with my pre-k and kindergarten students”
- Interpersonal support with youth and family
“Talked with my granddaughter about her feelings after school went red and she was feeling frustrated, depressed and hopeless about school.”

PC CARES At Home: Care packages

In March 2020, the pandemic stopped our original plan to gather people in-person from multiple sectors of the community for learning circles. That summer, we started sending packages to the people who had attended a learning circle in their village to stay in touch and remind people about their learning and conversations at PC CARES learning circles. After positive reactions to the care packages, we decided to keep sending them regularly to anyone who signed up to receive them. The care packages include goodies and reminders about the wonderful things we can do for wellness in our communities.

Care packages are designed for adults who support youth in rural Alaska, especially those who attend learning circles virtually or in-person. If you attended learning circles you can sign yourself up or nominate a friend. Please keep in mind that the packages are not created for youth or children. PC CARES packages are for the important mentors in the lives of young people. Examples include: youth basketball coach, dance group leader, Elders who make time for youth, a young adult who youth look up to, a treasured teacher, etc.

Care packages are sent every 6-8 weeks and are curated by members of the Local Steering Committee, along with research staff. The current mailing list has 200 names, mostly consisting of supportive adults who have some experience or exposure to the PC CARES project in the Northwest Arctic (~40%), Bering Strait (~55%), and Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta (~5%) regions. The supplies, which usually include a snack or treat, games/freebies, and information cards, are purchased through the research grant. Student interns at the University of Michigan assemble the care packages, and they are mailed from Ann Arbor, MI.

The latest care package was themed “Reach Out to Youth” and was sent in mid-October to 171 recipients in 30 Alaskan villages (see table). The information card provided in the package talked about how recipients can show their care and support to the youth in their life, by sending short, kind and non-demanding messages. With a late-October arrival, the greeting started with a Halloween pumpkin smiley face. The package had snacks with supportive words stapled to the bag, a fidget spinner toy to help with focus, a box of cheery inspirational quotes, and some inspirational stickers as an encouraging reminder. Recipients can share the positive energy from the package to youth around them.

After each care package mailing, we follow up via phone interviews with 5 randomly-selected recipients to hear what they thought of the care package and how the care packages could be improved. We also collect surveys with recipients’ feedback about the care packages. This information gives us a sense of how well-received, intuitively understandable, and helpful the packages are, as well as giving us ideas for future care packages

Below is an overview of interview responses:

- When asked “What did you or the young people in your life like about the most recent PC CARES care package?” interviewees mentioned almost every item included in the Reach Out to Youth mailing. They described sharing the items with family and friends, including kids, grandkids, clients, and sister.
- To make the care packages more useful, recipients suggested more reminders and positive affirmations to share with others, in the form of stickers and magnets.
- People enjoy the surprise of getting a care package, especially since they arrive unexpectedly: *“It could brighten someone’s day all of a sudden.”*

- When asked what they “took away” or learned from the package, recipients gave a variety of responses. A few mentioned the information provided on the card about recommendations for conversations with youth, while another said the package made them feel like they were thought of and appreciated. One recipient talked about how they used the package’s 1 fidget spinner to talk about sharing with the 5 kids in the household.
- For ideas for future packages, the interviewees suggested items that included both indoor (like card games and crafts) and outdoor (fishing) activities. *“Getting out and getting that fresh air. Getting your mind off of things. Really helps. An excuse to go fishing is always great.”* Recipients also suggested providing more resources like websites, contact numbers for their community. One recipient said: *“Something to promote a question or an answer, like a quiz question. Ask a question where they have to learn something or explore something. Challenge them to go to your website or social media. Provide a question or an answer. Like a treasure hunt. My fear is that people would get this care package and just throw it away without reading this great information.”*
- Several topics for future care packages were suggested, including healthy lifestyle, warning signs for suicide, healthy relationships, Native culture, gun safety, ice safety, safe subsistence travel (over land and by boat), and *“How to be a productive community member in a positive way.”*

Care package topics often relate to or remind their recipients about learning circle topics. The theme selected by the Local Steering Committee for the next care package is safe homes. All 201 packages were sent at the end of January 2022. PC CARES care package will continue through May 2022.

For descriptions of past packages, visit:

<https://www.pc-cares.org/cp-timeline>

For a slideshow of packages we’ve sent:

<https://www.pc-cares.org/cp-gallery>

“Reach Out to Youth” Care Package Recipients	
24	Nome
19	Kotzebue
13	Savoonga
10	Unalakleet
11	Gambell
7	Shungnak
7	Shishmaref
6	Teller
6	Selawik
5	Akiak
5	Golovin
5	Bethel
5	St. Michael
4	White Mountain
4	Noatak
4	Elim
4	Brevig Mission
4	Buckland
3	Stebbins
3	Koyuk
3	Ambler
3	Anchorage
2	Wales
2	Deering
2	Akiachack
2	Kiana
2	Kivalina
2	Shaktoolik
1	Noorvik
1	King Cove

PC CARES At Home: Facebook

There are 2 ways to engage with PC CARES on Facebook: users can “like” our page, which publishes 2-3 posts each week about resources, opportunities, and helpful tips and articles related to suicide prevention, wellness, and youth leadership in Alaska. So far, **85 people have “liked” the PC CARES Facebook page.** If you are a Facebook user, help us grow our reach! Please “like” our new Facebook page:

<https://www.facebook.com/pccaresathome>

Users can also join our private Facebook group “PC CARES at Home.” This group is for anyone participating in PC CARES: folks who receive care packages or attend learning circles. In this group, we encourage users to share what they did with the stuff they received in a care package or how they used the

tools, insights, or relationships you explored or reinforced during each learning circle(s). Users are also encouraged share about their day, something that made them laugh, successes or struggles (and how they got through them), or any tips/advice for the group on wellness.

The PC CARES At Home Facebook group is a private group, meaning only group members can create, view, or respond to posts.

PC CARES at Home currently has **129 group members**. When asked whether they had joined the Facebook group, most interviewees who use Facebook regularly said they had joined the group. One interviewee said: *“I love it, I make sure I look at it at least once a week. I tell my clients about it to look it up if they are having a bad day.”*

If you have ideas, events, articles, or other content you would recommend we share via Facebook, please email them to pccares@umich.edu, or Facebook message them to Tara Schmidt on Facebook.

Recent Publications

May 29, 2019 - Preliminary outcomes show the PC CARES model feasibility and social impact

Wexler, L., Rataj, S., Ivanich, J., Plavin, J., Mullany, A., Moto, R., Kirk, T., Goldwater, E., Johnson, R., Dombroski, K. (2019). [Community mobilization for rural suicide prevention: Process, learning and behavioral outcomes from Promoting Community Conversations About Research to End Suicide \(PC CARES\) in Northwest Alaska](#). *Social Science & Medicine*, 232, 398-407.

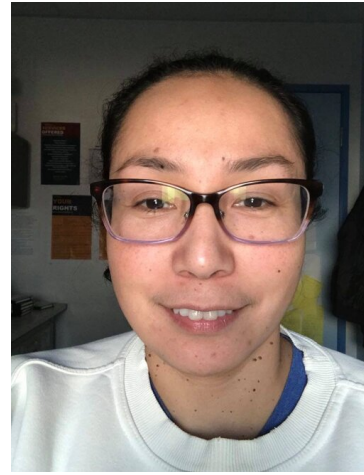
The process and preliminary outcomes of the PC CARES intervention are explained and the results are presented in this study. Linked participant surveys (n=83) compared attendees’ perceived knowledge, skills, attitudes, and “community of practice” at baseline and follow-up. A cross-sectional design compared 112 participants’ with 335 non-participants’ scores on knowledge and prevention behaviors, and considered the social impact with social network analyses. Learning Circle transcripts were scored for accuracy and fidelity to the curriculum, and participants’ discussions were analyzed for understanding of the research content and application in everyday life. Social network analyses indicate PC CARES had social impact, sustaining and enhancing prevention activities of non-participants who were in close relationships with participants. These close associates were more likely take preventive actions than other non-participants after the intervention. This article concludes that PC CARES offers a practical, scalable method for community-based translation of research evidence into self-determined, culturally-responsive suicide prevention practice.

We share the full text of all published papers about PC CARES on our website at <https://www.pc-cares.org/research-eval>

Member acknowledgement

We want to thank Emily “Funny” Murray, Josie Garnie, and LaVerne Sacchues for being our longest-serving Local Steering Committee (LSC) members. They have been involved with the project since the LSC convened in November 2018. They have consistently provided support, guidance, and innumerable

contributions to the project, including guiding us through the transition to virtual delivery in spring 2020. We are so grateful for your service with this project!



To read more about these members, and about the Local Steering Committee, please visit:
<https://www.pc-cares.org/lsc>

As always, thanks for reading, and thank you for being involved with PC CARES!