



PC CARES Local Steering Committee Bulletin

June 18, 2021

Greetings LSC,

Summer “break” could be a misnomer for Alaskans—the new season wakes green food sources and the need to gather from our surroundings settles into our bodies like an urgent itch. In this season, we look back and take stock:

- Over the last 9 months, 74 people from Northwest and Bering Strait finished a 7-session series of school-based, virtual learning circles. We also tracked the kinds of prevention actions taken by 225 people at the beginning of the year, compared to the end. We hoped to see the positive changes both in those who participated in PC CARES and among others working in the same school and community. Our results are very promising! We will cover them in this newsletter.
- We sent another batch of PC CARES Packages focused on the value of restful sleep for mental wellness to 74 Northwest and Bering Strait community members.
- We shared our work with others nationally and across the circumpolar North.

PC CARES at School

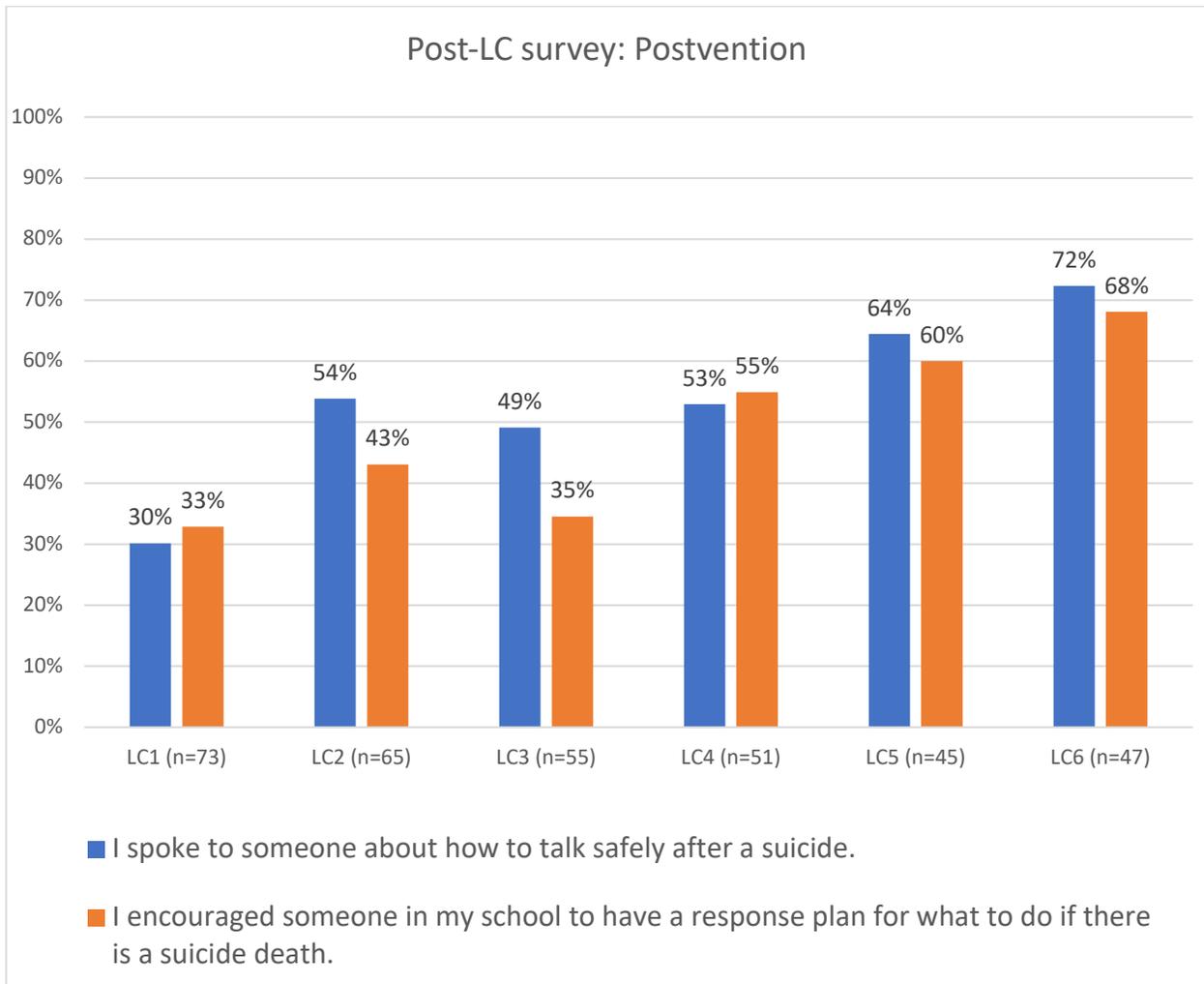
PC CARES at School was the first time ever learning circles were held exclusively online and offered as a 3-credit, master’s level Rural Development class through UAF. Back in the fall, we modified PC CARES for online delivery and hosted a series of 7 learning circles from November 2020 to May 2021. Participants in PC CARES at School were 65% teachers, 9% school administrators, and a small number of Norton Sound Health Corporation and Maniilaq Association employees, as well as 15% who indicated their role as “other.” Of the 74 people who attended at least four 2-hour learning circles, 62% were female. The majority (55%) were white, with 8% indicating they were Alaska Native and/or American Indian. We are hoping to increase the proportion of Alaska Native participants next year.

Our surveys show that people who attended at least 4 learning circles (n=74) valued their PC CARES learning experience, increased their confidence and skills over time, and did more prevention activities because of their involvement. After every learning circle (LC), attendees are sent a link to an optional survey that tells us what they thought about that month’s class.

Below are some highlights of participant agreement across all post-LC surveys:

- **72%** said they *spoke up about what the school can do to reduce the risk of youth suicide*
- **90%** *worked with others to increase wellness in the school community*
- **87%** said their *relationships with the people in this session are better because of the discussions.*

When we asked participants about areas of learning covered in the learning circles, two questions about **postvention**, or responding to a suicide death in ways that help decrease risk for others who may be struggling, showed clear improvement over time. Learning circle 4 (LC4) covered postvention planning for schools, and you can see in the graph to follow that encouraging someone at the school to have a response plan increased after LC4 from 35% to 55%, and kept climbing.



We asked participants about the relevance of the information they learned with 4 questions:

1. *I can imagine myself actually using what I learned today.*
2. *I can apply what we learned today to my life.*
3. *By participating in this session, I have more ways to prevent suicide.*
4. *This session gave me useful ideas.*

Agreement was recorded on a 0-7 scale, with higher numbers indicating the strong agreement, and low numbers indicating strong disagreement. The average scores across all learning circles showed a high level of agreement.

For all 4 questions, there was a statistically significant difference between scores after the first learning circle and scores after the fifth learning circle ($p < .05$). Toward the end of the learning circle series, attendees were more likely to agree that the session gave them useful ideas, they can apply what they learned that day to everyday life, they can imagine themselves using this information, and participating in the session gave them more ways to prevent suicide.

PC CARES as a Community Intervention

We documented positive changes for prevention and wellness in PC CARES participants as well as others. Collecting surveys from people within BSSD, NWABSD, Norton Sound, Kawerak, Maniilaq ($n=225$), they reported doing more for prevention and wellness at the end of the year compared to the beginning. Surveys from teachers, school administrators, village-based service providers report increased actions to promote wellness and help prevent suicide across all 19 questions comparing October 2020 to May 2021. For example:

- *"I found ways for a child/teen to give back to their school, community, or family"* increased from 29% at baseline (September) to 38% at follow-up (May)
- *"I helped a teen or child talk about their feelings of grief"* increased from 28% to 45% of respondents reporting doing this in past few months
- *"I talked about how we can help prevent further harm after a suicide happens"* increased from 9% to 22%
- *"I quietly listened to a youth (child or teen) who had a problem, reflecting back to them what I heard"* increased from 58 to 76%
- *"I talked with a young person (teen or child) about what is happening in their life"* increased from 68 to 77%

Survey results also seemed to show an increase in collaboration or coordination with others to create healthy environments for youth.

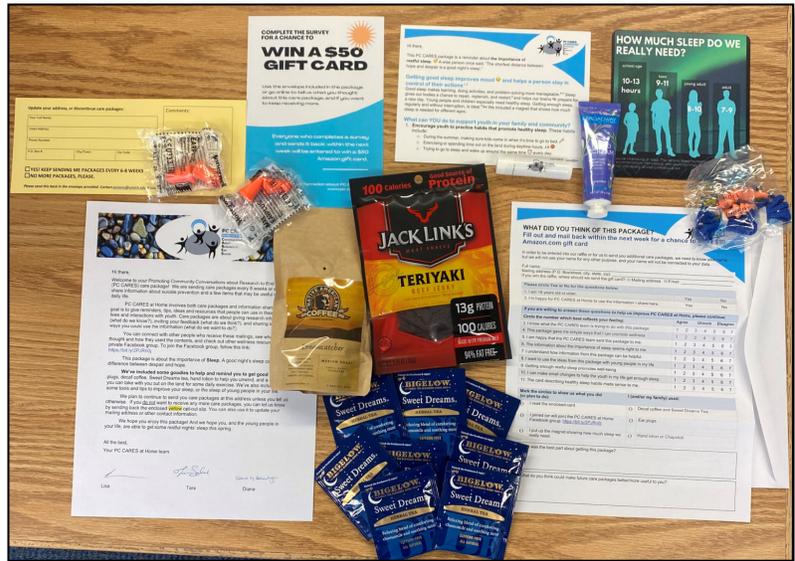
- *"I worked with others to increase wellness in the school community"* increased from 48% to 56%
- *"I worked with others to prevent suicide"* increased from 19% to 33%

The results from participants and others suggest that PC CARES is working as we hoped! The seven learning circles offer community members, educators and service providers an array of tools and opportunities to work together (and on their own terms) to promote wellness and prevent suicide, and to reach other to others to do more.

PC CARES At Home: Care packages

A care package themed on restful sleep was sent on May 19th to the list of people who "opted in" to receive more. After being nominated to receive a Small Acts of Kindness care package (192 were nominated), 22 people sent back a card saying they would like to get more care packages. This, combined with those who opted in after getting care packages about talking to youth, listening well, as well as small acts of kindness, grew the mailing list to 74 people in total.

The sleep care package was sent to 74 people and contained ear plugs, Sleepytime tea, decaf coffee, beef jerky to take when out on the land, chap stick featuring the PC CARES logo, lavender-scented hand lotion for winding down, and a magnet displaying “How much sleep do we really need?” The informational card focused on the value of sleep for mental wellness and offered some tools to support restful sleep. The package included a letter explaining why they are receiving the care package and that they can opt-out at any time, feedback survey, and postcard reminding people to complete the survey for a chance to win a \$50 gift card.



Please, continue to nominate folks you think would benefit from receiving PC CARES package: email Diane (dmschne@umich.edu) or use the link pinned to the top of the Facebook group.

Sharing our work: recent presentations

Josie, Lisa, and Tanya presented to the **Arctic Council** in early March for a **virtual knowledge exchange**, attended by service providers in Greenland, Russia, Canada, U.S. Alaska, Norway, Sweden. According to the event organizer, “...your session contributed immensely to this overall success, and I think you can honestly take some credit for the fact that on average the participants who submitted the feedback from rated the experience 4.8 of 5 stars and that all of them said they are highly likely to recommend future virtual knowledge exchanges.” Participant comments included:

- *“I’ll share new knowledge and new methods/approaches that can be adapted to our smaller communities, for instance, emphasis on Indigenization, values, doing small things to make a difference (acts of kindness).”*
- *“I am already using the tips & ideas in my community”*
- *“Prevention in the small details”*

Enclosed is visual notes from Josie, Lisa, and Tanya’s talk with the Arctic Council, which captured some key takeaways from the group along with information covered in the presentation.

Lauren White (Choctaw, UM doctoral student) presented **Youth Suicide Research Conference** on June 11th with an abstract titled *Partnering with Rural and Remote Alaskan School Districts to Adapt the Promoting Community Conversations to End Suicide (PC CARES) Intervention in the “New Realities” of Post-Pandemic Research*. The presentation described the series of cascading adaptations to the model in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, including changes in delivery (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), and content (addition of concepts about shifting from white dominant culture, as well as school-based postvention planning and engaging community change). Lauren described what worked to help make the project succeed in the past nine months. Participants felt the program was easy to apply to the village setting because it was presented from perspectives understand village life. Largely, it was due to your guidance and engagement, and that the teaching team included individuals with community as well as research expertise.

If couldn't make it to the talk, but want a peak at Lauren's presentation, please reach out to her at lawhi@umich.edu.

Research project helping other communities adapt and use PC CARES

We often get requests from outside Alaska and even outside the US to use the program and have not taken time to thoughtfully compile the essential elements and steps to build and adapt the program. Caroline Bec, Doctoral Student at McGill University in Canada, is to work with our research team to develop a guide to help other communities adapt and use PC CARES in ways that are locally responsive while sustaining PC CARES core elements.



Message from Caroline:

Nice to meet you! I grew up in the Alps mountains in France. Over the last few years, I worked in mental health and suicide prevention research as well as community-based project coordination of health, and cultural adaptation of clinical guides in many countries (Canada, China, Scotland, Sweden, Vietnam and the US).

I currently am working with Lisa to submit a research proposal centered on PC CARES and teamwork used to make the program happen. PC CARES often get requests from outside Alaska and even outside the US to deliver the program and PC CARES does not have steps in place to support implementation by other teams. The purpose of my research is to develop a guide to help other communities and organizations adapt and use PC CARES in ways that are locally responsive while sustaining PC CARES core practices, essential values, and central activities. The study will include the PC CARES research team and Local Steering Committee members who would like to be involved. It will involve interviews, focus groups and observations done while sitting in on meetings, and would start in September 2021.

If you have any questions about the research or want to have a chat, please don't hesitate to reach out to me at caroline.bec@mail.mcgill.ca

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