

# Strengthening Voices for Suicide Prevention

Making Policy and Practice Best Support the  
Most Vulnerable Children, Youth and Families

Michigan Suicide Prevention Community Technical  
Assistance Meeting

May 3, 2018



*Public policy  
in the best interest  
of children.*

# Who We Are

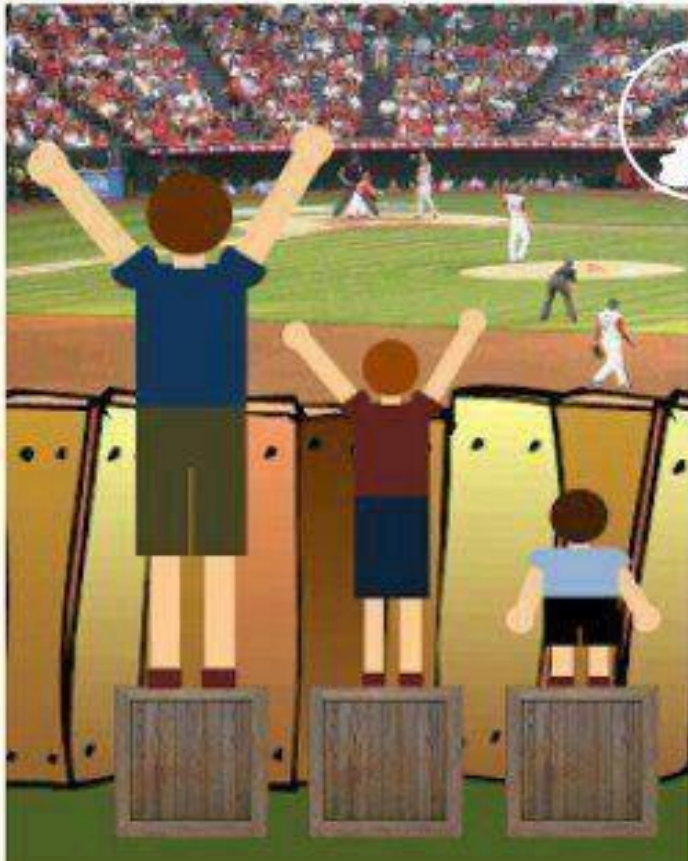
- A statewide, independent policy voice for children, youth and their families.
- We want Michigan's public policy and programs to help children, youth and families access the opportunities they need to succeed.
- To make that happen, we work to ensure that policymakers prioritize the needs of children, youth and families facing the most challenges.
- We believe that better public policy is built when those directly impacted by it are engaged with decision makers.

# How We Work:

## Knowing What Changes Public Policy

- **Understanding** Issues and Solutions
- Strategically **Communicating** that Information
- **Mobilizing Strategic Partners** and Engaging Communities Around Problems and Solutions
- **Advocate Directly** With Change Makers and Connect Others To Them

# Equality



# Equity



# Michigan Situation

- Good News! Everybody loves kids
- Good News! Good News! People are concerned about suicide
- Good News! We know what to do
- Bad News! Sometimes they don't love ALL kids – particularly all youth
- Bad News! Disinvestment trend
- Bad News! Limited political will to change the situation

# Policy In Context

- Growing child, youth and family poverty
- High unemployment for young adults, particularly those facing challenges like mental health, others
- Growing abuse and neglect
- Minimal movement in education outcomes
- Minimal movement in health outcomes
- Some public programs growing to meet needs, others not
- Over-reliance on federal support/support more tenuous
- Over-reliance on grants and pilot programs
- Reactions to crises of the moment
- Disinvestment in key areas like mental health
- Poor outcomes across the board for kids involved with the foster care and juvenile justice systems

# Why the Disconnect?

- Lots of competition for fewer dollars
  - Deficit budget for more than a decade
  - Recent revenue bright spots resulting in challenge and opportunity
- Ideology about the role of government
  - Polarization of the parties
  - Unprecedented at this moment
- Policymakers don't hear about issues of concern

# Becoming a Voice For Your Cause

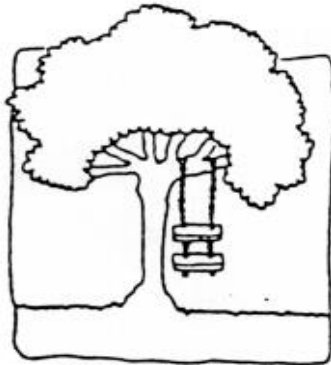
- Moving concerns into ACTION
- Using influence for CHANGE
- Changing Attitudes and Behavior



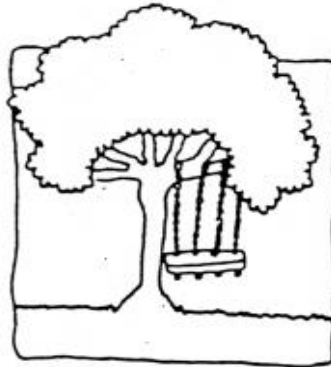
# Why Get Involved/Why Advocacy

- You Can
  - You already have the skills you need
  - It doesn't take that many of us
- You Should
  - There are things we want changed
  - Democracy=Responsibility
  - Decision-makers REALLY need our help

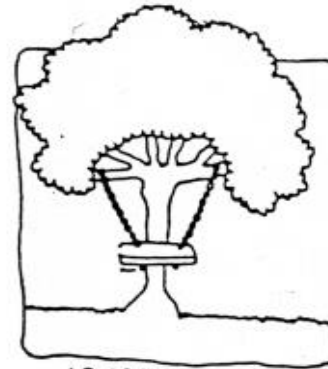
# How a Bill Becomes Law



AS INTRODUCED



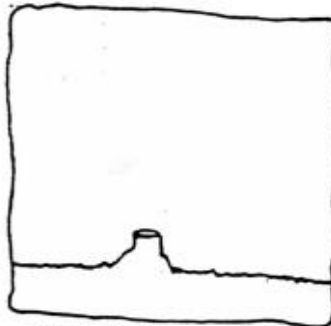
AS AMENDED IN  
COMMITTEE



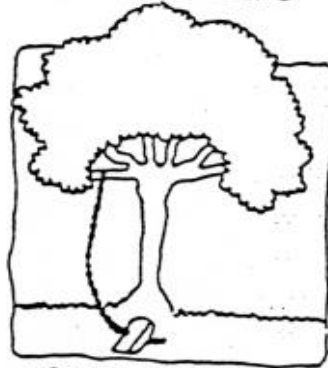
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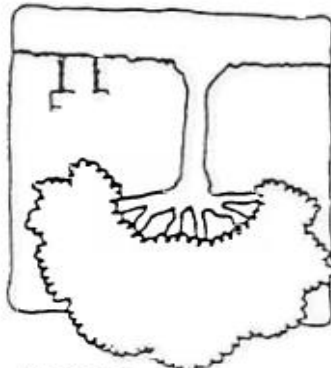
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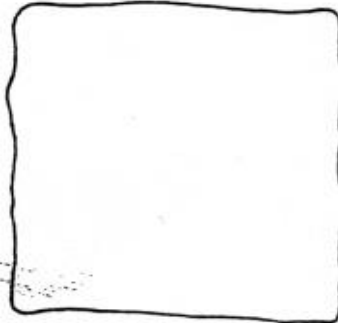
AS FUNDED BY JOINT  
BUDGET COMMITTEE



AS IMPLEMENTED BY  
THE STATE AGENCY



AS REPORTED BY THE  
MEDIA



AS UNDERSTOOD BY  
THE PUBLIC



WHAT WAS ACTUALLY  
NEEDED

# How do we make change?

- **Get the attention of the people who can make the change you want**
- **Talk to Decision-Makers**
  - A concern that you have about your life and work
  - A concern that you have about their work
- **Talk to Other People**
  - About an issue
  - About policymaker's views or positions
  - About how to act

# Building an Advocacy Strategy: Becoming a Stronger Voice for Your Concerns

- WHAT are the changes that matter
- Getting the attention of the people who can make the changes that we want
  - WHO can make those changes
  - HOW to get them to listen – what influences them
- Who and What Do We Know
- Who and What Do We Need

# Policymakers Need To Know What We Know

- We Know the Problems
- We Know What Works
- We Know What Doesn't Work
- We And Those We Serve Are Experts in Life and Work
- Solution as important as the problem

# What Are the Changes That Matter?

- What do policymakers need to know about children, youth and families?
  - How can we get that information
- What do policymakers need to know about how programs work or don't work?
  - Maybe they work for some people but not others
  - Maybe they used to work but don't anymore
  - Maybe they are based on the wrong information about what matters

# How Do We Best Get Them That Information?

- Helps to Know Something About Them
  - What issues do they prioritize?
  - Who do they tend to listen to?
  - What do they think about our issues?
  - How does our work help to solve their problems?
- Helps to Know Something About Their Job
  - They are busy, have lots of issues to weigh in on
  - Helps to connect the dots between our issues and issues they are already talking about

# You Can Do Some Homework on Their Priorities

- Who represents you? Who else do they represent?
- What have they said when they are in the district? Through media and otherwise?
- What have they worked on in Lansing?
  - They sponsor and co-sponsor bills
  - They all have committee assignments



# Advocacy= Bringing Influence to Bear

How Do We Influence Decision  
Makers?

# What Influences You?

# Who/What Influences Decision Makers

- Friends
- Title or position
- Information
- Numbers
- Constituents
- Money

“When you need a friend, it’s too late to make one.”

Mark Twain

# Who Do We Need?

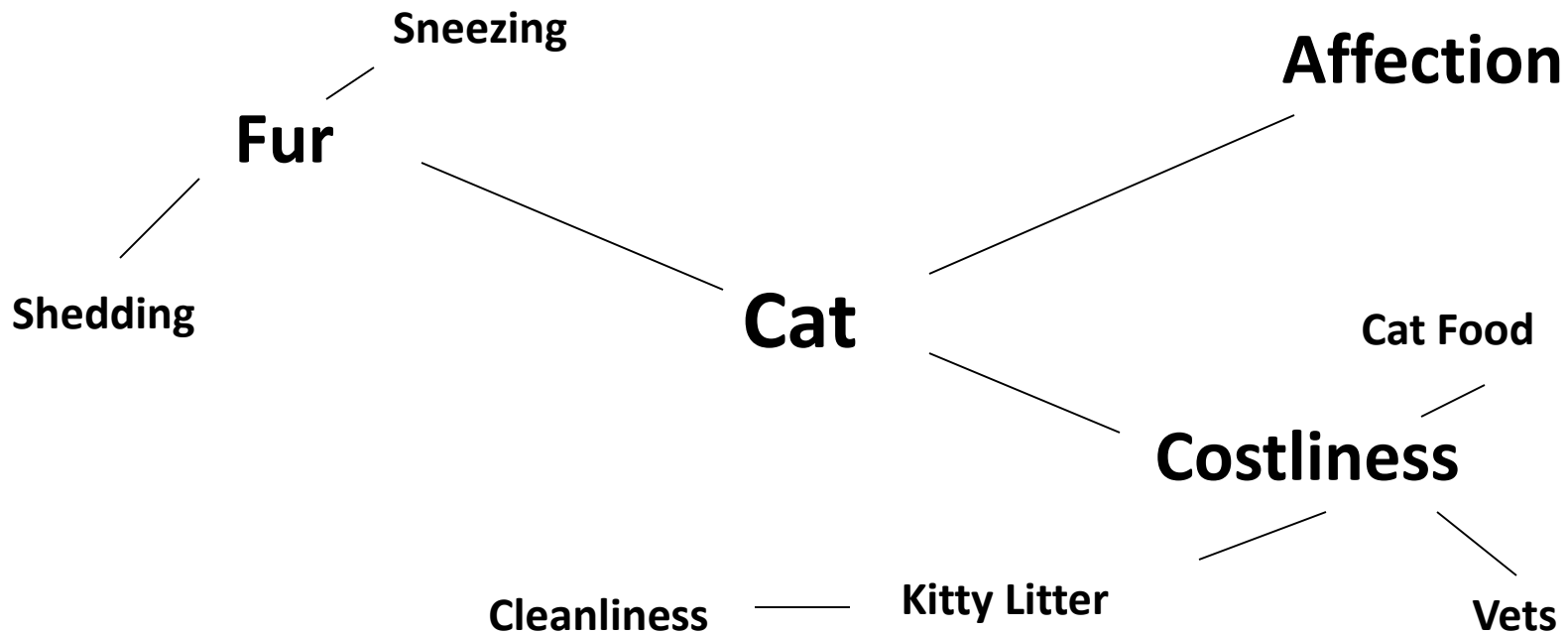
- People Who Know
- Relationships
- Information Partners
  - Researchers, Evaluators
- Titled Partners
  - Experts, Professionals
- Constituent Partners
  - Based on Geography and Experience

# How Do We Get Them to Listen?

- We use mental shortcuts to make sense of the world
- Based on our life experiences, including the media
- We use “frames” to filter new information



# Cat Frame



# Why Do Frames Matter?

When the facts don't fit the frame, it is the FACTS that are rejected, not the frame.



# How To Find Their Frame

- **Get to Know Them!**
- Simple Research
- Paying Attention
- **TALK TO THEM**



# Current Policy Frames

- Flint Water Disaster/Distrust of Government
- Nassar Crimes/Reaction to Sexual Abuse
- School Shooting/Reaction to Safety
  - Gun Laws
  - School-Based Solutions
  - Mental Health
- Governing Into An Election Year

# Four Critical Numbers

- 2500: Different piece of legislation to be considered EACH YEAR
- 10-20%: Voters who contact elected officials
- 12: Phone calls needed to get attention
- 5-20: Enough to start or stop a discussion

# Civics 101

- The Clock is Always Ticking
- Always Looking for a Majority
- Two-party System – Majority in Power
- Bi-Cameral Legislature
- The Governor

# How a Bill Becomes a Law

- Bills are introduced
- They are discussed by each chamber
  - Majority party controls the agenda
  - If both agree
- They are presented to the Governor
  - Veto power

The state budget, as the single most powerful expression of the state's priorities, is a powerful tool for improving the circumstances of the most vulnerable, doing nothing for those circumstances, or making those circumstances worse.

# Democracy in Action

- Four tools for communication
  - Letters/e-mails – 1 page
  - Phone calls – 3 minutes
  - Coffee Hours – depends
  - Office Visits – 10-20 minutes

THEY CAN AND SHOULD VISIT YOU TOO!

  - Testimony – 3-5 minutes
- Be brief and focused, but be sure they hear you

# Opportunities in 2018 and Beyond

- Attention to Behavioral Health
  - Legislative Caucuses
    - Disabilities Caucus
    - CARES Task Force
  - Mental Health Commission Charge
  - Federal Health Care Conversation
  - School Safety Crisis
  - Opioid Crisis
- Attention to Trauma Informed Practice
- Other opportunities?



# The Elections

- Get to know the candidates
- Educate the candidates on the issues that matter to you.
- Help groups you are involved with understand the candidates' positions. Better yet, invite candidates to those meetings.
- Vote
- Stay engaged after the elections are over.



# Capitalizing on the Election Year

- More Attention on Issues
- More Attention to Constituents
- More Opportunities to Connect
- Building Early Relationships for Next Year

# Giving Our Solutions The Best Chance

- What do we need to do before talking with policymakers?
- Who would be good partners to engage?
- Who might be the best messengers?

# Always Keep the Door Open

- If they don't do what you want...
  - Can you blame them? Did they know what you know?
  - Express disappointment, but look for other possibilities
- If all else fails...
  - Don't get angry
  - Get a better person elected/appointed/hired

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Michigan's  
Children

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in the best interest  
of children.*