American Foundation for Suicide Prevention

- Steed Johnson
- Mason Ramsey
- Hannah Watson
Personal Statements:

“There is a growing sense of optimism that our case is finally getting the attention it needs. This is because of the willingness of hundreds of thousands who are getting involved in speaking out about how suicide has impacted their lives.”

-Robert Gebbia, Executive Director of American Foundation for Suicide Prevention

“The group all has personal ties with suicide, which has led us to look into the research that the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention has done around this sensitive issue. Mason has personally lost 5 of his family members including his younger brother Jackson Ramsey. These instances have led him and his mother to strive to spread the knowledge of the risk factors and the general knowledge around suicide in the state of Virginia.”

-Mason Ramsey

“Last year, here at Longwood University, one of the brothers of Theta Chi committed suicide. Although I am a Sigma Nu, and he is not my specific brother, he was a Greek and all Greeks are family. I was deeply touched by his passing and saw the impact it had on the Longwood University community. Since then, I have become more interested in suicide rates and such around not only Virginia, but the nation.”

- Steed Johnson
“My personal tie to suicide is through Mason. I’ve known Mason since freshman year and when I heard that his mother was putting on a walk I made sure that I was there. I woke up early and drove up to Richmond in order to make the walk and support Mason and his family. I can’t think of a better way to support Mason and spread word about the organization.”

-Hannah Watson
Mission Statement:
The American Foundation for Suicide Prevention (AFSP) is the leading national not-for-profit organization, according to research, exclusively dedicated to understanding and preventing suicide through research, education and advocacy, and to reaching out to people with mental disorders and those impacted by suicide.

To achieve its mission, AFSP engages in the following five core strategies:

- Funding scientific research
  - AFSP is the leading private supporter of suicide prevention research. AFSP-funded studies contribute to the understanding of the neurobiological, genetic and psychosocial factors that can lead to suicide, and investigate interventions and treatments that can help prevent suicide.

- Offering educational programs for professionals
  - AFSP educational programs inform physicians, mental health professionals, teachers, clergy, journalists and other gatekeepers about suicide prevention to better identify and bring to treatment individuals at risk for suicide.

- Educating the public about mood disorders and suicide prevention
  - AFSP prevention projects include the interactive Screening Program for colleges and workplaces, the Physician Depression and Suicide Prevention Project and a suicide prevention initiative aimed at reducing
suicide rates among lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender populations.

-Promoting policies and legislation that impact suicide and prevention

○ AFSP takes positions on policies and legislation that can advance suicide prevention. The Public Policy and Advocacy division alerts community leaders and grassroots advocates to policies and legislation that can further suicide prevention at the national, state and local levels.

-Providing programs and resources for survivors of suicide loss and -people at risk, and involve them in the work of the Foundation

○ AFSP helps survivors of suicide loss to heal, providing them with information and encouraging them to become involved in prevention. Annually, AFSP sponsors National Suicide Awareness Day, with healing conferences and a live webcast. AFSP’s Outreach Program and e-Network inform survivors of resources and Facilitator Training Program is expanding the number of survivor support groups.
Background/Research:

In 1987, a small group of caring individuals had a vision: establish a private source of support for suicide research and education, and essential suicide prevention efforts that could be sustained into the future. These founding families—each of whom had lost someone to suicide—joined with scientists to create what today is the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention, or AFSP. Research is key to AFSP’s mission of understanding and preventing suicide, and our Suicide Research Grants Program is focused on innovative studies that specifically address suicide. By investing in researchers dedicated to our shared goal, we move forward on our path toward prevention.

Many of the original founders of AFSP were concerned about an alarming rise in youth suicide over the previous four decades. During this period, the suicide of young men had tripled while for young women it had doubled. Suicide is currently the third leading cause of death among young people age 15 to 24. The highest overall rates of suicide are for adults age 40 to 59.

AFSP supports the efforts of researchers exploring new directions in suicide research. Our researchers range from newly-graduated postdoctoral fellows to distinguished investigators in their fields. Since our founding in 1987, AFSP’s research mission has grown in geographic scope, with recently supported projects in Puerto Rico, Canada, England, Australia, Sweden, and China. Research is key to AFSP’s mission of
understanding and preventing suicide, and our Suicide Research Grants Program is focused on innovative studies that specifically address suicide. By investing in researchers dedicated to the organization’s shared goal, AFSP moves forward on their path toward prevention. With all of this being said, before AFSP, there was no national-scope not-for-profit organization dedicated to understanding and preventing suicide through research, education and advocacy.

Since being Organized AFSP:

- Mobilized and connected tens of thousands of people who have lost a family member, loved one, or friend to suicide;
- Reached thousands of individuals who are at risk for suicide, as well as those who love and care for them;
- Attracted the participation of members of the scientific and clinical communities, who conduct groundbreaking research on suicide and its prevention with support from AFSP.
- Established more than 50 local chapters in 35 states, with more in the process of forming;
- Educated hundreds of local communities about suicide and how to prevent it;
- Created a public policy and lobbying arm by merging successfully with an existing national policy organization, thus enabling AFSP to press for legislation and policies at the federal, state and local levels that advance the goal of preventing suicide;
- Substantially increased their funding from individual donors, including the thousands of
highly motivated individuals who participate in AFSP’s Out of the Darkness Walks;

-Educated reporters and the media about how to best cover suicide; and Communicated with hundreds of thousands of individuals through the AFSP website, social media, brochures, speakers and efforts to generate coverage.

ACTION STRATEGY/OBJECTIVES

Audience:
1. Who is AFSP trying to inform? AFSP is attempting to inform a group of people who have not yet been exposed to the organization and what their mission is. In order to do so, the organization has used social media and their website to connect to people who have in any way been affected by suicide. AFSP is targeting all audiences of all ages and genders.

2. What relevant information does AFSP need to share? The American Foundation for Suicide Prevention prides themselves on informing the public about suicide. One of the main thing that the organization, and what we mainly focused on, are suicide prevention walk on college campuses everywhere. Neighboring schools in Virginia such as George Mason, JMU, and Radford put on these awareness walks and incorporate their entire university. AFSP wants to gain more awareness with the Virginia public and get more recognition in order to gain support for their cause.

3. What is the “take away” that AFSP wants their audience to have? AFSP wants their audience to know more about suicide and the risk factors that are involved. AFSP also
wants the public to know the impact of it and that the problem needs to be addresses. With that, AFSP is informing the public that in Virginia, suicide and/or depression is not covered under most major insurances because Virginia doesn't consider it a threat to the general public. AFSP is working to get public support against the fact that suicide and/or depression is not covered by insurance in Virginia and push a change.

4. What behaviors has AFSP influenced in telling their stories? Suicide is a hard topic to discuss no matter what the age of the person. As long as AFSP able to start the conversation and get people comfortable with talking about it then the organization has done a service to the public and will have made progress within our culture.

COMMUNICATION TACTICS/PLANNING

S.W.O.T. analysis

-Strengths: This organization has many strengths, but there are two that the we, as a group, feel exceed their other strengths and should be noted. The first of these two strength’s is the organization’s ability to bring awareness to such a touchy subject. Suicide is something that many do not want to hear about, much less talk about, but this organization is able to bring this problem the attention, from people, that it deserves in a conservative and caring way. This allows people to feel comfortable with the organization and open themselves to the conversation about suicide. The second strength that this organization has is their willingness to inform all ages. This is not an organization that only focuses on one a certain age group, it is an organization that has
no limits on age and will go to extremities to make sure everyone is informed. For example, on this organization’s website, there are sections in which one can click on to be informed about the different events going on for different age groups. The college campus walks is just one of many events that AFSP has for people of different ages.

- **Weakness:** The weakness that this organization has is its reach. It is a growing organization, but it has not reached a broad area and that is something that
would need to be addressed and improved on. AFSP wants to be well known, not only in Virginia, but nationwide. The organization has not reached nationwide level and it something that needs to be improved on. The organizations has good tactics and a communication plan but it needs to be carried out more thoroughly in order to reach a broader audience. Also, with these weaknesses are the graphs (pictured above) that the organization uses to inform their audience. The AFSP website has these two graphs as their attention grabbing statistical graphs. Unfortunately, these graphs and statistics are out of date and not clear. Both graphs are from 2010, which makes this information four years old. People have to see new information and information that is happening right now in order to get involved. Also, reading these graphs is extremely hard. The labels on the bar graph (top graph) are small and uninformative with the information that is
trying to be conveyed. With the circle graph, the information is too broad. AFSP names too many other diseases along with suicide that are among the leading causes of death in the United States. Some of these other diseases are even very rare. If ASFP wants to prove how prominent of a problem suicide is, the organization needs to compare it to diseases that are known. If the organization wants to increase awareness, the statistics and graphs have to be clear, solidified and up to date, otherwise it is in effective, such as these graphs.

**Opportunities:** Suicide, with its many variables, is such a difficult subject to address and understand, it takes second place to many other issues such as, cancer, autism and many other diseases, which this organizations completely supports. With this being said, it allows this organization to be able to work in their own specific way and address an issue that is not addressed by others, which makes them one of the go to organizations for suicide. The A.F.S.P. sponsors multiple programs that are meant to target the different age groups and how they specifically handle and interpret suicide. Some of these programs include the Out of the Darkness Community walk as well as the Out of the Darkness Campus Walk. The AFSP has also started up awareness and prevention programs that are shared through the various programs and walks that they host around the country. One of the more informative programs that I found would benefit the Longwood campus is titled “The truth about Depression on College Campuses”. This is an informative movie that comes with brochures and informative packets that share knowledge and prevention techniques on how to notice and address the depression symptoms that could potentially save a peer’s life.
**Threats:** The biggest threat to the organization is the unwillingness of people to join the conversation and speak out about how suicide has influenced their life or someone else’s life, that they know. As mentioned before, this organization has been very effective with making people feel comfortable and getting them to talk about how suicide has affected either their life or someone else’s life that they know. With that being said, there are still those who feel uncomfortable with the topic and are unwilling to talk about suicide. By having this level of uncomfortableness with the audience they are trying to communicate to, the organization struggles to gain support. Without this support, AFSP cannot expand and will struggle to succeed in the future if the networking and support from people that have been touched by this disease does not begin to increase.

**Suicide prevention state initiatives**

While all U.S. states have some form of suicide prevention plan in place, no two states currently address the issue in the same way. Some plans and initiatives are current, while others are out of date. Some are backed by research, others are not. Some cover the entire lifespan, while others address only youth suicide prevention. Some states are implementing a wide variety of suicide prevention activities, while others have allowed the majority of their initiatives to lapse.

In order to be effective, statewide suicide prevention plans must address suicide prevention among a wide variety of vulnerable populations. And for those plans to have meaning there must be ongoing funding available from the state or other sources to
make prevention activities and programming possible. Collaboration and coordination among state and local agencies is critical to developing a comprehensive and effective statewide approach to suicide prevention.

AFSP monitors state suicide prevention activities and advocates for state plans that:

- Address suicide prevention across the lifespan
- are fully implemented
- are funded, sustainable, and evaluated

**Audience Segmentation**

(Predisposed to our message)

- Based on Psychographics, even more separating out of audiences needs to happen.
- Developing Tactics need to be targeted to specific segments.

**EVALUATION/MEASUREMENT**

AFSP has made ground-breaking improvements research within the field.

AFSP Research Grants support many types of Studies

- Neurobiological Studies - brain mechanism that may increase or lessen suicide risk
- Genetic Studies - illuminate the heritability and genetics of suicide and suicide risk factors in families
- Psychosocial Studies - that lead to the identification of risk factors and warning signs
- Clinical Treatment Studies - which researchers test the effectiveness of
psychotherapies, medications and other biological interventions like ECT (electroconvulsive therapy) in reducing suicidal behavior and suicide risk.

- Community Intervention Studies- aimed at identifying effective ways of preventing suicide in the general community.
- Survivor Studies- directed towards understanding the impact of suicide on those who have experienced suicide loss, and how people can be supported through suicide bereavement.
- International Studies- that help identify the similarities and differences among different cultural contexts in which suicide occurs

**Psychographics**

- When AFSP is not sponsoring walks, in order to raise awareness about suicide and the true problem it is within the United States, many volunteers are: working around the clock to spread the word by advertisement, giving speeches at universities to raise awareness about our cause and about the walks that they do and most recently, meeting with members of congress and those that hold high positions within the government to try and get them to join our cause and fight this problem.