



# **PREVENTING CHILD DEATHS**

## **Mahoning County Child Fatality Review Board 2005 Report and Recommendations**

*The mission of the Mahoning County Child Fatality Review Board is to decrease the incidence of preventable fetal and child deaths by:*

- *Promoting cooperation, collaboration, and communication between all groups, professions, agencies, or entities that serve families and children*
- *Maintaining a comprehensive database of all child deaths that occur in Mahoning County in order to develop an understanding of the causes and incidences of those deaths*
- *Recommending local service and program changes to the groups, professions, agencies, or entities that serve families and children that might prevent fetal and child deaths*
- *Advising the Ohio Department of Health of aggregate data trends, and patterns concerning child deaths.*

A licensed counselor from the **Mahoning County Family and Children First Council** is assigned to research the circumstances of child deaths that occur under these conditions:

- Due to an injury, either intentional or unintentional
- Whose death is unattended by a physician
- Whose death has been investigated by the coroner
- When a review is requested by any child fatality review board participant

The counselor presents his research findings to the Child Fatality Review Board, which meets periodically as required by Ohio law.

These organizations participated in child death reviews in 2005:

Help Hotline Crisis Center  
Mahoning County Alcohol and Drug Addiction Services Board  
Mahoning County Children Services  
Mahoning County Coroner's Office  
Mahoning County District Board of Health  
Mahoning County Mental Health Board  
Saint Elizabeth Health Center  
Tod Children's Hospital  
Youngstown City Health District  
Youngstown Police Department

The Board reviewed 8 of the 44 Mahoning County resident child deaths reported in 2005. A table summarizing these 44 child deaths is presented on page 4. In 2004-2005 an apparent cluster in geographic area and time of 2 suicides – 15 and 17 year old boys - occurred in the Lowellville area. As a consequence, the Board decided to focus its review and recommendations on suicide and suicide prevention in its report for 2005.

## ***A Suicide Prevention Message from Help Hotline***



### **WARNING SIGNS OF SUICIDE**

***Suicide is a leading cause of death for teens and adults.  
Information can prevent a tragedy from occurring.  
Become aware of the warning signs.***

- \* Suicide talk or plans***
- \* Drastic changes in behavior, eating, sleeping, school, alcohol or drug use***
- \* Loss***
- \* Hopelessness, depression.***
- \* Previous attempts.***
- \* Impulsive behavior.***
- \* Family history of violence, suicide, or chemical abuse.***
- \* Giving away prized possessions***

***A COMBINATION OF SIGNS MAY SIGNIFY A PROBLEM.  
WHAT CAN YOU DO TO HELP?***

**CALL HELP HOTLINE**  
**330-747-2696 330-424-7767**  
**1-800-427-3606 211**

According to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), suicide was the third leading cause of death among youths and young adults aged 10--24 years in the United States in 2004, accounting for 4,599 deaths. During 1990--2003, the combined suicide rate for persons aged 10--24 years declined 28.5%, from 9.48 to 6.78 per 100,000 persons. However, from 2003 to 2004, the rate increased by 8.0%, from 6.78 to 7.32, the largest single-year increase during 1990--2004. This fact suggests that increases in suicide and changes in suicidal behavior might be occurring among youths in certain sex-age groups. Based on these observations, CDC has urged health authorities to consider focusing suicide-prevention activities on these groups to help prevent suicide rates from increasing further (1).

There were 8 suicides among children under the age of 18 in Mahoning County between 1998 and 2005. Following the second suicide death of 2005, Help Hotline Crisis Center responded by providing suicide "postvention" counseling and support to students in the Lowellville school district. Help Hotline is the local social service agency certified by the American Association of Suicidology and its 24 hour crisis line receives nearly 3,000 calls each year from persons contemplating suicide.

Subsequent to the 2 suicides in 2005, D & E Counseling Center received startup funding from the Mahoning County Mental Health Board to assign a community mental health liaison to Lowellville and other school districts in Mahoning County for the early identification of depression, suicide risk, and other mental health issues among students by promoting the *Red Flags*, *SOS Signs of Suicide*, and *Teen Screen Assessment* programs.

The *SOS Signs of Suicide* program is a nationally recognized suicide prevention program for secondary school students. It is both a suicide education and suicide risk screening program that includes a presentation, teacher-led discussion, and administration and scoring of a student screening form. It is the most popular suicide prevention and screening program with local school districts.

The *Red Flags* program was developed to help students, parents, and school staff recognize and respond to the signs of depression and mental illness. The Ohio Departments of Mental Health and Education have made Red Flags kits available to every public middle school in Ohio. However, most schools have not been able to implement the program due to the lack of staff time.

The *Teen Screen* program is the most intensive intervention offered by D & E Counseling Center. Students, with parental permission, complete one of four self-administered screening instruments. Each student receives a debriefing interview and those who screen positive for suicide risk are interviewed by a clinician to determine if further evaluation or treatment is necessary. Students who require additional services are assigned a case manager who arranges for the appropriate treatment.

D & E Counseling Center has been able to sustain these interventions since 2005 with additional funding from the Margaret Clark Morgan Foundation. These local interventions undertaken since 2005 to prevent additional “suicide clusters” in Mahoning County are consistent with the U.S. Surgeon General’s recommendation in his 1999 [Call-to-Action to Prevent Suicide](#) to “develop and implement safe and effective programs in educational settings for youth that address adolescent distress, crisis intervention and incorporate peer support for seeking help” (2).

#### References:

- (1) CDC. Suicide trends among youth and young adults aged 10-24 years – United States, 1990-2004. MMWR September 7, 2007. 56(35);905-908.
- (2) U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. The Surgeon General’s Call to Action to Prevent Suicide, 1999. <http://www.surgeongeneral.gov/library/calltoaction/default.htm>. Accessed October 9, 2007.

---

#### **Report contributors:**

*Catherine Grizinski  
Duane Piccirilli  
Help Hotline Crisis Center*

*Robert Conkey  
Joseph Shorokey  
D & E Counseling Center*

*Matthew Stefanak  
Health Commissioner  
General Health District in Mahoning County  
Chair, Mahoning County Child Fatality Review Board*

*October 9, 2007*

*Mahoning County Child Fatality Review Board reports from 2000 through 2005 may be found on the Mahoning County District Board of Health website at <http://www.mahoning-health.org/healthreports-annualreports.asp>*

## Child Deaths in Mahoning County 2005

### Ages

- 44 child deaths in 2005
- 26 (59%) deaths were infants (birth-1 year)
  - 19 infant deaths (43%) were neonates (birth-28 days)
  - 7 infant deaths (16%) were post-neonates
- 1 death (2%) was preschool-age (1-4 years)
- 4 deaths (9%) was 5-9 years
- 7 deaths (16%) were 10-14 years
- 6 deaths (14%) were teens (15-17 years)

### *Deaths by Age Group by Cause*

Cause	0-1 Month	1-12 Months	1-4 Years	5-9 Years	10-14 Years	15-17 Years	Total
Prematurity	15	3					18
Birth defects	3		1	1	1		6
SIDS & Sleep-Related Conditions	1	1					2
Homicide					1	3	4
Suicide						2	2
Motor vehicle accidents					1		1
Choking				1			1
Electrocution					1		1
Drowning						1	1
Cancer				2	3		5
Infectious disease		2					2
Undetermined/unknown		1					1
<b>Total</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>44</b>

### Residence

- 24 in Youngstown (54%)
- 7 in Boardman (16%)
- 6 in Austintown (14%)
- 2 in Beaver Township (4%)
- 1 in Canfield Township (2%)
- 1 in Goshen Township (2%)
- 1 in Lowellville (2%)
- 1 in Sebring (2%)
- 1 in Struthers (2%)

### Race

- 25 were white (57%); 16 were black (36%); 3 were biracial (7%)

### Sex

- 26 were boys (59%); 18 were girls (41%)

*Source: Mahoning County District Board of Health*