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A Confidential SMS Texting Service for LGBTQ Youth Sexual and Reproductive Health

Matthew Shear, MS III

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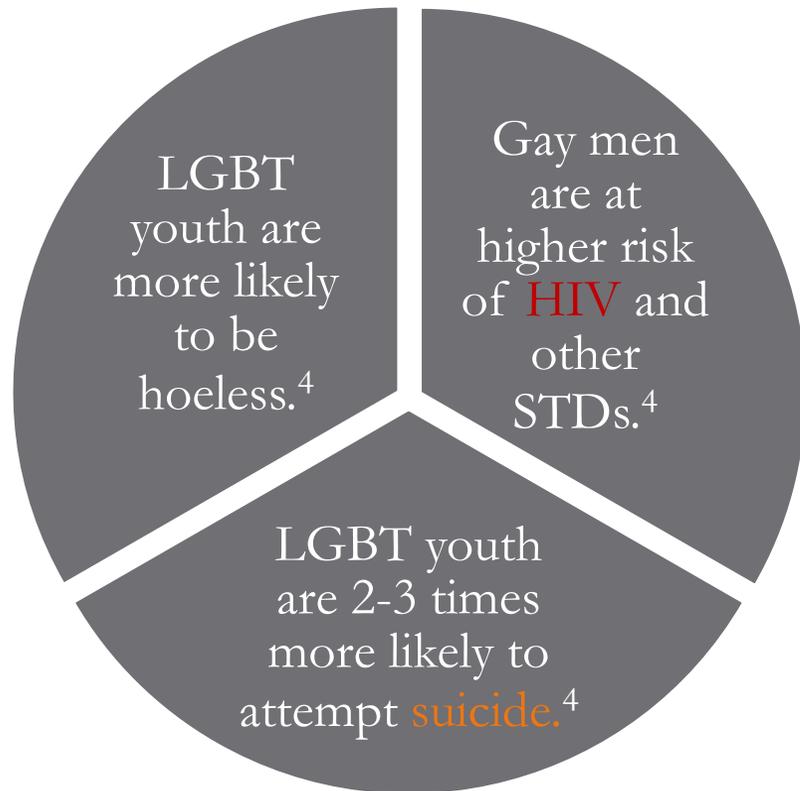
Description of Need

*“Although many lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender adolescents lead happy and healthy lives, others face tremendous challenges to growing up physically and mentally healthy. Compared to heterosexual youth, lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender youth are at higher risk for depression, tobacco, alcohol and other drug use, suicide, and **unhealthy sexual behaviors.**”^{1,2}*

Vermont’s LGBTQ youth self-identified their priorities for solving these disparities³:

1. **Queer-inclusive sex education in Vermont’s middle and high schools.**
2. Training educators to be more queer-inclusive.
3. Increasing awareness of non-binary gender identities.
4. Increasing access to gender neutral restrooms.

Public Health Cost



Estimating the cost of HIV among LGBTQ youth

- HIV infection among young men who have sex with men aged 13–24 increased by 26% from 2008–2011.⁵
- The lifetime treatment of an HIV infection is estimated to cost \$379,668.⁶

Estimating the cost of suicide among LGBTQ youth

- Suicide costs society over \$44.6 billion a year in combined medical and work loss.⁷
- The average suicide costs \$1,164,499.⁷

Bottom Line: LGBTQ youth need better access to queer inclusive reproductive health education, social service, and community organizations.

Community Perspective

Interview Subject 1:
Erika Meierdiercks
Director of Programs
Outright Vermont



“LGBTQ Youth have a need to be seen and valued, and our LGBTQ texting hotline helps provide a sense of community to youth.”

“Barriers to accessing Outright include transportation, location, family acceptance and identity.”

“Barriers to accessing the text line among rural youth include access to a cell phone, texting, and access to internet.”

“An initial goal for the texting hotline is to help it be seen as a legitimate resource by sex educators.”

Interview Subject 2:
Amanda Rohdenburg
Director of Advocacy & Director
of Events and Marketing
Outright Vermont



“Outright is looking for ways to increase our outreach to rural youth—we have Friday Night Group in Montpelier and Brattleboro, Camp Outright is in Starksboro, but we are hoping to use our text line to reach even further.”

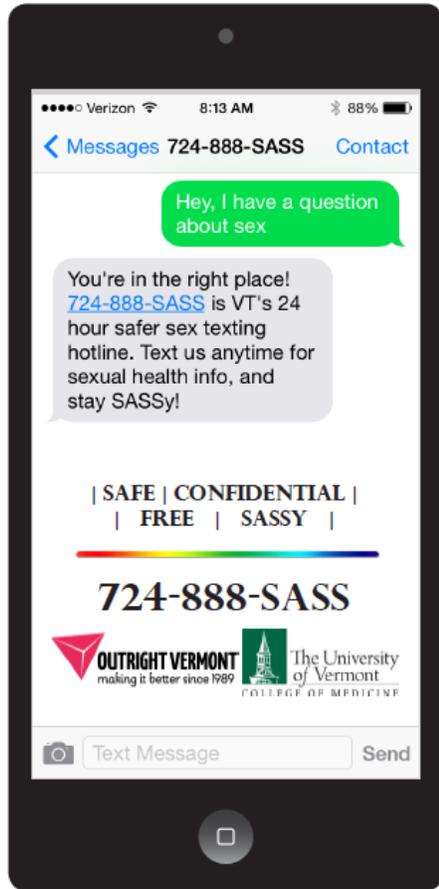
“Getting the word out about the text line has been a challenge. We may need to distribute these resources to high schools by hand.”

“A good next step would be partnering with middle and high schools in rural communities to refer to our texting hotline during their sex education courses.”

Outright Vermont is an LGBTQ youth service organization based in Burlington whose mission is to build safe, healthy, and supportive environments for gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, queer, and questioning youth ages 13-22.



Interventions and Methodology



Sample promo flyer for the textline.

Interventions:

1. Promote awareness of Outright's LGBTQ texting hotline.
2. Expand access to Outright Vermont's LGBTQ counselors.
3. Increase utilization of Outright's services among rural LGBTQ youth.

Methodology:

1. Partner with sex educators to use the hotline during sex ed in high schools.
2. Expand service to include email and live-chat.
3. Print and deliver promotional materials for the hotline to rural high schools outside of Chittenden county.

Results

1. Working with Outright Vermont, a strategic plan was designed for incorporating the LGBTQ texting hotline into high school sex education classes. In partnership with community stakeholders, the first high school to incorporate the service will be Burlington High School in May 2016.
2. Access to counselors was expanded. Vermont's LGBT Youth can now text, live chat, or email. This helps to better serve youth, regardless of their access to a cell phone. Email or Google Chat: ASK.SASS.VT@gmail.com
3. Initial analysis of the texting hotline shows 74% of all texts originate from an 802 area code—meaning Vermonters are the biggest users of the service. A strategy for hand-delivering the promotional materials to rural communities was designed, additional flyers were printed, and materials will be delivered in April 2016.

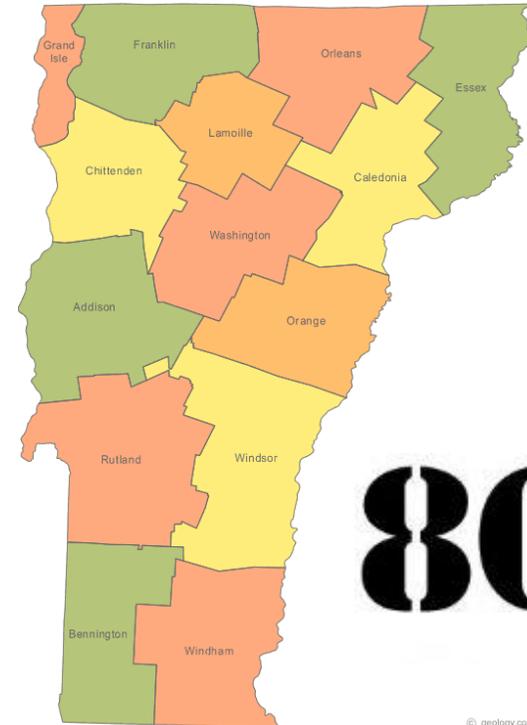
Evaluation and Limitations

Proposed Evaluation

- Quantify the number and frequency of text messages submitted to the hotline pre and post intervention to measure the increase in access/awareness.
- Quantify the number of high schools who offer the hotline during sex education pre and post intervention.

Limitations

- Vermont has a single area code (802), so it cannot be determined whether a given text message originated from a youth from rural counties of Vermont.
- Demographics of clients who access the text/chat/email service cannot be determined.



Future Directions

L

-**Look** at trends and patterns among texting utilization to analyze referrals to health care, social, or other services.

G

-**Gather** a panel of LGBT health experts to assess the validity of content provided by counselors on the texting service.

B

-**Build** a database of inquiries submitted to the textline to inform and expand existing sex ed curricula to be more queer inclusive.

T

-**Transform** and adapt published, peer reviewed methodology to assess “reach” of the texting service to more rural counties in Vermont.

Q

-**Quantify** observed changes in the hotline over time, pre and post intervention.

References

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