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Analyzing the Impact of U_Matter® Suicide Prevention Training on Vermont Organizations

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Introduction

- Suicide is one of the leading causes of death in rural communities in the United States with Vermont ranking 20th nationally.¹
- Despite passing recent legislation, Vermont remains behind other states in suicide prevention measures.²
- Best practices in suicide prevention involve directly asking individuals questions about suicide risk.³
- Gatekeeper training programs such as U_Matter® have been shown to be effective methods of increasing mental health and suicide awareness.^{3,4}
- Recent work has highlighted the impact of the U_Matter® Suicide Prevention Awareness and Skills Training (SPAST) program on community-level suicide prevention efforts.⁴

Methods



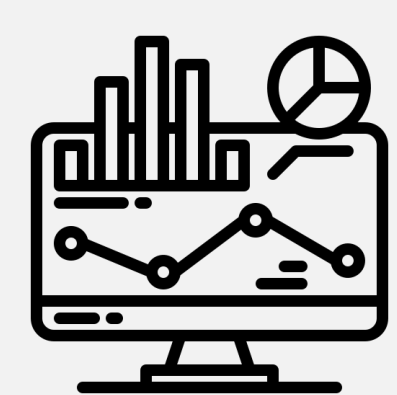
- Conducted a literature review and attended U_Matter® SPAST Training session.
- Conducted a needs analysis with Center for Health and Learning (CHL) leadership input.



- Developed interview questionnaire assessing organization comfort surrounding suicide prevention and their U_Matter® SPAST experience.
- Representatives from organizations that completed the training in the years 2024-2025 were invited to participate via email.

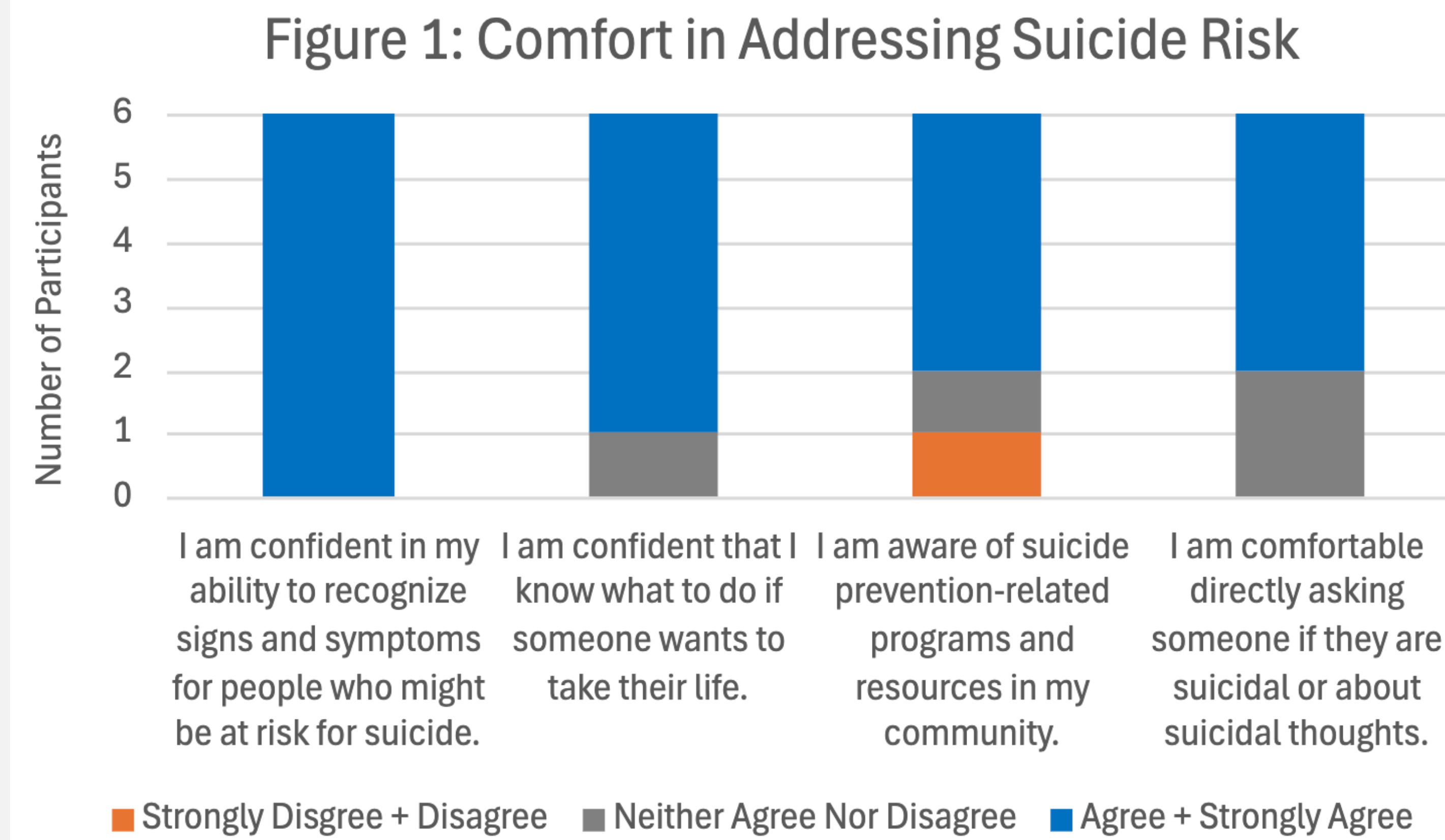


- Thirty-minute interviews were held over Zoom, an online video-chat service.
- Organizations were based in Vermont.
- Six interviews with members of six unique organizations were completed between October 23, 2025 and December 8, 2025.



- Excel was utilized to assess responses to scaled questions.
- Interview notes were analyzed collaboratively for themes related to suicide prevention, intervention strategies, and barriers for implementing change.

Results



Qualitative Themes

Increased Interest

5/6 interviewees reported interest in having more staff trained.

"Would love to do more training like U_Matter. It is more beneficial to have someone from an actual agency...[who]has more updated knowledge on the industry [than myself]."

Changing Attitudes

All reported positive changes in attitudes, confidence, or beliefs around supporting people at risk of suicide.

"[The training] allowed for the curtain to be pulled back...I think there is more openness to having conversations about it [suicide] and greater awareness to systems in place. Training provided conversations and allowed for people [employees] to see processes in place and make them [resources] more accessible than they were before."

Barrier - Time

4/6 noted time as a barrier to getting staff trained.

"The biggest barrier [we have] is time. [We have] a limited amount of time since [our employees] are busy seeing multiple [clients]...so it can be challenging to get everyone together and provide those [training] opportunities"

Discussion / Conclusions

This study demonstrates that the U_Matter® SPAST suicide prevention training has a meaningful and positive impact on confidence, attitudes, and engagement with suicide prevention efforts for participating organizations.

Key positive findings included:

- Increased comfort with discussing suicide and mental health concerns
- A broader interest in expanding training to additional staff members

Key barriers identified included:

- Time constraints regarding the ability to continue ongoing education and training
- Limited awareness of community suicide prevention resources

Future Directions

- Growing suicide rates underscore the continued need for community-based initiatives such as those exemplified by CHL.
- Since completing this project, CHL has been dissolved due to federal funding cuts.
- The resources of CHL have been distributed to new organizations and will be administered by Vermont Association for Mental Health and Addiction Recovery (VAMHAR).
- Future educational efforts could be aimed at increasing awareness of local resources related to suicide prevention by strengthening community referral services.
- Given the identified barrier of time, dedicating financial and logistical support for organizations to engage with this style of training could aid in further dissemination of this effort and future prevention of suicide within the state of Vermont.

References

1. American Foundation for Suicide Prevention. Suicide Statistics. AFSP. Published 2025.
2. Act No. 56. An Act Relating to Public Health Initiatives to Address Death by Suicide. Vermont General Assembly; 2023.
3. Burnette C, Ramchand R, Ayer L. Gatekeeper training for suicide prevention: a theoretical model and review of the empirical literature. *Rand Health Q.* 2015;5(1):16.
4. CHL Report to the Vermont Department of Health, September 2025.