

Posted on Fri, Oct. 27, 2006

FOR THE RECORD

## A deadly threat to N.C. teens

Suicide is third leading cause of death in state's 15-19 age group

*From Leslie McGuire, director of the Columbia University TeenScreen Program:*

Thank you for your Oct. 5 article, "A cry for help' from Mecklenburg teens," regarding the tragedy of suicide and risk-factors associated with youth suicide, including depression.

Suicide is a very real and prevalent problem that is too often overlooked. In North Carolina, suicide is the third leading cause of death for 15- to 19-year-olds. Studies by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention show that 16 percent of North Carolina high school students think seriously about suicide and 13 percent have made a suicide attempt.

Research tells us that 90 percent of youth who die by suicide suffer from a diagnosable and treatable mental illness at the time of their death, but the vast majority of these teens are not known to their parents, teachers or other adults as suffering from a mental disorder.

In response to this public health crisis, Columbia University has spent more than a decade developing its TeenScreen Program. TeenScreen is a voluntary mental health screening program that provides communities throughout the nation with free tools and training to identify youth who are at risk for suicide and those suffering from unidentified mental illness. Screening is always voluntary and no child is screened without a parent's permission.

The Columbia University TeenScreen Program is currently being implemented in over 470 sites in 41 states, including North Carolina.

Screening can help find those youth who are suffering from undiagnosed mental illness or are at risk for suicide, make their parents aware of their children's difficulties, and help to connect them with the mental health services that can save their lives.

Mental illness and suicide are public health issues which should be public concerns. I applaud The Charlotte Observer for your responsible coverage of this critical issue. I strongly encourage parents, health professionals, educators and others in your community to prioritize early intervention and prevention initiatives including mental health screening to help prevent unnecessary suffering and the tragedy of suicide.

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*For The Record offers commentaries from various sources. The views are the writer's, and not necessarily those of the Observer editorial board.*

