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Suicide prevention moves to text messaging

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By **Alan Johnson**

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Acknowledging younger Ohioans' preference for text conversations, the state unveiled a free, confidential way for people in crisis to connect via text message with a trained crisis counselor on Wednesday.

To access the Crisis Text Line, people text keyword "4hope" 24 hours a day, seven days a week to 741741 to talk with a counselor. It is solely a text and not a voice conversation.

The hotline is aimed at people struggling with suicidal thoughts, as well as those who are depressed, thinking of self harm, victims of bullying or bogged down in an emotional crisis, officials said.

"Crisis Text Line is not a replacement for counseling," said Tracy Plouck, director of the Ohio Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services. "Crisis hotlines have been used successfully for decades, but technology is changing, and we need to be sure to meet Ohioans where they are in order to get them the help they need."

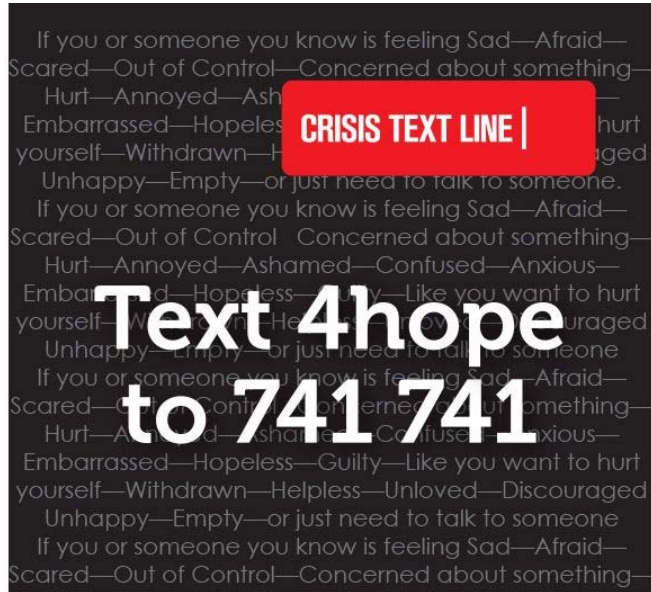
There is no charge to the caller and no cost to the state to link to the National Crisis Text Line, a nonprofit entity that has financial support from Melinda Gates and Reid Hoffman, founder of LinkedIn, among others.

The Stark County Mental Health and Addiction Recovery Board began operating the text line service about two years ago as a state-funded pilot project.

Executive Director John Aller said the service directly resulted in two lives being saved when a text conversation prompted the counselor to call emergency medical personnel.

Counselors in Stark County had 1,300 text conversations with 918 people as of Aug. 25. The line is getting 70 to 80 text contacts a month.

The Crisis Text Line is an outgrowth of the "Strong Families, Safe Communities" partnership between the the mental health agency and the Ohio Department of Developmental Disabilities.




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Details about the line are available online at <http://www.crisistextline.org/faq/>

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