

University of Missouri

**Project Title: Rural School Libraries Anchoring Community Mental Health Literacy**

*“I’m no expert, but we have to do more around mental health in this school. It’s never been this bad, and I’ve been teaching for 23 years. I don’t even know where to start. This community doesn’t have many mental health resources, and our counselor is only part-time. There has to be a better option than consulting Dr. Google or telling families about the clinic 45 minutes away. I asked our principal and our librarian for help but, you know, none of us are really trained for this kind of thing.” – Rural Missouri Teacher*

**Project Summary:** The School of Information Science & Learning Technologies and the Hook Center for Educational Renewal at the University of Missouri propose a one-year planning grant in the Community Anchors category to assess the capacity of rural school districts to promote community mental health literacy via school libraries. This assessment will inform a broad-scale intervention that will expand opportunities for rural public school libraries to contribute to school and community mental health initiatives and prepare rural school librarians to deliver mental health literacy support and training. Estimated budget is \$50,000.

**Statement of National Need:**

*Young people in rural areas are in greater need of mental health literacy than those in urban areas.* Rural residents are more likely than their urban peers to have a mental illness, and less likely to have access to mental health specialists.<sup>1</sup> “Research suggests that the prevalence of mental illness and death by suicide in rural areas may be related to limited mental health literacy,” that is, limited knowledge of mental health risk factors and protective behaviors.<sup>2</sup>

*School librarians can serve as community anchors for mental health literacy.* In rural communities, public libraries, schools, and churches are community anchor institutions.<sup>3</sup> School librarians touch the lives of children, teachers, other school professionals, and often parents, too. Rural school librarians can play a role in making health information available, if they have training and support.<sup>4</sup> They can play a similar role for mental health information. Despite this, little research has been done to document how school librarians might help support mental health in ways other than bibliotherapy, and even that research is scant.<sup>5</sup>

**Goals and Outcomes:** This planning grant will support a capacity assessment to determine: 1) current efforts among rural school libraries to promote community mental health literacy and 2) current individual, organizational, and community capacity of rural school libraries to promote community mental health literacy. Implications for policy, research, practice, and training will include recommendations for a state action agenda to embrace rural school libraries as a vehicle to promote mental health literacy in rural communities.

**Project Design:** The project will start on December 1, 2017 and end on November 30, 2018. The co-PIs and research assistant will complete this project in two phases.

Phase I (December-July): Assess the current capacity of school librarians, school counselors, and school administrators and other stakeholders in rural communities to better understand opportunities for and barriers to expanding the role of libraries and librarians in school and community mental health.

- Develop leadership group with representation from key stakeholders (see partners below) and establish plan for regular two-way communication on project.

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<sup>1</sup> Meit, M., et al. (2014). *The 2014 Update of the Rural-Urban Chartbook*. Grand Forks, ND: Rural Health Reform Policy Research Center.

<sup>2</sup> Story, C.R., Kirkwood, A.D., Parker, S., & Weller, B.E. Evaluation of the Better Today/Better Tomorrow youth suicide prevention program: Increasing mental health literacy in rural communities. *Best Practices in Mental Health*, 12(1), 14-25.

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.benton.org/blog/rural-broadband-programs-and-community-anchor-institutions>

<sup>4</sup> Lukenbill, B., & Immroth, B. (2009). School and public youth librarians as health information gatekeepers: Research from the Lower Rio Grande Valley of Texas. *School Library Media Research*, 12, 1-30.

<sup>5</sup> Baruchson-Arbib, S. Bibliotherapy in school libraries: An Israeli experiment. *School Libraries Worldwide*, 6(2), 102-110.

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- Review and synthesize available statewide data on children’s mental health and related district needs with a focus on rural schools and communities.
- Identify mental health “local best practices” underway in libraries in rural school/communities.
- Survey rural school librarians, counselors, administrators, and other stakeholders on current motivation, resources, and organizational climate to pursue this initiative.
- Develop interview protocol for rural librarians on mental health resources, training, and ability to support students and teachers.
- Travel to rural locations for interviews, observation, and resource analysis.
- Assess and review data.

Phase II (August-November): Develop and pilot tools for helping school librarians meet students’ and teachers’ mental health literacy needs across rural areas nationwide.

- Summarize and disseminate rural mental health “local best practices” underway.
- Identify themes in mental health literacy needs.
- Develop/pilot tools to help school librarians participate in school and community mental health literacy
- Produce and disseminate state action plan for systematic expansion of effective tools across rural communities in Missouri.

**Current Significance & National Impact:** One in five children ages 13-18 have or will have a serious mental illness, and the average delay between onset of symptoms and seeking/receiving care is 8-10 years<sup>6</sup>. Almost 40% of students with a mental health condition age 14 and older who are served by special education drop out of school, the highest dropout rate of any disability group.<sup>6</sup> Suicide is the second leading cause of death for 10-14 year olds and 15-24 year-olds, nationally and in Missouri.<sup>7</sup> Missouri ranks 35<sup>th</sup> in the nation on mental health workforce availability.<sup>8</sup> Rural communities lack accessible, acceptable, and appropriate mental health supports. This project will provide the groundwork to develop a scalable program to help school librarians provide mental health information resources to students, teachers, and other school personnel.

**Key Personnel:** Denice Adkins, SISLT Associate Professor, contributes expertise in school libraries and information seeking of rural and marginalized communities. Beth Brendler, SISLT Assistant Professor, contributes expertise in serving diverse communities, collection assessment, and qualitative research methods. Melissa Maras, Assistant Director, Hook Center for Educational Renewal, MU College of Education, contributes expertise in school mental health, capacity-building, and community-engaged scholarship.

**Partners:** Missouri Association of Rural Education, Missouri School Counseling Association, Missouri Association of School Administrators, Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, MU Partnership for Educational Research (partners include 23 school districts in the state); Fulton School District & Fulton State Hospital.

**Budget:** The budget for this planning grant will be approximately \$50,000, and will include funding for personnel to conduct research (SISLT faculty, Hook Center Assistant Director, and a graduate research assistant), as well as travel costs for researchers to visit rural areas for interviews and environmental scans.

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<sup>6</sup> The National Alliance on Mental Illness (n.d.). *Mental Health Facts: Children & Teens*. Retrieved on October 4, 2016, from <https://www.nami.org/NAMI/media/NAMI-Media/Infographics/Children-MH-Facts-NAMI.pdf>

<sup>7</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Injury Prevention and Control. Web-based Injury Statistics Query and Reporting System (WISQARS) [online] (2005). *10 Leading Causes of Death by Age Group, United States – 2014*. Retrieved on January 5, 2017 from [www.cdc.gov/injury/wisqars](http://www.cdc.gov/injury/wisqars). Available at: [https://www.cdc.gov/injury/wisqars/pdf/leading\\_causes\\_of\\_death\\_by\\_age\\_group\\_2014-a.pdf](https://www.cdc.gov/injury/wisqars/pdf/leading_causes_of_death_by_age_group_2014-a.pdf)

<sup>8</sup> Mental Health America (n.d.). *Mental Health in America – Access to Care Data*. Retrieved on January 5, 2017, from <http://www.mentalhealthamerica.net/issues/mental-health-america-access-care-data>