

Chelsea Magyar: Mitigate school shootings through threat reporting

By Chelsea Magyar

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Like any Valentine's Day, lovers made plans and singles remembered their singleness this year. But amidst the chocolate and flowers and singles' awareness, the one-year anniversary of the shooting at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Fla., loomed, asking for a different kind of awareness. An awareness that sees that not everything is all right and that gun violence in schools is still an issue but not a hopeless one.

Awareness could be the key to mitigating the problem of school shootings: awareness of those around us and awareness of the resources we can utilize to mitigate school shootings.

In many incidents of school gun violence, someone knows that something is off. A 2004 study conducted by the U.S. Secret Service and the U.S. Department of Education that examined 37 incidents of U.S. school violence from December 1974 through May 2000 revealed that in most cases, at least one other person knew about the attacker's intentions or attack plan. This shows that we are often aware when danger is afoot, but we may not know what to do about it. We are not aware of the seriousness of a threat or we are unaware of our potential to positively intervene.

To address these blind spots, I think Coloradans should be aware of Safe2Tell, an anonymous reporting system through which students, teachers, administrators and community members can share concerns with law enforcement without being traced and with assurance that their concerns will be taken seriously.

According to research conducted by University of Arizona associate professor in psychology Michael Sulkowski, trust that support systems will respond to students' concerns and the experience of connectedness to the campus community positively correlated with students' willingness to report perceived threats. On the other hand, lack of trust in support systems and disconnection to community were among the factors that prevented threat reporting. Safe2Tell's assurances that calls are not traced and that proper action is taken and tracked provides tools to encourage trust in this reporting system. Campus connectedness is perhaps beyond the scope of Safe2Tell, but an awareness of the power of the individual to

reach out, intervene and become an agent of connection combined with systems like Safe2Tell could make all the difference between a school shooting and a troubled individual listened to and treated with compassion.

Threat reporting in action shows this is true. In 2011, the founders of Safe2Tell reported that 83 percent of threats communicated to Safe2Tell resulted in positive action and that the program prevented an estimated 28 attacks. There are also more recent success stories that can be found at Safe2Tell.org.

To encourage awareness of reporting systems such as Safe2Tell, I recommend that schools invite Safe2Tell to give presentations and that individuals program the Safe2Tell number — 1-877-542-7233 — into their contacts, download the app on their phones, and visit the Safe2Tell website. In the 2011 Safe2Tell study, researchers found that Safe2Tell received a larger number of calls after trainings about the reporting system.

Valentine's Day may always be a day of singles' awareness. It will now also be a day to mourn the lives lost and the tragedy suffered at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School. But perhaps it can also be a day that makes us aware of the individuals around us and aware of the power of a single call and a single agent of change.

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