

Throughout the state, students are taking an active role in helping their peers with mental wellness. School-based peer-led mental wellness programs are in 300 schools or districts, reaching the majority of Wisconsin's 421 school districts. Sources of Strength is one of those programs.

## How the Program Works

Sources of Strength is a youth mental health promotion and suicide prevention program that calls on peer social networks to create healthy norms and culture. The focus is on upstream, strength-based work that will ultimately prevent suicide, violence, bullying, and substance misuse.

Youth lead the groups – that is critical to the program model. Adult advisors walk alongside the students and, together, they work to improve mental health and wellness in their school communities. That often radiates out to their broader community.

## The Solution – Building Connections

Bringing students together to connect and build a sense of belonging is foundational to Sources of Strength. The program equips and empowers students to have the skills and tools necessary to listen and talk to one another. Peer leaders are trained to be the eyes and ears in their school – to recognize if other students could use help and simply talk to them.

Programs also develop positive messaging campaigns on mental wellness for their schools. The goal is that young people become part of the solution in their school and community.

"All this makes it easier for kids to talk about mental wellness which is so important in decreasing the stigma associated with mental health," said Katrina Johnson, Project Manager – [Connect Strength](#) and advocate for Sources of Strength. "The focus is on what we can do every day in our schools and communities to bring people together. When that happens connections are made and individuals build strength. Connection is protection."



*Top: Katrina Johnson, center on floor, speaks with attendees of a Sources of Strength regional retreat.*



*Right: Sources of Strength students came together at a regional retreat.*

“ When you focus upstream and on building strengths in students it works and spreads wellness. Sources of Strength has made it easier for young people to talk about mental health.

– Katrina Johnson

Project Manager – Connect Strength

Building quality relationships among teens is important:

- The quality of teen friendships can predict physical and mental health in adulthood. ([source](#))
- Quality relationships among teens is a far better predictor of long-term outcomes than the quality of teens' relationships with their parents. ([source](#))

## Additional School-based Peer-led Mental Wellness Programs

In addition to [Sources of Strength](#), there are other school-based peer-led mental wellness programs in place throughout Wisconsin. Those include [Hope Squad](#), [NAMI Raise Your Voice Club](#), and [REDgen School](#).