



# Strategic Planning Recommendations

April 11-12, 2007

Staffed by: The Center for Learning Excellence  
The Ohio State University  
807 Kinnear Road  
Columbus, Ohio 43212

## Introduction

### Background & History

Red Flags is a comprehensive mental health awareness program designed to help junior high/middle school students, teachers and school staff recognize signs of depression (and other mental health issues). In addition, Red Flags helps individuals recognize the symptoms related to suicide and to identify resources that can help children in grade 6-8 seek assistance for themselves, peers or siblings who may be suffering from and/or exhibiting signs of depression. This school based program was created in response to school violence and shootings. An education subcommittee of the Mental Health Association of Summit County (MHASC) developed Red Flags to address such critical issues. The intent of the program is not to diagnose individuals but to refer individuals for appropriate services.

The three-pronged program includes an in-service training for school personnel, a video-based curriculum for students called [\*Claire's Story: A Child's Perspective of Childhood Depression\*](#), and a seminar for parents, students and community members. Red Flags was piloted in 10 Ohio schools in the 1998-99 school year reaching 3,150 students, parents and school personnel. After evaluation and revision, it was made available for implementation in the fall of 1999. The pilot evaluation showed that students significantly increased their knowledge of clinical depression based on pre/post tests. All participating schools indicated the program was "very needed."

The Ohio Department of Mental Health and the Ohio Department of Education have since made Red Flags Program Kits available to every public middle school in Ohio and a private donor has made kits available to all non-public schools. To date, more than 656 public schools and 144 non-public schools in Ohio have requested Program Kits. The program has also been used in a number of other states and it is being piloted in others. More than 337,320 children and adults nationwide have received the informational booklet, *Red Flags in Children's Behavior*.

Statewide data from the 2003-2004 school year have been collected from 149 schools in 54 Ohio counties. Approximately, 12,000 students in those schools received Red Flags

materials/information. According to ??, 93% of these schools have students with depression or other mental illnesses. Following the program, at least 494 students self-identified or were referred with concerns about depression (????). Of those, 291 students were further evaluated by a mental health/health professional (????).

A model illustrating the operation of the Red Flags program is indicated in Figure 1. This model suggests that there are four primary outcomes associated with the implementation of the Red Flags program. Students and others exposed to the Red Flags program should: 1) be more aware of mental health issues; 2) know what to do if they or a friend exhibit signs of a mental illness; 3) be able to identify resources to which they might refer themselves or a friend and 4) feel less stigma associated with mental illnesses. Finally, MHASC developed the Red Flags.org website which offers information on depression in children and adolescents. It also provides online support for the Red Flags program.

-----  
 Insert Figure 1 here.  
 -----

Figure 2 provides an illustration of the current management structure dedicated to implementing the Red Flags program in Ohio and nationally. An MHASC staff member and consultant are currently responsible for ... The Advisory Board provides advice concerning... The Board of Directors of the MHASC is the legally and financially responsible for the oversight of the Red Flags program.

-----  
 Insert Figure 2 here.  
 -----

### **Current Evaluation Recommendations**

Beginning in ????, a formal, three-year evaluation of Red Flags was funded by the Ohio Department of Mental Health (ODMH). The evaluation developed and conducted by the University of Akron (see ... for a more detailed account of the evaluation) focused on fidelity issues using a mixed method research design. The following information was taken from the executive summary of the evaluation report. The initial qualitative investigation, consisted of several focus groups involving participants and administrators of the Red Flags program. A second qualitative component, consisted of phone interviews with program administrators. Quantitative data were collected by administering several research instruments to students and school staff.

Results of the evaluation were predominantly positive. Analysis of the data indicated that participants in the Red Flags program were significantly more aware of signs of depression than were the non-participants. Responses indicated there was no significant difference in the willingness of middle school students to make referrals but data also indicated that students who participated in the Red Flags program had significantly more positive gains in their academic

orientation.<sup>1</sup> Data also indicated a greater reduction in the students' disruptive behavior following participation in the program.

The evaluators were not able to get good estimates of the fidelity in presenting all of the key components of the Red Flags program. Each of the schools in the evaluation study used components of the Red Flag program based on individual needs and other constraints. Schools also varied widely in the amount of class time devoted to implementation of the Red Flags program. It is important to note that all data indicated the program was low cost to implement. Quantitative analyses also identified overall significant student gains in terms of their awareness of the symptoms of depression and other mental illnesses.

The evaluation team from the University of Akron provided the following five recommendations to enhance the Red Flags program:

1. Develop a theoretical framework that explains why the Red Flags program is likely to produce desired outcomes
2. Develop a comprehensive model depicting how program activities are linked to program outcomes<sup>2</sup>
3. Develop an implementation plan describing the necessary components of the Red Flags program that must be implemented
4. Develop recommended evaluation procedures designed to measure key processes and outcomes associated with the Red Flags program
5. Develop a Resource Center to provide advice and materials related to the implementation of the Red Flags program

## **Planning Team**

A planning team was convened and charged with developing a strategic plan that would include recommendations to ensure that Red Flags is appropriately evaluated, marketed and sustained in order to promote implementation in Ohio and nationally. Goals driving the planning process included the following: 1) to sustain the Red Flags program over time; 2) to address recommendations in a University of Akron evaluation study; and 3) to establish Red Flags as an evidence-based program. An evidence-based program is one for which there is credible evidence linking program actions to desired outcomes. Members of the planning team are indicated in Appendix A.

## **Planning Process**

---

<sup>1</sup> A measure of "school climate" was used as a proxy measure for academic performance.

<sup>2</sup> Figure 1 provides the beginnings of such a model.

The Center for Learning Excellence (CLEX) assisted the Red Flags planning team in developing the strategic planning recommendations summarized below. The Center for Learning Excellence is a unit within the College of Education and Human Ecology at the Ohio State University. The planning process used to support the work of the Red Flags planning team was based on several unique features. Perhaps, most importantly, team members distinguished between long-term and strategic planning recommendations. Long term recommendations focused on a three to five year time frame while strategic recommendations focused on a 12 to 18 month time period and were judged to have a high feasibility of implementation.

The planning process used to support the development of the Red Flags strategic plan can be summarized in five basic steps. These steps and corresponding questions addressed during each phase of the planning process are summarized below:

1. **Status check or background information**-What is the current status of the Red Flags program and what information should be considered in developing recommendations to enhance the program?
2. **Affirmation of mission/vision**-What is the purpose of providing the Red Flags program and to what desired future state does this program contribute?
3. **Development and prioritization of targeted impacts**-What must be accomplished in order to improve the Red Flags program?
4. **Development of strategies**-How can these improvements be accomplished?
5. **Development and initiation of implementation procedures**-What action steps must be taken in order to initiate strategies?

Each section below begins with the statement of a primary goal for the continued development of Red Flags over the next three to five years. These goals are followed by a number of strategies that team members believed would contribute to the achievement of the goal. Those strategies indicated in bold were judged to be high priority issues that should be addressed in the next 12 to 18 months. Finally, action steps are specified for specific strategies.

## **Evaluation Goal, Strategies and Action Steps**

**Evaluation Goal: Complete two or more external evaluations over the next three to five years. An external evaluator is an individual who is not part of the implementation of Red Flags.**

- Identify and pay a stipend to a researcher(s).
- Partner with stakeholders./Partner with state agency to complete evaluation.
- Offer an incentive to schools implementing Red Flags to complete evaluations./Partner with universities to complete evaluations of the Red Flags program.

- Hire a private research firm to conduct evaluation studies.
- Ask a university based evaluation class to evaluate the Red Flags program.
- Measure needs of students not receiving the Red Flags program to serve as a comparison group.
- Identify and ask student(s) working on dissertations/thesis's to complete evaluations of the Red Flags program.
- **Contact researchers already involved in school based mental health research and create funded partnership to complete a series of evaluation studies.**

**Implementation Plan for Strategy: Contact researchers already involved in school based mental health research and create a funded partnership to complete a series of evaluation studies.**

**Action steps to be initiated over the next 12 to 18 months<sup>3</sup>:**

1. Identify national and/or state researchers who might be interested in participating in evaluating the red Flags program.
2. Develop summary materials and points of interest related to the red Flags program and it's promise as an effective intervention for potential researchers.
3. Discuss potential partnership with researchers.
4. Investigate potential funding sources for evaluation efforts including foundations.
5. Complete template for grant funding that can be used to respond to a variety of potential funders.
6. Submit at least one proposal for funding in the next 12 months.
7. Secure funding for evaluation.
8. Complete evaluation study.
9. Publish and disseminate results of completed evaluation studies.

### **Intervention Enhancement Goal, Strategies and Action Steps**

---

<sup>3</sup> It is unlikely that steps 8 and 9 can be completed in the next 12-18 months.

**Intervention Enhancement Goal: Update training and intervention materials.**

- Up-date training materials annually.
- Use web-based site as a management tool to track location of Red Flags interventions.
- Solicit sponsorships to underwrite cost of training materials.
- Produce training materials in American Sign Language, Spanish and Somali and assure that content is culturally appropriate. Assess what languages are relevant on an on-going basis.
- Develop a Red Flags Resource Center.
- Create and implement “certification” for trainers.
- **Create new student intervention video and update training materials.**

**Implementation Plan for Strategy: Create new student intervention video and update training materials.**

**Action steps to be initiated over the next 12 to 18 months:**

1. Develop theoretical framework to guide Red Flags.
2. Develop comprehensive model of Red Flags intervention.
3. Develop implementation plan and guidelines for implementation.
4. Identify firm to produce curriculum updates.
5. Develop overview of and contract to produce desired updates.
6. Engage services of production firm.
7. Transfer training materials to web./Develop web based training capacity.
8. Ensure that training materials are Ohio specific
9. Distribute training materials via disk

**Management Goal, Strategies and Action Steps**

**Management Goal: Enhance the capacity to manage the local, state and national distribution of the Red Flags program.**

- Strengthen linkages with the Mental Health Association at the state and national levels.
- Consider the merits of securing independent 501c3 status for Red Flags.
- Strengthen the capacity of the Red Flags Advisory Board.
- Add staff members dedicated to the management and implementation of Red Flags.
- Consider turning Red Flags into a “profit-making” corporation.
- Market and sell training materials.
- **Develop procedures that allow the MHASC Board to provide policy and oversight functions.**

**Implementation Plan for Strategy: Develop procedures that allow the MHASC Board to provide policy and oversight functions.**

**Action steps to be initiated over the next 12 to 18 months:**

1. Diversify funding base and secure support from Ohio Department of Mental Health, Ohio Department of Education, Foundations, Private Corporations and/or Pharmaceutical Companies.
2. Develop a formal business plan and operating budget for Red Flags that is reviewed and revised on an annual basis.
3. Copyright/register all Red Flags materials.

### **Marketing Goal, Strategies and Action Steps**

**Marketing Goal: Annually increase participation in the Red Flags program.**

- Disseminate using various media channels including annual mailings to schools, via the internet and web-site, through peer to peer presentations, consumer and family presentations, speakers’ bureau, written materials and/or celebrity spokesperson(s).
- Position Red Flags so that web-based materials are identified through the use of various search engines.
- Disseminate to various audiences such as associations of health and behavioral health professionals and school board members.

- Create a message that emphasizes school success, general success stories and mental wellness in marketing materials.
- Create incentive and identity by recognizing involvement in Red Flags. Increase state agency recognition of Red Flags.
- Hold an annual conference/recognition event.
- Present Red Flags to behavioral health classes at colleges and universities.
- Collaborate with Family and Children First Councils and schools that have interests and/or record of involvement in community affairs. Market to these partners.
- Coordinate comprehensive launch of marketing campaign during mental health week 2008.
- **Develop and brand all Red Flags materials including a brochure, web-site, newsletter or e-news letter and PSAs.**

**Implementation Plan for Strategy: Develop and brand all Red Flags materials including a brochure, web-site, newsletter or e-news letter and PSAs.**

**Action steps to be initiated over the next 12 to 18 months:**

1. Secure resources to marketing revamp materials.
2. Create a Request for Proposals (RFP) and solicit proposals from marketing firms.
3. Develop marketing materials.
4. Pilot test marketing materials.
5. Develop specific targets for marketing campaign.
6. Initiate marketing campaign.

## **Summary**

Red Flags is a comprehensive mental health awareness program designed to help junior high/middle school students, teachers and school staff recognize signs of depression (and other mental health issues). In addition, Red Flags helps individuals recognize the symptoms related to suicide and to identify resources that can help children in grade 6-8 seek assistance for themselves, peers or siblings who may be suffering from and/or exhibiting signs of depression. This school based program was created in response to school violence and shootings. An

education subcommittee of the Mental Health Association of Summit County (MHASC) developed Red Flags to address such critical issues. The intent of the program is not to diagnose individuals but to refer individuals for appropriate services.

A planning team was convened and charged with developing a strategic plan that would include recommendations to ensure that Red Flags is appropriately evaluated, marketed and sustained in order to promote implementation in Ohio and nationally. Goals driving the planning process included the following: 1) to sustain the Red Flags program over time; 2) to address recommendations in a University of Akron evaluation study; and 3) to establish Red Flags as an evidence-based program. An evidence-based program is one for which there is credible evidence linking program actions to desired outcomes.

Members of the planning team developed and/or refined four goals, 32 strategies related to achieving these goals and 27 action steps to be completed in the next 12 to 18 months. Strategies that will be addressed and action steps that will be initiated include:

**Contact researchers already involved in school based mental health research and create a funded partnership to complete a series of evaluation studies.**

1. Identify national and/or state researchers who might be interested in participating in evaluating the red Flags program.
2. Develop summary materials and points of interest related to the red Flags program and it's promise as an effective intervention for potential researchers.
3. Discuss potential partnership with researchers.
4. Investigate potential funding sources for evaluation efforts including foundations.
5. Complete template for grant funding that can be used to respond to a variety of potential funders.
6. Submit at least one proposal for funding in the next 12 months.
7. Secure funding for evaluation.
8. Complete evaluation study.
9. Publish and disseminate results of completed evaluation studies.

**Create new student intervention video and update training materials.**

1. Develop theoretical framework to guide Red Flags.
2. Develop comprehensive model of Red Flags intervention.

3. Develop implementation plan and guidelines for implementation.
4. Identify firm to produce curriculum updates.
5. Develop overview of and contract to produce desired updates.
6. Engage services of production firm.
7. Transfer training materials to web./Develop web based training capacity.
8. Ensure that training materials are Ohio specific
9. Distribute training materials via disk

**Develop procedures that allow the MHASC Board to provide policy and oversight functions.**

1. Diversify funding base and secure support from Ohio Department of Mental Health, Ohio Department of Education, Foundations, Private Corporations and/or Pharmaceutical Companies.
2. Develop a formal business plan and operating budget for Red Flags that is reviewed and revised on an annual basis.
3. Copyright/register all Red Flags materials.

**Develop and brand all Red Flags materials including a brochure, web-site, newsletter or e-news letter and PSAs.**

1. Secure resources to marketing revamp materials.
2. Create a Request for Proposals (RFP) and solicit proposals from marketing firms.
3. Develop marketing materials.
4. Pilot test marketing materials.
5. Develop specific targets for marketing campaign.
6. Initiate marketing campaign.

The planning team also identified several issues that must be considered in future planning activities. These issues focused on incorporating evaluation as a key component of program delivery, considering school climate as formal program outcome and developing necessary modifications so that Red Flags might be implemented in other settings such as churches. There is a considerable knowledge base and a wealth of experience that suggests that Red Flags may be

a valuable additional to the variety of programs that enhance the well-being of youth and families. Implementation of the strategies defined in this strategic plan should provide a basis for the continued development of Red Flags and should help in the quest to adequately address mental illnesses among young people in Ohio's and the nation's schools.

DRAFT