
Catholic Lifesaver Corps

Project Report

April 2022



Catholic
LIFESAVER
— CORPS —

It is with extreme gratitude that we offer the following report on the Catholic Lifesaver Corps initiative funded, in large part, by the Fulcrum Foundation and operated by our archdiocesan Mental Health Ministry.



CLC Cohort 1 meets with Jake Novack

Project History

This initiative ultimately began with **Jake Novack**, a high school student in Los Angeles. Following a suicide in his high school, Jake was disappointed in the school's response, which was to avoid the issue entirely.

Through a referral, he discovered LivingWorks, an organization that offers suicide prevention training internationally. He personally attended their safeTALK workshop, which is a 4-hour training on recognizing and responding to the signs of suicidal ideation. He further attended their ASIST program (Applied Suicide Intervention Skills Training), which prepares participants to intervene with those contemplating suicide.

Jake desired to go one step further and petitioned LivingWorks to train him as a safeTALK facilitator, allowing him to run the workshop for his peers. LivingWorks declined, citing a policy that facilitators must be adults. Jake persisted, continually advocating that he could effectively play the role.

Today, Jake is a senior in high school and a fully certified safeTALK facilitator. He opened the door for the now-unfolding Catholic Lifesaver Corps (CLC) which trains high school students to be safeTALK facilitators for their peers in Catholic schools and parishes.

As we now say at CLC:

*Jake was the rock tossed into the pond...and
we are the first ripple.*

Jake shared about the importance of this initiative in a CLC infomercial found here: [safeTALK Infomercial - Zoom](#)

Locally, CLC began with **David & Cassandra Pina**, parishioners at St. James Cathedral who are both LivingWorks trainers. David had a connection with Jake in L.A. and nurtured a vision for creating carbon copies of this remarkable young man, placing young people at the forefront of transforming Catholic schools and parishes into suicide-safer communities.

LivingWorks says:

“Suicide-Safer Communities are passionate in their belief that suicide is preventable and that suicide prevention is a shared responsibility where every person from policy makers to individual community members has the potential to make a difference and save a life. In acquiring an official “Suicide-Safer Community” designation, communities will be recognized for their efforts as leaders in formulating and implementing suicide prevention initiatives on a sustainable and ongoing basis over time.”

CLC is now one of those special initiatives that produces suicide-safer communities.

David approached our archdiocesan **Mental Health Ministry**, seeking infrastructure to potentially develop and implement a new model involving youth. The Mental Health Committee fully embraced this idea and immediately partnered with the Catholic Schools office to develop a plan.

Following a generous donation from a single donor (\$10K) and an extraordinary gift from the Fulcrum Foundation (\$18.5K), we suddenly had enough financial resources to launch a single CLC cohort.



David Pina leads a LivingWorks training for CLC

Project Execution & Results

Reps from Mental Health Ministry met with principals from all 11 Catholic high schools to pitch this new initiative and open an [online application](#) process for schools who desired to participate.

2 Catholic high schools applied (and were accepted) to the pilot CLC cohort:

Archbishop Murphy High School in Everett and **Pope John Paul II High School** in Lacey.

We asked each school to mindfully select 4 students as safeTALK facilitator trainees and up to 4 adults as ASIST suicide intervention trainees. The CLC model establishes these selected students as workshop facilitators with the adults serving as community resource people who flank them. Community resource people are at-the-ready to intervene with any subsequent workshop participant who might step forward and admit suicidal ideation.

Our 2 schools – following a thoughtful and comprehensive interview, discernment, and orientation process – submitted the following people to Cohort 1:



CLC Cohort 1

Students

- Annie E.
- Bianca O.
- Leah S.
- Kiani W.
- Nora A.
- Catherine E.
- Noah F.
- Bella K.

Adults

- Dane Stringfellow
 - Julie Suek
 - Nicole Thompson
 - Autumn Long
 - Gary Baits
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In addition, the Mental Health Committee submitted the following members to become ASIST trained for the parish workshops:

- Joseph Stevens
- Cathy Callans

The initiative was further supported by the following church personnel in various administrative and pastoral roles:

- Archbishop Etienne
- Bishop-Elect Frank Schuster
- Fr. John Madigan
- Amanda Zilke
- Sandra Barton Smith
- Deacon Eric Paige
- Jaye Dryden (and Palisades staff)
- Deacon Ronnie San Nicolas
- Nancy Granger
- Daria Lobato
- Joe Cotton



Playing the 'Game of Fun' in the evening

We established 2 two-day training retreats at the [Archbishop Brunett Retreat Center](#) at the Palisades in Federal Way:

- March 7th – 8th, 2022
- March 21st – 22nd, 2022

Both ASIST and safeTALK train-the-trainer courses were taught by David and Cassandra. The goal of the retreats, beyond teaching students how to facilitate workshops and intervene with individuals contemplating suicide, was to establish a sense of community/team and Catholic identity for cohort members. This occurred more deeply than we could have possibly imagined. Students bonded with each other at profound levels, united in a shared commitment to something exceptionally important and bigger than themselves.

Evenings at the retreat center were filled with laughter and joy as we engaged in lively games, discussions, and community-building activities, including walks to the beach and Catholic trivia competitions.

Further still, CLC is committed to rooting itself in our Catholic faith and spirituality. Every session began with prayer and each evening concluded with extended prayer and song in the chapel. Fr. John Madigan joined us and offered a crucial faith-based reflection on this initiative's role in establishing the Kingdom of Heaven on earth. We intentionally ground all efforts in God and Catholic principles that respect life and human dignity.

On March 8th, 2022, we received a special visit from Archbishop Etienne and Bishop-Elect Frank Schuster who offered an intimate commissioning Mass for all CLC members in the chapel. In his homily, Archbishop Etienne reflected on his own journey as a former operator for a suicide prevention hotline. He expressed that the CLC initiative fully lives into the Gospel and that he was very proud of the students for accepting this mantle.

Following Mass, Archbishop Etienne and Bishop-Elect Schuster joined the CLC students for lunch and fellowship, a highly meaningful experience for them. Blessing and communing with CLC students was Bishop-Elect Schuster's FIRST official act upon being named a bishop by Pope Francis.

As training retreats were unfolding, the Mental Health Ministry and LivingWorks were working behind the scenes to develop safety structures that would wrap around student CLC members to ensure their safety and mental well-being while engaging in this heavy topic. Examples include regular, monthly all-team meetings to ensure a supportive group environment for this work. Plus, all CLC members will be assigned a mentor from our Mental Health Committee who will check-in with them to gauge their wellness level while serving in this capacity.



Commissioning Mass with Archbishop

Project Impact

- The following are some quotes from participant feedback questionnaires:
 - “I feel better prepared to help someone thinking about suicide.”
 - “Thank you for bringing this workshop to our high school students. You are helping us create a culture of care in our schools...It is a real blessing!”
 - “David Pina is an excellent teacher. I didn’t have many expectations going into this, but I have learned so much.”
 - “I like the awareness of the vocabulary used and the cultural differences when it came to the topic of suicide. The guidance and knowledge were useful.”
 - “This was good – a lot in a short time – but very worth it.”
 - “I love David. He was so amazing and helpful. He truly changed the way I would react to someone struggling with suicide. Thank you, David.”
 - David noted that, in all his years of training safeTALK facilitators, the high school students were above average in their performance of this role. They proved that not only are students ABLE to play this role, but also have the capacity to play it BETTER than their adult counterparts.
 - During the second training retreat, one student from Pope John Paul II shared that, following the first retreat, he picked up on a possible suicide invitation from a peer who made a puzzling comment. This student’s previous ASIST training prepared him to ask the question about suicidal ideation. Thankfully, the peer was attempting to make a joke, but our CLC student indicated that it was his involvement in CLC that caused him to make sure. Our students have different ears and skill sets now. And, as more safeTALK workshops get offered, this will be multiplied and spread around our schools and parishes. Open and prepared eyes and ears in our schools and parishes mean suicide-safer communities.
 - At the final prayer service and commissioning in the Palisades chapel, each CLC student and adult, one by one, shared why this initiative is so meaningful. The profound sharing elicited tears from the entire community, a truly beautiful moment, and a foretaste of the Kingdom of Heaven.
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Lessons Learned

- The initial plan involved selecting 2 students from each school. We upped it to 4 for the pilot because only 2 schools applied despite our hope for 5. However, we learned that 4 students per school is ideal in terms of establishing solid teams within the overall CLC team. Great team-dynamics within school communities emerged. We will likely stick with school teams of 4.
- Thanks to Archbishop Murphy's amazing infrastructure-building, we learned processes that work brilliantly for assuring high caliber and capable students. Their process involved an application, a teacher recommendation, and an interview. We plan to standardize their approach for all schools moving forward.
- We ran into some obstacles trying to fit rigid LivingWorks requirements into school structures. However, we learned that it might work well to offer subsequent, student-facilitated safeTALK workshops on Saturdays. To create an incentive for students to participate, we want to award service hours to workshop attendees. Learning how to save a life most assuredly counts as legitimate service.

- We learned that we need to build in some conference meeting time or check-in time with the SEL counselors during training retreats.



Sending our CLC members off with a blessing

- We want to continue the active and intentional integration of our Catholic identity and the call of discipleship, so students know that this is a ministry of the Church, and they are the hands and feet of Christ implementing this important work. (i.e. Masses, reflections, journaling, connections to Pope Francis' words on mental health, knowledge of what our Church is doing and how we can echo those opportunities in our communities.)
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Future Plans & Sustainability

- Given that Jake preceded our students as a youth facilitator, he most graciously agreed to serve as a mentor for our students. In fact, On March 21st, Jake met with our CLC team via Zoom to offer insight and feedback. We plan to subsequently utilize current CLC members as future mentors for future CLC cohorts. We believe peer-to-peer support is crucial.
- Once we have a few school safeTALK workshops under our belt, we plan to expand to parishes. We will work with the archdiocesan Youth Ministry office and with the Mental Health Committee to plan logistics for parish-based safeTALK workshops. This ensures that Catholic public school students and other parishioners benefit from CLC as well.



A CLC student practices facilitating a safeTALK workshop

CLC Student Expectations

Each student CLC facilitator has committed to offer at least 1 safeTALK workshop for their school and 1 workshop for a nearby parish before the end of the 2021-2022 school year. Workshops have already been scheduled for the latter part of April, 2022. They further commit to provide at least 2 safeTALK workshops for their school and 2 for parishes during the 2022-2023 school year. They might choose to offer more than that. Each safeTALK workshop can have a maximum of 30 participants.

- We will offer a report to Catholic school principals in April and eventually petition new school applications for CLC Cohort 2, set to train in the fall. (October, 2022)
- We hope to launch CLC cohorts each year to replace students that go on to college. We remain excited about the reality that post-high school, these students can continue to offer safeTALK workshops at their colleges and other locations. The goodness will spread.

- We want to invite schools to reflect on how CLC fits into their larger mental health/wellness school program. Perhaps we consider infusing some of the recommended trainings/programs for FULL faculty and staff that have been vetted by the Mental Health and Diversified Learners Committees: <https://mycatholicsschool.org/for-catholic-schools/catholic-identity/mental-health-resources/> Specifically, **Mental Health First Aid Trainings** through **NAMI**, an 8-hour course that teaches participants how to help someone who is developing a mental health problem or experiencing a mental health crisis. The training helps identify, understand, and respond to signs of addictions and mental illnesses. 1) The **adult Mental Health First Aid course** is appropriate for anyone age 18 and older and is available in both English and Spanish. 2) The **youth Mental Health First Aid course** is primarily intended for adults to learn how to help young people experiencing mental health challenges or crises. It reviews the unique risk factors and warning signs of mental health problems in adolescents ages 12-18 and emphasizes the importance of early intervention. **Find a course** near you.
- We plan to place the CLC program info on both the OCS and archdiocesan websites. We desire for this new program to be highly visible to elevate the work.
- We will continue to seek additional grant funding and private donations to help expand the number of available safeTALK facilitators and ASIST-trained adults. Our grand vision involves CLC reps from all 11 Catholic high schools at some point.

The Mental Health Ministry would like to express our deepest thanks to the Fulcrum Foundation and a private donor for believing in this initiative and supporting it so generously. Together, we will create suicide-safer communities and build the Kingdom of God.

CLC Expense Report

Date	Description	Amount
3/7/22	CLC Retreat Supplies	\$406.88
3/8/22	March 7-8 CLC Training Accomodations @ ABRC	\$4,918.75
3/8/22	March 7-8 CLC ASIST Training 16 participants at \$120/ea	\$1,920.00
3/8/22	CLC Cohort 1 Dinner	\$95.77
3/22/22	March 21-22 CLC Training Accomodations @ ABRC	\$3,151.25
3/22/22	March 21-22 CLC safeTALK Training 10 participants @ \$950/ea	\$9,500.00
3/22/22	CLC Cohort 1 Dinner	\$125.38
Total		\$20,118.03

Sponsor a CLC student!

As CLC continues to deploy more and more peer-to-peer training in suicide prevention, we increase the amount of heightened eyes and ears in our school hallways and parish halls. What could be more important than that? Your help is needed to develop more student workshop facilitators and expand this crucial pro-life movement!

An investment of **\$2500** pays for 1 CLC student to complete two training retreats necessary to become a certified safeTALK facilitator. They will, in turn, offer several suicide prevention workshops and increase safety in our communities. Please join CLC as a **SPONSOR** and invest in saving lives! If interested, please contact Joe Cotton at joe.cotton@seattlearch.org or (206) 382-4847.