



FirstLink

2019 ANNUAL REPORT

FirstLink
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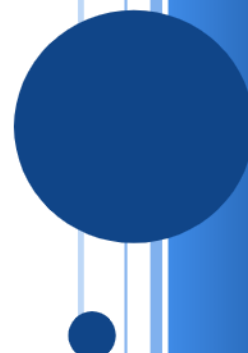


TABLE OF SERVICES

Information & Crisis Services

Telephone Services

- Information & Referral
- Listening & Support
- Crisis Intervention
- Suicide Lifeline

Crisis Contract Lines

- North Dakota University System - Statewide
- Rape & Abuse Crisis Center
- Community Chaplains
- Military Service Center
- Region IV South – Both Adult & Children Mobile Crisis Teams
- Rape, Abuse, and Incest National Network (RAINN)
- Southeast Human Service Center

Suicide Services

- Caring Contacts Program
- Suicide Education Outreach Training

Community Information Services

- Community Resource Collection

Emergency Services

- Child Abduction Response Team (CART)
- Disaster Response and Volunteer Coordination

Education

Mental Health Trainings

- Mental Health First Aid
- Youth Mental Health First Aid
- Applied Suicide Intervention Skills Training (ASIST)
- SafeTALK Training

Community Education

- 2-1-1 University
- Suicide Talk with FirstLink
- Community Resources
- Active Listening
- Noteworthy Customers
- Resilience & Self-Care
- Youth Suicide Prevention
- Suicide Risk Assessment

Community Outreach & Awareness

Public Relations & Marketing

- Media Correspondence
- Agency Newsletter
- Social Media
- Advertising
- Speaking Engagements

Development

- Fundraising
- Grant Writing

Giving Tree of Hope/Toys for Tots, Connection Fair, and Job Fair

Administration

Finance

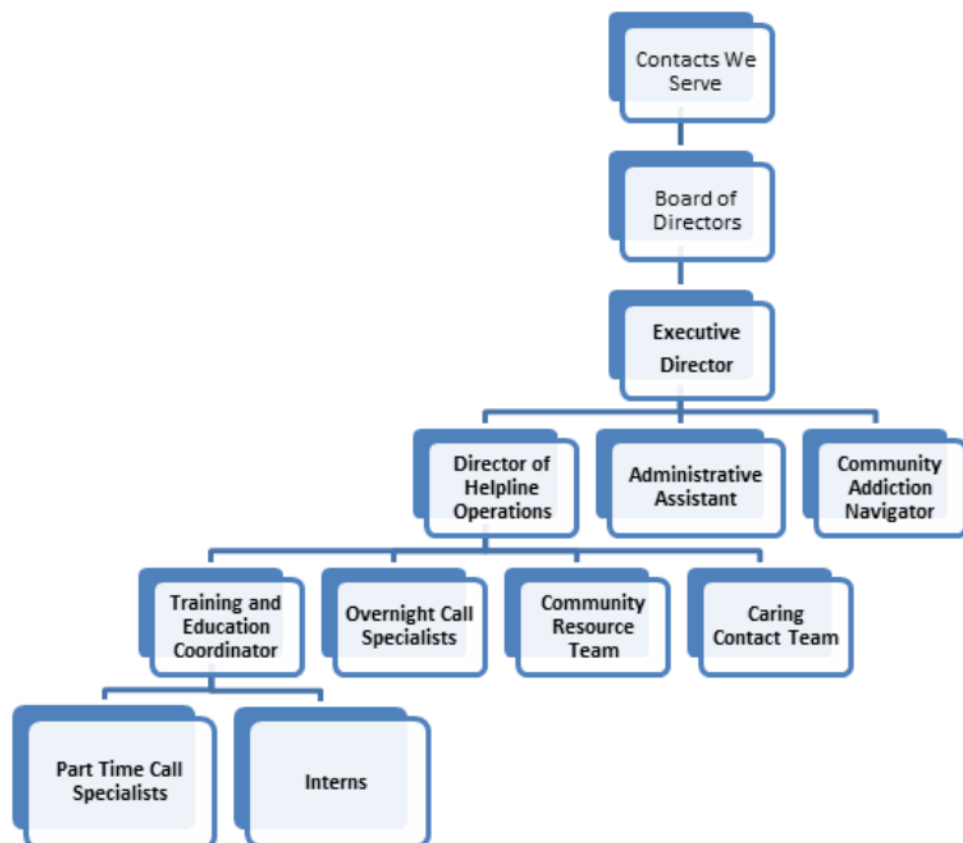
- Budget
- Audit
- Financial Reporting
- Accounting

Human Resources

- Benefits
- Staffing

Technical Operations

2019 ORGANIZATIONAL CHART



FIRSTLINK'S MISSION, VISION, AND PURPOSE

Mission: To assist people in identifying, accessing, and making effective use of community and volunteer resources.

Vision: To be the first link in linking people and resources 24 hours a day.

Purpose:

- Provide appropriate Information and Referral of mainly Health and Human Service resources to callers and community members
- Provide 24 hour listening and support to callers
- Provide suicide prevention services including handling calls from the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline network at the local level
- Provide training in the areas of Mental Health, Suicide Prevention, and Workplace Wellness
- Provide after-hours services to other agencies by handling their calls when their offices are closed

FirstLink continues to be accredited by the American Association of Suicidology (AAS) since 1987 and by the Alliance of Information and Referral Systems (AIRS) since 2009.

FirstLink is contracted to answer phones for 17 agencies to provide a variety of support services. FirstLink screens each call for crisis intervention needs, provides listening & support or information & referral according to individual contracts. FirstLink regularly attends community events in an effort to spread awareness about our organization. In 2019, we attended 20 different community events and reached approximately 2,740 individuals.

FUNDING

In 2019, we were blessed to be funded by many very generous donors, foundations, state departments, grants, contracts, and special events. Major funders included: United Ways from across the state, ND Dept of Human Services, ND Dept of Health, Military, Sanford, Essentia, AFSP, cities of Fargo, Moorhead, West Fargo, Cass and Clay Counties, MN Dept of Health, SERVE Foundation, Alex Stern Foundation, NDUS, SEHSC, BCBS Caring Foundation, Farmers Union Insurance, numerous churches, service clubs, businesses, and individuals. Our 2019 corporate sponsors were Bremer Bank, Dakota Medical Foundation, MJ Capelli's, and Prairie St. John's. We want to thank all of you for helping us give hope to so many 24 hours a day.

2019 REPORT – REDESIGNED WEBSITE

FirstLink has a newly redesigned website. Go to myfirstlink.org to search our community database, print our resources, search for upcoming trainings, and to make a donation.



[HOME](#)

[ABOUT US](#)

[GET HELP NOW](#)

[RESOURCES](#)

[Crisis Services](#)

[Suicide Support
Services](#)

[Printable Resources](#)

[Policies](#)

[EVENTS • TRAININGS](#)

[SERVICES](#)

COMMUNITY DATABASE

Not sure where to turn for food assistance programs, a listening ear, or other resources? FirstLink is here for you. Click to search our database.



GET HELP NOW

In need of immediate support and not sure what to do? We have resources available 24 hours a day, every day. Check out our available resources.

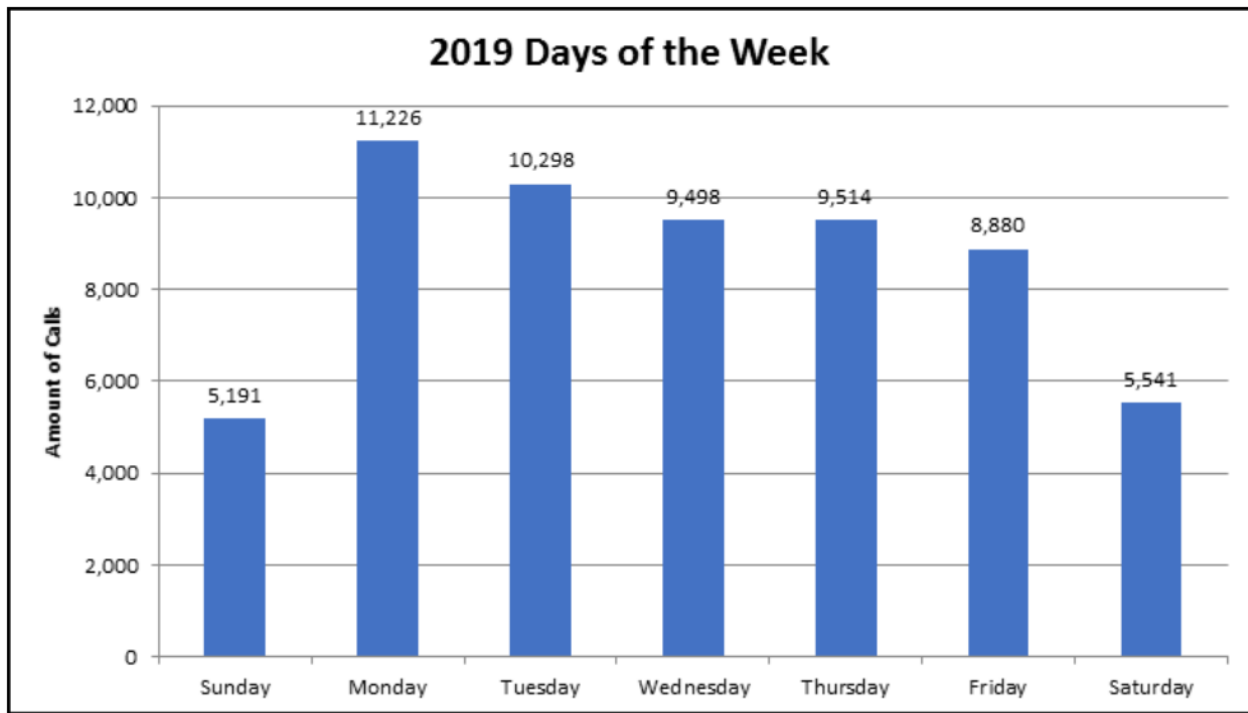


2019 STATISTICS – VOLUNTEER UPDATE

Volunteers help with a variety of tasks at FirstLink. Interns help by answering 211 and NSPL phone lines and go through the entire 75 hours of training to become a call specialist. Other volunteers help with fundraising, administrative tasks, operations, painting, putting together office equipment, photography and they help spread the word about our mission. FirstLink welcomed 7 interns from local universities that were trained as Call Specialists and provided resources, help and hope to FirstLink's contacts. Volunteers helped at our annual breakfast, luncheon and Giving Tree of Hope/Toys for Tots event. FirstLink has a dedicated Board of Directors that volunteer hours of their personal time for meetings, trainings, and assist with special events. In 2019, FirstLink volunteers served 1,157.5 hours totaling a value of \$16,748.11 (excluding our Giving Tree of Hope event.) Amazing! Thank you!

2019 STATISTICS – PHONE CONNECTIONS

FirstLink handled a total 60,148 contacts. Primarily, these contacts are incoming calls on the FirstLink 2-1-1 Helpline, National Suicide Prevention Lifeline, and our contract agencies' after-hours phone lines. The total handled contacts also include texts and outgoing calls made by our Caring Contacts Program team and the Community Navigator.



2019 STATISTICS – CONTACT TYPES

Contact Types

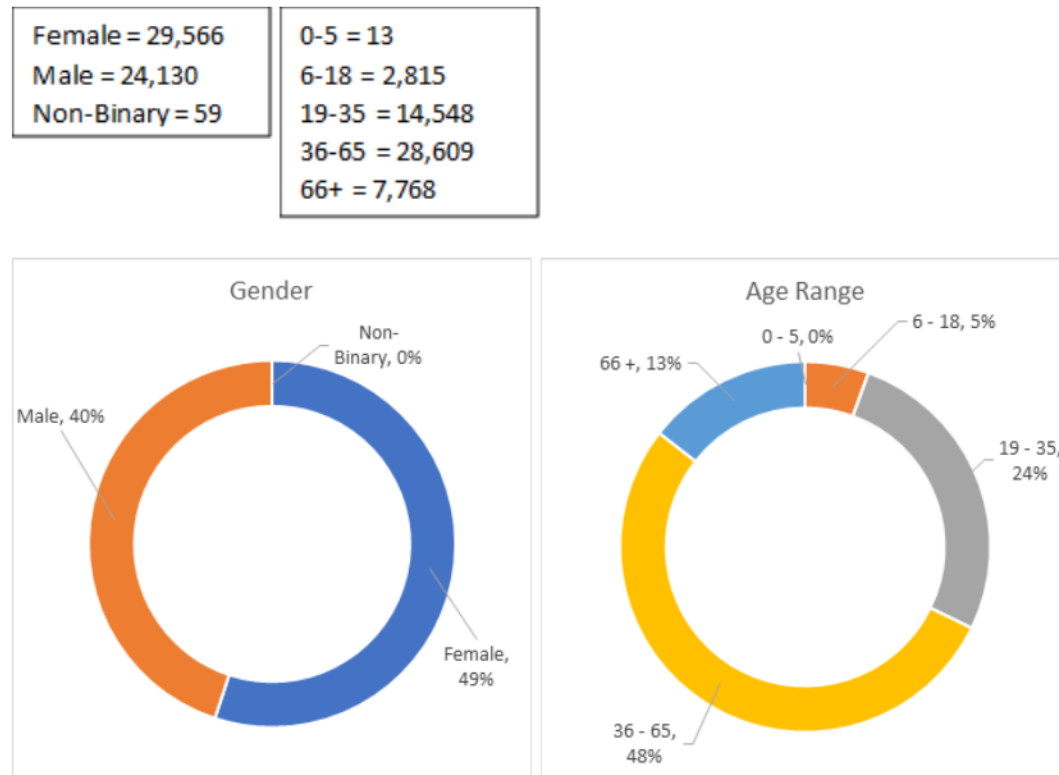
FirstLink categorizes each call or text with one of four call types: Information, Referral, Listening & Support, or Crisis Intervention.

- **Information** calls include situations where the caller is requesting specific details about certain agencies in their community. Nonproductive calls, such as hang ups, are also classified as an information call type.
- **Referral** calls are when the caller informs a Call Specialist about a specific need they are having, and the Call Specialist assesses the situation and determines which resources are most appropriate for potentially meeting that need.
- **Listening & Support** calls consist of Call Specialists using active listening to support the caller.
- **Crisis Intervention** calls include suicide-related calls, calls when our Call Specialists initiated rescue efforts, or calls through our contract agencies in which a Call Specialist had to connect with the agencies' on-call staff.

Please Note: Our contacts are documented as one of those four call types for internal reporting purposes. The reality is that every call or text we receive is regarding a crisis that the person reaching out is experiencing. Imagine you are the mother who just fed your baby the last bottle of formula you have, and you can't afford to buy more; this is a crisis to them, but a referral call to us. Imagine being newly widowed, unable to sleep in the middle of the night and all you need is to hear a voice on the other end of the phone, but don't know who to call; this is a crisis to them, but a listening & support call to us.

2019 STATISTICS – DEMOGRAPHICS

FirstLink identifies a caller's demographics during an interaction via telephone or text. FirstLink consistently tracks a help-seeker's location (if they disclose this information), gender, and age range. In 2019, 49% of the individuals FirstLink connected with were female and 40% were male. 59 individuals identified as non-binary. Callers do not always provide a gender when contacting us. Most of the individuals FirstLink connected with were between the ages of 36 and 65.



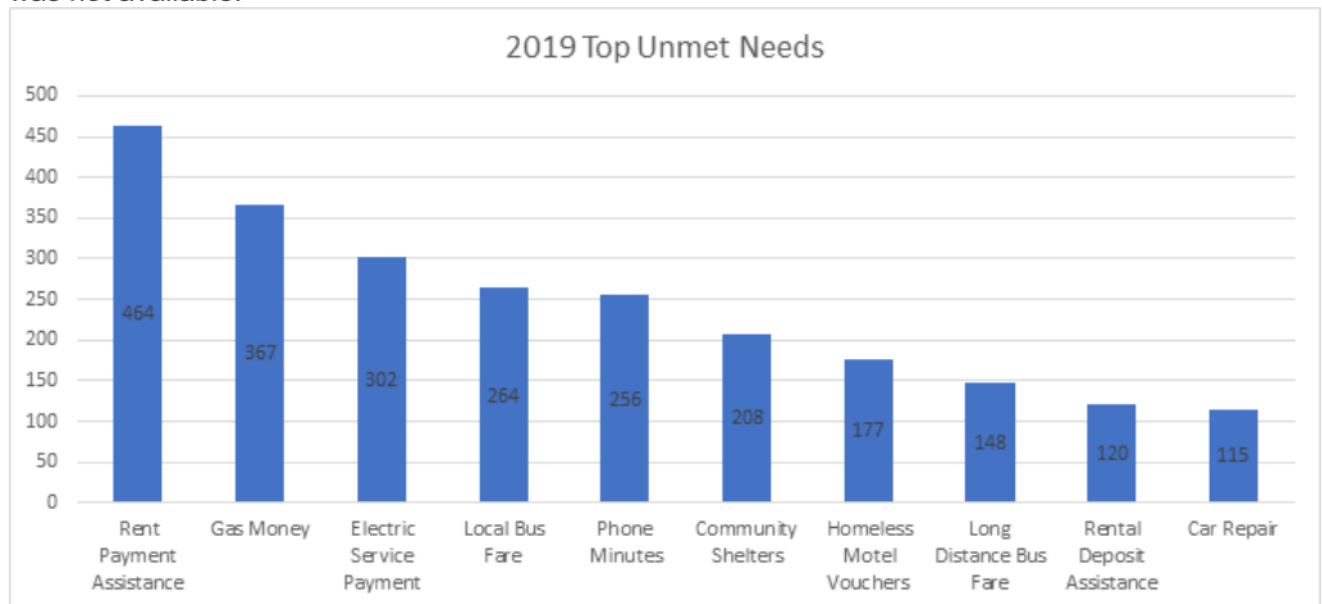
2019 STATISTICS – RESOURCES

In 2019, FirstLink offered 18,061 community resources to meet a variety of needs for help-seekers. The following is a breakdown of those needs:

- Basic Needs (food, shelter, transportation, rent and utility assistance): 8,154
- Consumer Services (tax assistance, money management, consumer protection): 252
- Criminal Justice and Legal Services: 530
- Education: 87
- Environment and Public Health/Safety: 413
- Health Care (physical health and medicine): 766
- Income Support and Seeking Employment: 890
- Individual and Family Life (leisure activities, volunteering, spiritual, support groups): 1,667
- Mental Health and Substance Use Disorder Services: 2,618
- Organization and Community Services (art and culture, disaster services, government): 1,535

At times, FirstLink may have been unable to provide a referral to a community resource for a need the help-seeker had. FirstLink tracks the needs that went *unmet* and the reason why. The most common reason that FirstLink was unable to provide a referral was due to no such

program existing to assist. Other common reasons for unmet needs include: help-seeker ineligible for service, has used all available services, refused referral, and immediate assistance was not available.



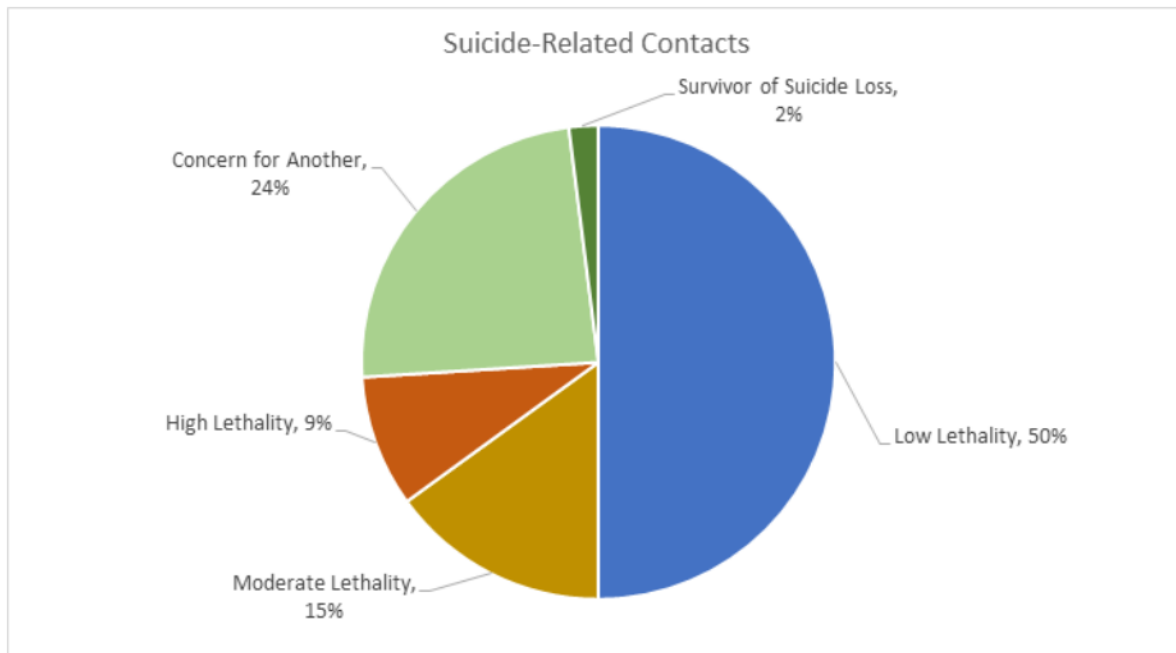
2019 STATISTICS – SUICIDE RELATED CONTACTS

In 2019, FirstLink handled 13,446 contacts related to suicide. Of those, FirstLink only had to initiate rescue services 102 times. Only 0.7% of our suicide-related contacts required rescue efforts, which goes to show just how much having a non-judgmental, listening ear can do to deescalate a situation. The 102 rescues sent also reflects the 102 lives potentially saved because that individual reached out to FirstLink for help.

When FirstLink handled a suicide-related interaction, the risk of suicide is assessed right away.

The outcomes of that initial assessment include:

- Low Lethality (thoughts, but no plan or intent)
- Moderate Lethality (plan, but no intent; or intent, but not plan)
- High Lethality (imminent risk of suicide or suicide in-progress)
- Concern for Another (lethality not assessed, unless able to connect with the person at risk)
- Survivor of Suicide Loss (emotional distress, although not suicidal)



Public Resource Directory / Online Database of Resources

FirstLink's entire database of resources is available on our website: www.myfirstlink.org. On any page, an option is available to 'View Resources'. Searching for resources is easy and efficient. Our Community Resource Team is currently working to assure that all resource information is accessible to individuals in need.

In 2019, FirstLink redesigned the category search feature on our resource directory. This feature is still being updated today, so please try searching for services and provide any feedback you may have to offer. Our Community Resource Team can be reached by email at database@myfirstlink.org.

FirstLink's website was viewed over 29,000 times in 2019. This includes over 7,000 visitors accessing our resource directory.

We're excited to launch a series of videos coming in 2020 that will help the public gain skills to search for appropriate resources and find helpful information using our online resource directory. Check out FirstLink's social media so you don't miss these quick and informative videos!

Texting

FirstLink assisted 293 help-seekers via text in 2019. All of FirstLink's services (referrals to resources, listening & support, and crisis intervention) are accessible via text. Individuals within North Dakota and Clay County, MN can simply text their zip code to 898-211 to connect with FirstLink.

Of our 293 texting interactions in 2019, nearly half (44%) were 'referral'. These interactions included exploring the needs of the help-seeker and connecting them with appropriate community resources. 22% of the texts FirstLink handled were providing Listening & Support or Crisis Intervention. We sent out 3,257 referrals via text in 2019.

2019 REPORT – CONTACT SUCCESS STORIES

"Holidays are stressful for me. I have called many times the last two weeks—thanks for being there for me."

"My New Year's resolution is to take care of myself. I am going to call the therapist that you referred me to, and I have your number to call 24/7 for times of anxiety."

"Thank you, I feel a lot better after being able to talk for a while."

"It was great to talk to you. I wish I would have had this conversation about my addiction and thoughts of suicide twelve years ago."

"Thank you for the ASIST workshop. I have to tell you that I put the training to use on Friday, with success!"

"I appreciate the text option, I loved getting resources for rent texted to me."

2019 REPORT – GIVING TREE OF HOPE AND TOYS FOR TOTS

FirstLink hosted their annual Giving Tree of Hope event in December! It's an amazing event that we have been partners with the community for 46 years. Together we provide gifts to children and special needs adults who would not otherwise receive a gift during the holidays.

This year we collected 13,519 gifts. On distribution day, we distributed those 13,519 to families and the remaining gifts were distributed to over 20 nonprofit agencies in the Fargo-Moorhead area to help support their clients.

This program relies heavily on the community's support and would not be possible without our amazing volunteers. This year 142 volunteers dedicated over 975 hours of their time to the Giving Tree of Hope event. Volunteers staffed our collection table at West Acres mall, helped organize and wrap gifts on collection day, and helped give out gifts on distribution day!

We also held a Connection Fair as they waited to receive their gifts. They were able to learn about other resources in the community from 8 other nonprofits and how they may benefit from their services.

As they left the event, we had two booths set up with agencies who are looking for employees. Our goal was to connect those attending with other supports they may need. It was a great day for all who attended and for those who got to help by volunteering and buying gifts!

2019 REPORT - TRAINING & EDUCATION

In 2019, FirstLink provided 222 presentations on a variety of topics including mental health, suicide, community resources, disasters, and self-care. Through these presentations we reached 5,289 people. For the second year in a row we were able to educate people in each region of North Dakota about the help and hope that is available through our 24-hour phone services.

2019 was a record-breaking year for our community training program. FirstLink provided 45 community trainings on how to help a person experiencing mental health challenges or thoughts of suicide. As in past years, FirstLink staff provided safeTALK, ASIST, and Mental Health First Aid trainings to organizations and community members across North Dakota and Minnesota. In 2019, FirstLink added 2-1-1 University and Suicide Risk Assessment trainings. Both trainings are one hour long and free to attend. 2-1-1 University provides an opportunity for professionals and community members to learn how to use FirstLink's online resource database. Suicide Risk Assessment training is a collaboration between FirstLink and the Fargo-Moorhead ReThinking Mental Health group. This training trains participants in the Columbia Suicide Severity Rating Scale, examples of how to triage care for suicidal individuals, and how to make a safety plan. Both trainings are offered periodically throughout the year and available to organizations by request.

For more than 20 years, FirstLink has provided Suicide Education Outreach to schools in Cass and Clay County. We provide students with information on myths and facts related to suicide, warning signs for suicide, and resources that are available to help. Through this program, we reached 2,543 students. During the presentation we give students a chance to write down questions they have about suicide and mental health so they can be answered by the presenter. We also instruct them to write down their name if they would like to speak with a counselor. In 2019, we helped connect 71 students to their counselor for help. FirstLink is always happy to present to different groups in the community to help them learn how they or their clients can use our database of resources to get connected to help and hope.

2019 REPORT – CARING CONTACTS PROGRAM

In 2019, FirstLink received a total of 2,375 referrals to the Caring Contact Program. 11,232 outgoing calls were made to participants, leading to 3,489 successful contacts/calls. FirstLink mailed 1,694 caring cards to program referrals. This program provides suicide support prevention services by offering follow-up caring interactions with participants after they have been seen at a clinic or discharged from a hospital or Emergency Department. The program is also offered to those individuals who have reached FirstLink through the FirstLink 2-1-1 Helpline or National Suicide Prevention Lifeline and stated they had suicidal ideation.

The follow-up program attempts to contact participants within 24-48 hours from FirstLink receiving the referral. A caring card is mailed with our contact information to those that provide an address.

FirstLink's grant with the Substance Abuse Mental Health Service Administration (SAMHSA) that funded this program for the past six years ended the end of June 2019. The funding from the North Dakota Department of Human Service ended December 31, 2019. FirstLink is focusing its efforts to find stable funding for 2020.

The data that was collected from SAMHSA and Columbia University on Caring Contacts was published and can be found here: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/28261860>. It was shown that follow-up calls with clients after a suicide-related hospital discharge was successful in helping participants to not die by suicide (79.6%) and helped to keep them safe once home (90.6%).

Total referrals	Outgoing calls	Successful contacts	Caring cards
2,375	11,232	3,489	1,694

Outcome Goals:

- Support the physical and emotional safety of participants
- Empower and motivate participants to use resources available to them in their communities
- Reduce service gaps by promoting continuity of care

- Encourage resilience and the development of a safety plan

Process Goals:

- Assessing for risk
- Non-judgmental listening and supportive contact
- Offer coping strategies and other information resources
- Support and encourage self-help strategies
- Encourage appropriate resources & treatment promotion
- Develop a crisis management plan and/or safety plan
- Review the crisis/safety plan
- De-escalating crisis (when applicable)
- Determine when the next Caring Contact will occur (this is tailored to the unique and individual needs of each participant)

Hospitals and Clinics that are Partnered with FirstLink:

- * Altru Health Systems – Grand Forks
- * Central Valley Health – Jamestown
- * CHI St. Alexius – Williston
- * Community Action Partnership – Dickinson
- * Elgin Community Clinic
- * First District Health (9 Clinics)
- * Glen Ullin Family Medical Center - Elgin, ND
- * Jacobson Memorial Hospital and Care
- * Jamestown Regional Medical Center (JRMC)
- * ND State Hospital – Jamestown
- * Northland Community Health (6 Clinics)
- * Northwood Deaconess Health Center – Northwood
- * Prairie St. Johns - Fargo
- * Sakakawea Medical Center – Hazen
- * Sanford – (Fargo/Moorhead/Bismarck/Minot locations)

*Spirit Lake Health Center

* SW District Health – Dickinson

* Spectra Health

*Bismarck Public Health

* Wishek Community Hospital and Clinics

Caring Contact Success Stories

“I appreciate this program. I look forward to the calls for many reasons, including that I enjoy feeling connected by having someone call me, the calls are unbiased, and I have a feeling of hopefulness after the call.

“I received the Caring Card in the mail, and it helped to remind me that I am not alone. I am very thankful that FirstLink can check in with me; your services are beneficial for the community and me.”

“This program has been invaluable to me; I’m so thankful to have your support.”

2019 REPORT – COMMUNITY NAVIGATOR FOR ADDICTION PROGRAM

The first full year of the Community Navigator Pilot Project saw steady growth and unprecedented collaboration from Community Partners. FirstLink established Memorandums of Understanding with 21 agencies and several more partnerships with services ranging from the entire continuum of recovery from withdrawal management to recovery housing and peer recovery support services. These agencies have regular contact with FirstLink with their bed capacity and program availability. Because FirstLink is the largest curator of health and human service resources in North Dakota, additional information and referral are offered as needed through the ongoing support and follow-up provided to participants.

The focus for the Community Navigator program is to provide a warm referral to the appropriate service treatment, while also tracking referral outcomes and facilitating collaborative partnerships between multiple systems of care. This support is offered to anyone regardless of their age or income who is looking for treatment for themselves or someone else. Even though the program was piloted in Cass County ND and Clay County MN, many referrals come from outside this area, particularly in rural communities where access to treatment is limited. Call Specialists provide support, advocacy, and crisis intervention around the clock with follow-up within one business day of initial contact.

	2018	2019
People Served	33	282
Counties Served	14	26
Warm Referrals	9	60
Completed a treatment intervention or participated in peer support recovery program.	7	90

* reported by participants who were reached for follow-up, which was 16 in 2018 and 76 in 2019. Numbers include reported changes in the level of care as well as recovery support services.

Long-term goals (2-5 years)

- Collaborate with community stakeholders to develop or acquire technology for a coordinated referral system (i.e., iris)
- Increase sustainable funding sources from Public and Private sources (i.e., Cities of Fargo, Moorhead, partner contracts, endowments)
- Outcome dashboard with data in real-time.
- Expand area served, including establishing MOUS and a network of Navigators across the entire state of North Dakota