

2024



ANNUAL
IMPACT
REPORT

FirstLink
4342 15th Ave S
Ste 201A
Fargo, ND 58103



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FirstLink

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

To provide suicide intervention by handling contacts from the 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline, as well as to provide appropriate information and referral of non-profit and government agencies, and for-profit behavioral health entities through the 211 Information & Referral Helpline. Further, FirstLink will provide education on the topics of mental health, suicide prevention, and wellness. FirstLink will also provide 24-hour supportive listening to contacts, and after-hours telephone support for other human service agencies when their offices close.



American Association of Suicidology
Accredited since 1987



InformUSA
Accredited since 2009





Overview of Services

Information & Crisis Services

2-1-1 Information & Referral Helpline

Community Resource Directory
Local & Statewide Disaster Response
Child Abduction Response Team (CART)

9-8-8 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline

North Dakota Statewide Crisis Response
Northwest Minnesota

Care & Support Program

Healthcare Facility Partnership Network

Contracted Telephone Support

North Dakota University System
Rape & Abuse Crisis Center
Region IV South Mobile Crisis Teams

Education & Outreach

Accredited Education Programs

safeTALK
Applied Suicide Intervention Skills Training
Mental Health First Aid

Community Outreach & Fundraising

Meet FirstLink
Specialized Presentations on Mental Wellbeing
Giving Hearts Day
Annual Breakfast

Administration

Strategic Planning Accounting HR/Benefits

Message from the Executive Director

As we reflect on 2024, we are filled with gratitude for the opportunities we've had to support our neighbors and address the growing need for emotional support and crisis intervention services across North Dakota. This past year has been a testament to the strength and compassion of our community, and we are proud of the work we've accomplished together.

One of the greatest joys has been building and deepening community partnerships. From collaborating on impactful marketing materials to working alongside one another in pursuit of shared visions, these connections have strengthened our ability to serve. Our partnership with local 911 centers has been especially meaningful, allowing us to better support individuals experiencing thoughts of suicide and ensuring they receive the most appropriate care for their current needs.

Looking ahead to 2025, we remain committed to advocating for those we serve. A key focus will be seeking state legislative support to secure ongoing funding for 988, 211, and mobile crisis response services. Together, we can continue to build a stronger, more connected network of care for everyone in our state. Thank you for your continued support and partnership.

Together, we are making a difference.

Jennifer Illich

Jennifer Illich, Executive Director



Board of Directors



Sarah Aaberg
Vice-Chair, Governance



Kyle Veum
Board Chair/Vice-Chair, Internal



Dave Lund
Vice-Chair, External

Governance (L to R)

Kristi Clifton
Ashley Schmidt
Timothy Briggeman



Internal (L to R)

Chelsey Matter
Darren Schmidt
Sandra Buchholz



External (L to R)

Elizabeth Medd
Kathryn Norby
Blaise Kautzman



Financial Update

FirstLink is fortunate to have diverse sources of funding to ensure that we can fulfill our mission. **Funding sources include:**

- Government grants & contracts
- Foundational grants
- Corporate contributions
- Contract fees for agency telephone support
- Training fees for community education programs
- Individual donations and gifts

In 2025, FirstLink will seek legislative funding to support the continued operation of services across North Dakota.

Organizational Chart

Contacts We Serve



Board of Directors



Executive Director

Director of
Operations

Community Resources Team

Education Coordinator

Staff Training Specialist

Director of
Workforce & Culture

Helpline Supervision

Call Specialists

Care & Support Program

Office Manager

Director of
Data Quality

988 Coordinator

Quality Assurance Specialist

Communications Coordinator

Operations Update

2024 has been a year of significant growth and progress at FirstLink. We have maintained and strengthened our collaboration with human service centers across the state, along with numerous other agencies, to ensure that individuals in crisis can reach someone 24/7.

This year, our staffing has nearly doubled, signifying the necessity of our services. FirstLink continues to answer the **988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline** via call, text, and chat for the entire state of North Dakota and Northwestern Minnesota. We continue to work diligently with Vibrant Emotional Health to ensure that we are not only meeting standards but working hard to provide above and beyond service to those in need.

In 2025, FirstLink will seek re-accreditation from InformUSA, demonstrating exemplary service as an information & referral agency. Re-accreditation includes assessment of FirstLink's internal training process, data collection and retention policies, and maintenance of our robust directory of local community resources.

SUPPORT SERVICES



211 Information & Referral Helpline

The demand for resource information continues to be substantial. Serving as the *first link* to various community resources, FirstLink faced another busy year in 2024.

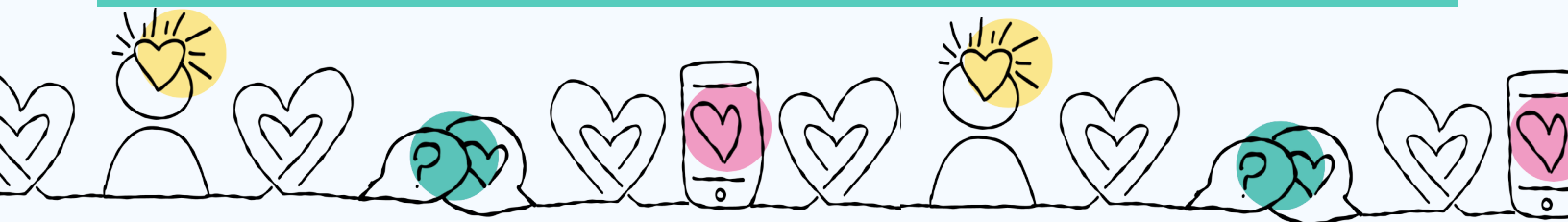
Our Community Resource team worked diligently **throughout the year and was able to add over 200 services to our directory**. These additions included programs offering physical and mental health services, veteran support services, and meeting basic needs such as food pantries! This was an increase from what was accomplished the previous year, marking FirstLink's commitment to continuously adding information to our directory in an effort to be the most effective point of contact for help-seekers regardless of their needs.

















In addition to the new program listings, our Community Resource team completed annual verification of information listed across nearly 5,500 programs from 2,200 agencies in our service area! Listing verifications are completed by making contact with an agency directly to confirm the accuracy of the described programs that they offer. This is completed via email, physical mail, phone, website exploration, and even in-person visits when needed!

You can add or request to update your program on FirstLink's website directly. Simply go to myfirstlink.org/community-resources.

Throughout 2024, community members accessed FirstLink's comprehensive Community Resource Directory regularly. **17,547 referrals were gathered from our website directly**. This feature is available to anyone, underscoring our commitment to providing access to resource information 24/7.

FirstLink's Community Resource Directory is user friendly, and allows help-seekers to access the same information that FirstLink's Call Specialists utilize. See the following page for instructions on how to navigate this valuable resource.



 Aging Services	 Youth Services
 Food	 Mental Health/Substance Use Disorder Services
 Housing 	 Support Groups
 Utilities	 Health Care
 Transportation	 Prenatal, Pregnancy, and Postpartum Services
 Education	 Personal & Household Items
 Employment	 Seasonal Programs
 Consumer Services	Resource Inclusion/Exclusion Criteria

Keyword Search

 **Tip: Make sure you fill out the location field!**

How To: Search the Community Resource Directory

FirstLink’s comprehensive community resource directory is available for the public to utilize. This valuable resource can be found by scanning the QR code to the right or visiting **myfirstlink.org**! Our resource directory contains the same information that Call Specialists access when help-seekers contact the 211 Information & Referral Helpline.

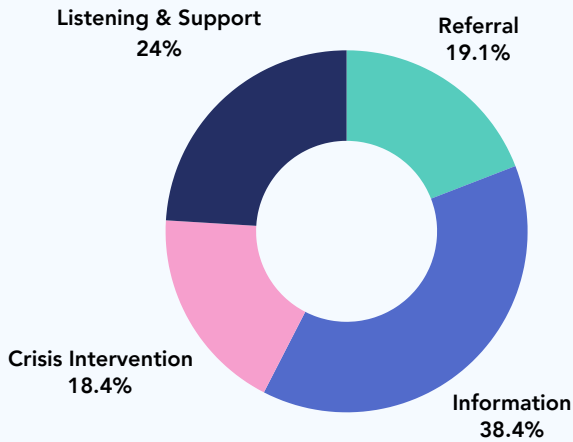
There are two ways to search the directory. Individuals seeking resource information can use the guided search by clicking into the specific need categories, seen in the screenshot above. Otherwise, searching can be accomplished by filling in what you are searching for next to the search icon within the keyword section.



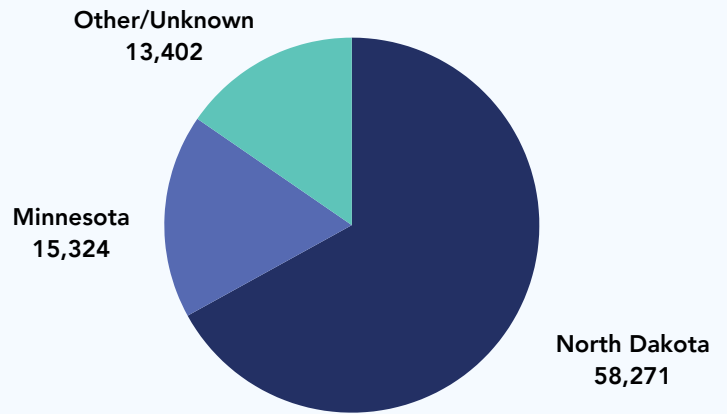
Total Contacts*

86,997

Contact Type*

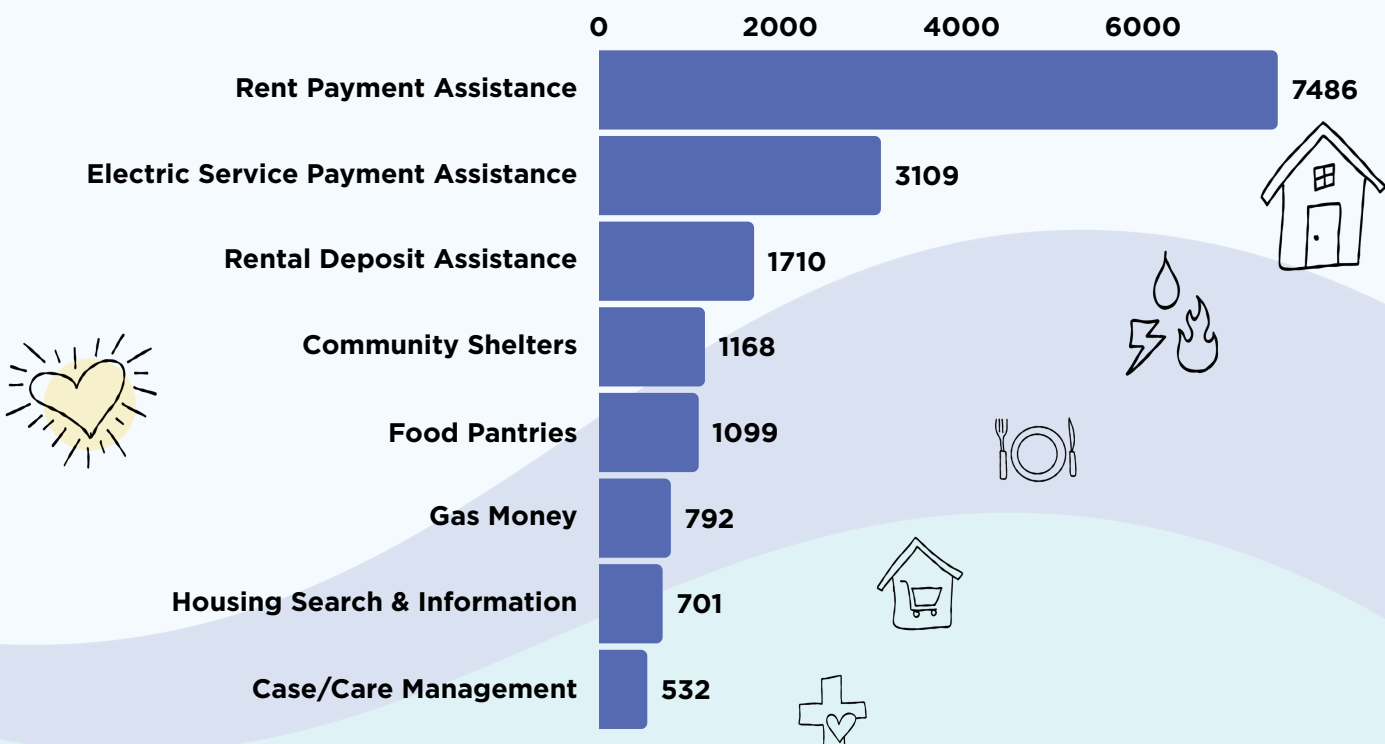


Help-Seeker Location*



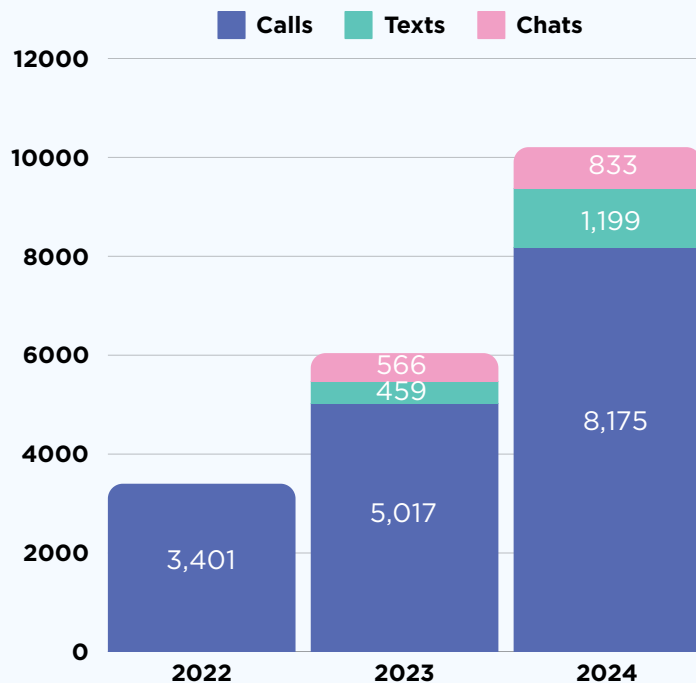
Top Resource Needs*

43,814 resource referrals offered

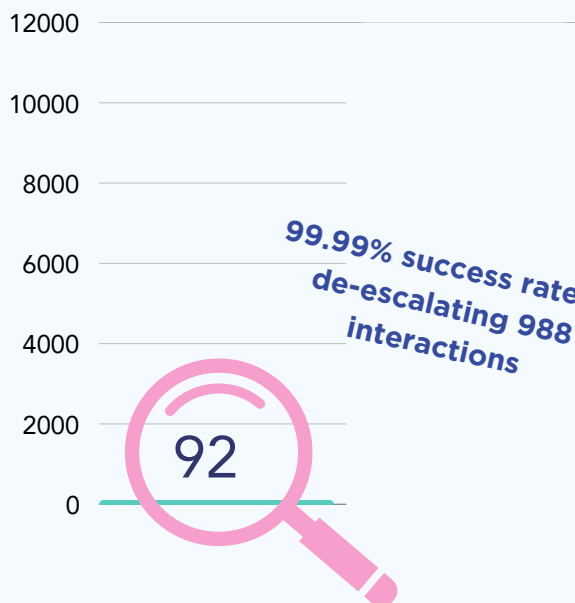




Help-seekers reaching the 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline

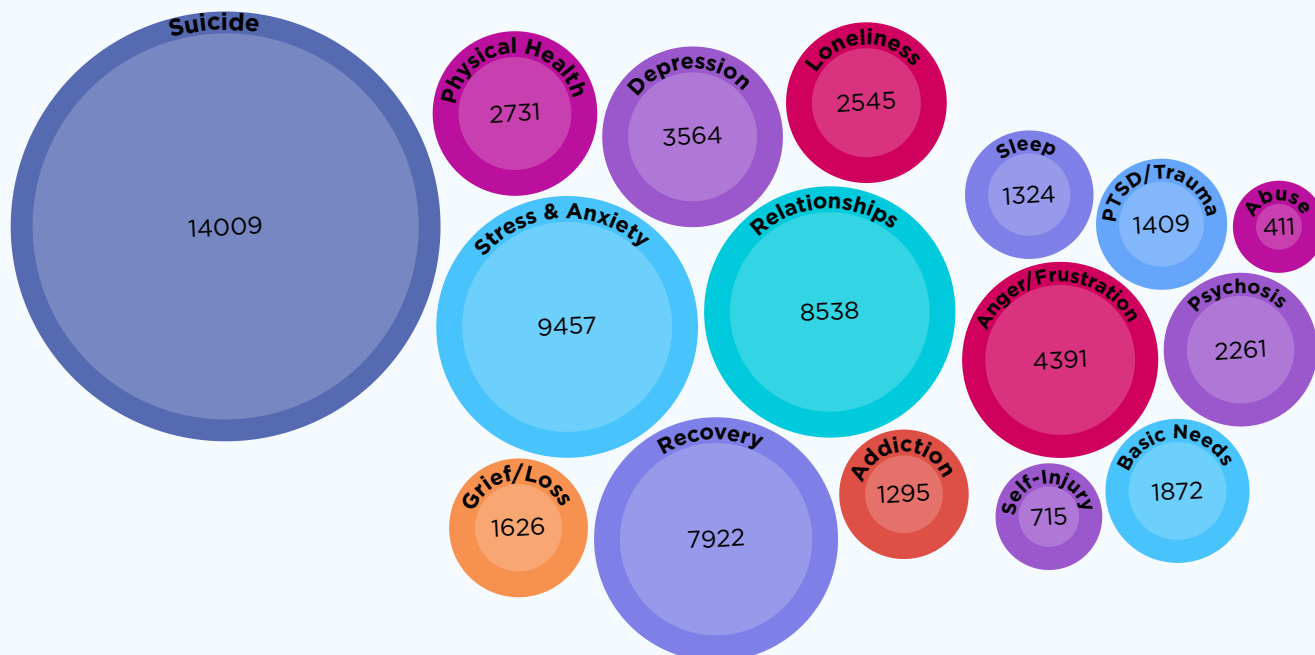


988 Lifeline interactions resulting in involuntary rescue



Top Listening Needs*

36,960 interactions were provided Listening & Support or Crisis Intervention services

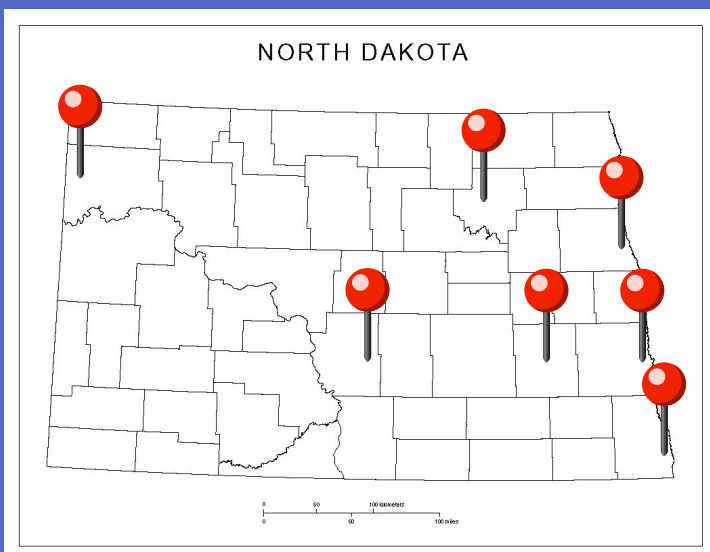


988 | SUICIDE & CRISIS LIFELINE

The **988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline** has seen increased awareness and use throughout the year. FirstLink has worked diligently to ensure we continue to follow best practices in order to provide consistent, quality service to help-seekers.

One goal of the **988 Lifeline** is for the service to become a comprehensive part of emergency response. To support this, FirstLink has taken action by forming partnerships with local 911 dispatch centers across the state of North Dakota. This partnership enables 911 centers to transfer mental health crises calls to FirstLink, so that individuals may receive the least invasive form of care. As of year end, FirstLink has partnered with **7 dispatch centers, covering 65% of the counties across North Dakota.**

Comparing 2023 to 2024, **FirstLink saw a 68% increase in contacts to the 988 Lifeline, including calls, texts, and chats.** Despite this increase in volume, we were able to maintain **less than 1%** of interactions resulting in involuntary emergency intervention. This impressive statistic emphasizes the expertise and training that our organization's Call Specialists undergo to effectively de-escalate and safety plan. This number also underscores the importance of the **988 Lifeline.** Each 988 contact supported by FirstLink reduces the burden on local emergency first responders and ensures those seeking help receive the most appropriate intervention along with referrals to services which will support continued safety and resilience.



Dispatch Center Partnerships:

- Red River Regional Dispatch
- North Dakota State Radio
- Lake Region Law Enforcement
- Grand Forks 911 Center
- Williams County Dispatch Center
- Richland County Communications
- Barnes County Public Safety

Care & Support Update

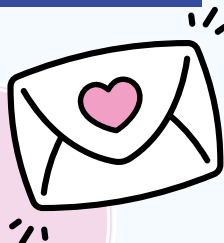
FirstLink's Care & Support Program is here to support the emotional and physical safety of those with mental health concerns. This could include depression, anxiety, suicidal ideation, concerning substance use, or any other challenge.

The Care & Support team provides free and confidential listening and support on an ongoing basis. Support is available 24 hours a day, 365 days a year.


To continue building our connection with Care & Support participants, FirstLink began sending out seasonal cards in 2024. The feedback regarding this initiative has been overwhelmingly positive, and we look forward to continuing it as we move forward.

2024 was a year of historic numbers for FirstLink's Care & Support Program. By year-end, we had over 12,000 contacts. FirstLink's continued setting of new records in this field reaffirms how necessary a follow-up support program is.


Learn more about the program, including how to partner with FirstLink, by visiting myfirstlink.org/care-support-program!

A simple line-art icon of an envelope with a heart on the front, positioned to the right of the testimonial bubble.

“Thank you for the card, it was so thoughtful. Having an organization like this one to talk to and help out means a lot.”

A simple line-art icon of a heart, positioned to the left of the testimonial bubble.

“You guys have been very wonderful, always checking in on me. You are amazing. I appreciate you guys reaching out because it helps me realize how much I need someone to remind me it's okay to reach out for help.”

A simple line-art icon of a heart, positioned to the right of the testimonial bubble.

Partnerships & Referrals

The Care & Support team accepts internal referrals from interactions on the 211 Helpline and 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline, along with other contract phone lines answered by FirstLink when appropriate.

We also partner with clinics, hospitals, and mental health providers across North Dakota and Minnesota for external referrals.

In 2024, the Care & Support team welcomed 8 new referring partners to our growing network. Take a look at some of our featured & new partners below!



Public Health
Prevent. Promote. Protect.
Steele County Public Health



Fargo Cass



The Lotus Center



Public Health
Prevent. Promote. Protect.



2024 At A Glance

12,378 total **contacts**

2,870 caring cards &
texts sent



2,041 referrals made

815 accepted follow-up

AWARENESS & EDUCATION



Trainings & Education

2024 was another impactful year for FirstLink's community outreach efforts. While we continued to participate in our community's larger events, we shifted our focus to devote more attention to delivering trainings. By prioritizing educational opportunities, we aim to provide more in-depth resources for our community, ensuring a lasting impact.

As FirstLink grows, our messaging has become even more refined. We've worked to ensure that our marketing materials align with our evolving mission, while also seeking more collaboration with fellow nonprofits in the area. To help streamline and enhance these efforts, we welcomed a Communications Coordinator in mid-2024.

FirstLink offers a diverse range of trainings focused on mental health, suicide prevention, self-care, and de-escalation. These trainings include both nationally recognized programs and unique sessions curated by our experienced team.

As part of our ongoing commitment to suicide prevention, we offer standardized training like **safeTALK** (Suicide Alertness for Everyone) and **ASIST** (Applied Suicide Intervention Skills Training), both developed by LivingWorks Education.

Additionally, we continue to provide both **Adult and Youth Mental Health First Aid** training, available in-person and virtually. These workshops, created by the National Council on Mental Wellbeing, teach individuals how to identify and respond to mental health concerns in others.



2024 At A Glance

108 trainings & presentations reaching over **2,400** participants



98% evaluated indicated an increase in skills

47 community events attended reaching over **24,000** individuals

More than **500,000** impressions on social media

Giving Hearts Day was February 8th 2024!

Giving Hearts Day is North Dakota's 24-hour online giving event. Giving Hearts Day is FirstLink's biggest fundraising day of the year. **Thanks to our generous donors and community supporters, we were able to raise over \$49,000!**

We want to thank everyone who helped us reach our goal. Your support has enabled us to be there 24 hours a day to provide help and hope to all those struggling in our communities.

Giving Hearts Day 2025 is Thursday, February 13th.

We have a bold goal to raise **\$60,000** to help support our work of offering hope and connection 24 hours a day.

Early giving is NOW OPEN!

Donate today by visiting myfirstlink.org/give



FirstLink's **15th Annual Breakfast** was May 1st, 2024.

We welcomed guest speaker Dr. Jill Nelson from NDSU to speak on resiliency.

Every year, we bring our supporters, stakeholders, and members of the community together to talk about mental wellbeing and suicide. In 2024, we heard about the importance of self-compassion and care.

The 16th Annual Breakfast is May 1st, 2025 at the Hilton Garden Inn in Fargo.

We will be joined by Dr. John Draper, expert in the field of crisis intervention and suicide prevention.

Learn more or register for the Annual Breakfast at myfirstlink.org/annual-breakfast!

Suicide Warning Signs

These signs may mean someone is at risk for suicide. Risk is greater if a behavior is new or has increased, and if it seems related to a painful event, loss, or change.

- Talking about wanting to die or kill oneself.
- Talking about feeling trapped or in unbearable pain.
- Changes in school or work performance.
- Talking about feeling hopeless or having no reason to live.
- Increased use of alcohol or drugs.
- Acting anxious or agitated; behaving recklessly.
- Sleeping too much or too little.
- Talking about being a burden to others.
- Extreme mood swings.
- Withdrawing or feeling isolated.
- Abrupt changes in behavior.
- Giving away possessions.



Call or text **9-8-8**, or chat by visiting **988lifeline.org**



Find hope today.

Learn more at **myfirstlink.org**

Visit **myfirstlink.org** to download or order a variety of brochures, calling cards, and other resources to increase awareness of our services!



- HOME
- ABOUT
- ANNUAL BREAKFAST
- RESOURCES + SERVICES
 - Get Help Now
 - Crisis Support Services
 - Care & Support Program
 - Community Education
 - Printable Resources**
 - Search for Local Resources
- UPCOMING TRAININGS
- GET INVOLVED
- FIRSTLINK MERCH

988 & 211 Promotional Resources

We are proud to make a variety of printable and professional marketing resources available to the communities we serve. Our goal is to increase awareness and utilization of the valuable services provided across FirstLink's phone lines, including the *211 Information & Referral Helpline* and *988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline*.

The resources below may be downloaded and shared or printed on your own. *For professional printing, please see the direct link to our Sir Speedy storefront to place your order.*

Non-profits serving North Dakota and Northwestern Minnesota: FirstLink is happy to provide a one-time care package of professionally printed marketing materials to help reach those you serve. Submit your request by clicking the **Non-Profit Printables Request** button below. Your agency is then welcome to order materials on your own through the Sir Speedy storefront or submit a second order request and we will reach out to discuss funding opportunities, such as local grants, to help fulfill your additional request(s).

[Order Printed Materials](#)

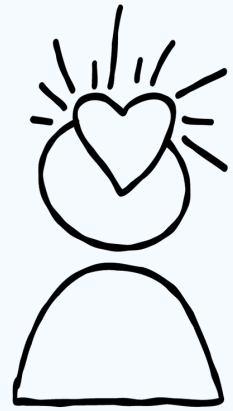
[Non-Profit Printables Request](#)

988 Flyers (various languages)

988 Posters

Crisis Safety Plan

Fill out this plan and share it with those close to you.



Crisis warning signs

Here are some things I do when I'm overwhelmed, emotional or struggling:

My coping strategies

Here are a few things I can do to return to calm or clear my mind:

People I can turn to

Here are three people I can always reach out to for help: (Be sure to save these in your phone)

Name: _____

Phone: _____

Name: _____

Phone: _____

Name: _____

Phone: _____

My inspirations

Here are three reasons (family, friends, pets, jobs) I can keep going:

If I need professional help

Here are places I can contact during a crisis:

I can call or text **988** any time

I can chat online at **988lifeline.org**



Safe spaces

Here are places or rooms I can go to feel safe:



The information presented above has been adapted from the following sources: 463 Foundation's My Safety Plan and Stanley & Brown (2021) There is Hope Safety Plan

988 SUICIDE & CRISIS LIFELINE | HOPE IS ON THE LINE | CALL OR TEXT: 988 | 988LIFELINE.ORG

Find these helpful crisis resources, and MORE, from our partners at

NORTH
Dakota
Be Legendary.

Health & Human Services



