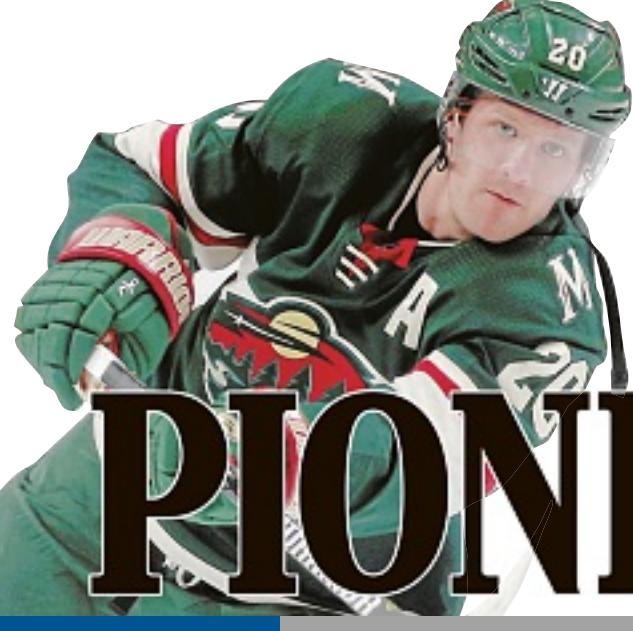


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SPORTS, 1B

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APRIL 2, 2018

## Crisis hotline's future in peril

Statewide service fields 50K calls per year but needs funding help to avoid shutdown

By Callie Schmidt  
[cschmidt@pioneerpress.com](mailto:cschmidt@pioneerpress.com)

Kari Bristol's 12-year-old former foster daughter was teased at school for her disabilities. She had a bad day, and nothing Bristol said could help.

Usually, they could go on a bike ride or to McDonald's for a treat. But this day, nothing worked.

The girl said she wanted to kill herself. She was scratching her arm with a pencil.

That Friday evening in May, they called Crisis Connection, a round-the-clock telephone service that connects people in crisis with

counselors and other resources. A counselor was sent out to their home in Hugo.

"She got back on track and was OK going to school on Monday," Bristol said.

Crisis Connection is the only center in Minnesota taking calls from the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline, and it will be forced to start shutting down May 21 unless it gets funding help.

The service, set in Richfield, is owned and operated by Oakdale-based Canvas Health, a nonprofit community mental

CRISIS CENTER, 3A



CALLIE SCHMIDT / PIONEER PRESS

Crisis Connection, a 24-hour telephone service based in Richfield that connects people with counselors and other resources, is in danger of shutting down unless it receives public funding.

## Trump calls stop to DACA accord

President also makes threat to exit NAFTA over Mexico inaction

By Philip Rucker and David Weigel  
*Washington Post*

PALM BEACH, Fla. — President Donald Trump spent his Easter morning here on an anti-immigrant tirade, declaring Sunday that there would be no deal to legalize the status of undocumented immigrants known as "dreamers" and threatening to exit the North American Free Trade Agreement unless Mexico increases border security.

Trump thrust the future of millions of immigrants who were brought illegally to the United States as children into peril by promising "NO MORE DACA DEAL," and he directed congressional Republicans to pass tough anti-immigration legislation.

An hour after he wished Americans a "HAPPY EASTER," Trump fired off three tweets in which he vented, sometimes in all-caps, about immigration laws he derided as "ridiculous" and "dumb" and about border enforcement he deemed dangerously lax.

In his first of the immigration-related tweets, Trump wrote,

DREAMERS DEAL, 3A

## Shelter closes, but problem remains

'Winter Safe Space' housed homeless

By Frederick Melo  
[fmelo@pioneerpress.com](mailto:fmelo@pioneerpress.com)

After four months of housing some of the hardest homeless residents to reach, Ramsey County's temporary "Winter Safe Space" closed Saturday.

Some officials hope to see the 50-mat emergency overnight shelter return next winter.

Others say St. Paul, Ramsey County, housing and human services providers and the state a longer-term strategy for housing downtown St. Paul's homeless.

"It really met the short-term, immediate need in our community," said Ramsey County Board Chair Jim McDonough. "The number of homeless in our community has dramatically risen, and the number of unsheltered is rising also. ... Getting them into a safe space for that evening, getting them connected to an outreach worker, on all those levels I think it was a great success."

But McDonough acknowledged a

WINTER SHELTER, 3A

## Rise in uninsured patients to test hospital bottom lines

Providers expect loss in revenue as more people likely unable to pay

By Brooks Johnson  
and John Lundy  
*Forum News Service*

DULUTH, Minn. — Starting next year, the federal government won't penalize people who don't carry

health insurance, so fewer people are expected to be insured. Hospitals, required to provide emergency care regardless of a patient's ability to pay, are expecting more red ink as a result.

This might hurt a little.

"The insured patients have to make it up. Which means your insurance is going up," said John Strange, CEO of St. Luke's in Duluth.

In the complex machinery of health care economics, many fac-

tors affect the cost of care and how it's delivered. And though providing charity care is both required of hospitals and a source of pride for them, too much will put a strain on the bottom line.

"Because we're a nonprofit, we use that bottom line for new

CHARITY CARE, 2A

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## > Crisis center

health agency. It would take at least \$969,000 annually to keep it operating, said Crisis Connection Manager Laura Weber.

Several legislators are sponsoring a pair of bills at the Capitol that would fund programs like Crisis Connection. Though the bills (one in the House and another in the Senate) are still active from last session, no vote beyond committees has been scheduled, said Canvas Health CEO Matt Eastwood.

"We've had great bipartisan support on this bill," Eastwood said. "We just haven't been able to get this out in front of everyone to get them to vote."

Eastwood has talked to Minnesota legislators who assume Crisis Connection is funded by the state and who are surprised to learn that it isn't.

### INCREASE IN DEMAND

Crisis Connection has linked Minnesotans with local psychiatrists and counselors as well as first-responders and emergency rooms since 1969. With no consistent funding source, it has survived with the help of fundraisers and contracts.

In 2017, the agency served more than 52,000 callers from across Minnesota, and the number of calls redirected from the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline went up 40 percent from 2016, due largely to the increase in demand for mental health services in rural Minnesota.

Mental health therapists

also often refer clients to Crisis Connection for after-hour counseling. Its phone numbers are posted on websites, bulletin boards, and in thousands of schools, mental health clinics and other public and community organizations.

Bristol's former foster daughter had that number posted on her wall at home and at school. If Crisis Connection didn't exist, Bristol would have had to call 911.

"Police would have come out and tried to assess her or take her to the hospital," Bristol said. "It would have been a lot more traumatic for her and for my family."

Crisis Connection has 13 contracts (an example is one it has with the state Department of Agriculture for a dedicated hotline for struggling farmers), but more than 800 clinical practices list Crisis Connection's phone number on their websites, according to Eastwood.

If they had 800 contracts, they wouldn't need to ask for money from the government — but they can't force providers to pay them if they post their service on their website, he adds.

"At some point, (Crisis Connection) shifted from being a private enterprise to serving the whole state, that has no way to cover its cost," Eastwood said.

### TEMPORARY FIX

This is not the first time the hotline has faced turmoil. It was set to close in July because of the funding issues, but a \$139,000 grant from the Minnesota Department of Health became a temporary reprieve.



Shea, a counselor at Crisis Connection in Richfield, takes a call on Monday. The service fields 52,000 calls per year on average. "Who's going to take those calls? That's really my concern," said Crisis Connection Manager Laura Weber.

CALLIE SCHMIDT / PIONEER PRESS

Minnesota Health Commissioner Ed Ehlinger said the agency was concerned about losing a life-saving resource, particularly with Minnesota facing historically high suicide rates and an opioid addiction crisis.

"This is not a permanent fix, but it will keep the suicide-prevention line open for people in crisis and provide time to find a lasting solution," Ehlinger said in a statement at the time.

The grant, which came from federal funds for suicide prevention, was issued after a flood of media attention. But now the grant is running out.

### MANY STATES HAVE MORE CENTERS

Crisis Connection is the only crisis center in Minnesota

that is accredited and takes calls from the national lifeline.

People might expect larger states to have more National Suicide Prevention Lifeline crisis centers — California has 12. But even states with populations comparable to Minnesota have more accredited crisis centers.

With one call center, Eastwood says Minnesota's model is actually the most cost-effective.

"It absolutely makes more sense to consolidate in a single, certified call center so you get continuity across the entire state," Eastwood said. "That way, you're not paying for (administration) and overhead in five different locations."

### WHAT IF IT CLOSES?

If the center is forced to close, people in need could still call National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1-800-273-8255 (TALK) and reach a counselor. But they would likely be routed to a counselor in another state accepting overflow calls, which could result in longer wait times and little access to Minnesota resources.

And if Crisis Connection closes and people try to call their current number — 612-379-6363 — there might be no one there to answer.

"If someone is suicidal and calls a number and no one answers, they're not likely to call again," Weber said. "That's a dangerous thing. And for me, that's a sad situation for Minnesota."

Eastwood echoes that concern.

"Staff and volunteers save lives every day and every week," he said. "So far, nobody has been able to tell me where those 52,000 phone calls will go if we're not here."

Eastwood has three family members and friends who died from suicide.

"It touches all of us," Eastwood said.

Monica Shevik lost her son Sean to suicide on Dec. 26, 2013. She has testified multiple times before the Legislature in hopes of finding funding for Crisis Connection.

Shevik recognizes that her son was in pain and despair the day he died. But she knows he wanted to live.

"He wanted his pain and suffering to end. And the only choice he thought he had at that moment in time was death," Shevik said. "Those moments in time are where help like Crisis Connection comes in to play."

Allison Offerman lost her father to suicide in 2012.

"You don't really know the value of something like this until you're in a crisis and you need it," Offerman said.

Offerman decided to offer her skills and background in psychology and become a volunteer counselor.

"I could help them be connected with resources so they could make a different decision than my father," Offerman said.

"That's part of what we're trying to do, to bring hope and healing to people," Eastwood said.

*Callie Schmidt can be reached at cschmidt@pioneerpress.com, or on Twitter at @callieschmidt.*

CONTINUED FROM 1A

## > Winter shelter

long-term solution is needed. "We've got to be nimble, we've got to be responsive," he said. "One of the issues we're seeing is rising rents, rising home prices, and that's pushing some people out that had stable housing."

In December, city and county officials opened up space for 50 homeless residents in the former county detox facility, which sits in a lower level of the Ramsey County Government Center East building on Kellogg Boulevard, below the county's human services offices.

Overseen by Catholic Charities workers, the \$400,000 "Winter Safe Space" was not run like a typical drop-in shelter.

Instead, with many skyway hours rolled back from a 2 a.m. to midnight closing as a result of recent changes to city ordinances, the temporary shelter was designed as a last resort for the homeless who camped out in the skyway or rode buses and light rail all night.

The shelter, which operated from 10 p.m. to 7 a.m., was far from glamorous — visitors slept in mats on the floor — but it provided relief from cold winds.

To gain entry, Metro Transit and St. Paul Police officers offered homeless residents referral cards. So did outreach workers from People, Inc. and Radian Health.

Some residents were dropped off in squad cars if other sites such as the Union Gospel Mission and the newly expanded Higher Ground St. Paul shelters were full or their doors had closed to new entries for the night.

"In some cases, if a police officer felt someone was unsafe, they would transport them, but it was never meant to be an arrest or a criminalizing act," said Chris Michel, a senior program manager with Catholic Charities.

### MORE HOMELESS, COLDER TEMPERATURES

"Our shelters across the board in the region are full," Michel added. "We didn't really know what to expect when we were planning the safe space. We definitely had some people who had been drinking, but we didn't have behavior implications as a result of that. My interpretation is we are trending very closely with the same population we see in the shelters."

Most nights, the Winter Safe Space was full or near capacity.

That's in part because average temperatures for the winter season were at least a few degrees colder than normal. In October 2015, a one-day count overseen by Wilder Research found 1,787 homeless adults and children in Ramsey County, a 14 percent increase from 2012. And rents have only gone up since then.

"The Safe Space folks they're engaging with really reflected a wide variety of people — people who are struggling with mental health, people who are unemployed," said Dave Katzenmeyer, a program supervisor with People Inc. "(Some) people have been experiencing homelessness for a year or longer, and some significantly longer than that, who were not previously on our radar. There's people who stayed a night or two. There's people who were ongoing."

Outreach workers from People, Inc. and Radian Health stopped by twice a week about 6 a.m. to work one-on-one with individuals in hopes of getting them into a more stable situation.

"Knowing that they would be there made it a lot easier to engage them, and it also made it easier to get them to fill out a housing application and do some of those case management-type of things," Katzenmeyer said. "They also had a drop-in time at the library, as in 'Meet me at the library in two hours so we can continue to work on what we've been working on.'"

Ramsey County contributed \$150,000 to bring the Winter Safe Space — a former detox facility that had mostly been used in recent years for furniture storage — up to building codes. Another \$100,000 helped Catholic Charities with staffing and operational costs. The city of St. Paul contributed an additional \$100,000, and the St. Paul and Minnesota Community Foundations contributed \$50,000.

The county remains active in Outside/In, a collaborative effort to get unsheltered homeless residents into shelters for the night, and RUSH, an initiative aimed at helping longtime shelter users find housing. It's unclear if the Winter Safe Space will return.

"We purposefully made it temporary, so we would hold our own feet to the fire," said St. Paul City Council member Rebecca Noecker, who represents downtown. "If we don't have those long-term solutions in place for next year, I would certainly advocate that we need something like Winter Safe Space in place again."

*Frederick Melo can be reached at 651-228-2172 and fmelo@pioneerpress.com, or on Twitter at @FrederickMelo.*

CONTINUED FROM 1A

## > Dreamers deal

"Border Patrol Agents are not allowed to properly do their job at the Border because of ridiculous liberal (Democrat) laws like Catch & Release. Getting more dangerous 'Caravans' coming. Republicans must go to Nuclear Option to pass tough laws NOW. NO MORE DACA DEAL!"

It was Trump who last fall canceled the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program, which was begun in the Obama administration to provide temporary protection to dreamers.

"A lot of people are coming in because they want to take advantage of DACA," Trump told the traveling press pool. "They had a great chance. The Democrats blew it."

The president added, "Mexico has got to help us at the border. ... They flow right through Mexico; they send them into the United States. It can't happen like that way anymore."

Trump in the past has promised to show "great heart" in wrestling with the DACA issue. In his comments Sunday, he appeared to be confused about the rules of the DACA program. To qualify, immigrants must have lived in America since 2007, have arrived in the country before age 16 and have been younger than 31 on June 15, 2012. No one arriving in the country after that date is eligible.

After canceling DACA, Trump said he would like to reach a deal with Congress to protect dreamers from deportation in exchange for funding to build his long-promised wall at the U.S.-Mexico border. The president, however, went on to reject immigration proposals from congressional Democrats in recent months.

"Catch and release" is not a law, but shorthand for immigration officials freeing up detention center space by allowing immigrants to remain at-large if they are not seen as security risks.

The Trump administration has frequently claimed that the policy ended when the new president took office.

But detention centers have continued releasing low-risk immigrants, as the backlog of immigration court cases reaches the hundreds of thousands. On March 5, Attorney General Jeff Sessions informed immigration court judges that they could rule against asylum seekers without full hearings, which conservatives see as a way, in the long term, to open



President Donald Trump stops to speak to members of the media as he arrives for Easter services with daughter Tiffany Trump and first lady Melania Trump at Episcopcal Church of Bethesda-by-the-Sea in Palm Beach, Fla., on Sunday.

**"Mexico is doing very little, if not NOTHING, at stopping people from flowing into Mexico through their Southern Border, and then into the U.S. They laugh at our dumb immigration laws. They must stop the big drug and people flows, or I will stop their cash cow, NAFTA. NEED WALL!"**

*Tweet from President Donald Trump on Sunday*

more space in detention centers.

Trump — who has spent

his time in Palm Beach hanging

out with family, playing

golf with friends and watch-

ing television — may have

tweeted in response to com-

mentary on Fox News Chan-

nel, which he is known to

view regularly.

"Fox & Friends" aired a segment earlier Sunday morning about Central American migrants traveling through Mexico en route to the United States. It carried the headline: "CARAVAN OF ILLEGAL IMMIGRANTS HEADED TO U.S."

Trump's Sunday comments may have been mere musings by an impassioned "Fox & Friends" viewer and may not signal a substantive shift in administration policies.

Still, White House officials

have long said Trump's

tweets are official presiden-

tial statements, and he has

been known to use Twitter to

preview formal policy pro-

nouncements.

Trump sent his tweets on

the fourth and final day of his

vacation in Palm Beach, Fla.,

where he has been staying at

his private Mar-a-Lago Club

with a small coterie of aides.

White House Chief of Staff

John Kelly did not travel

with him, but senior policy

adviser Stephen Miller, a

proponent of hard-line im-

migration policies, has been

with Trump.

The president also has

been spotted spending time

— both over dinner Friday at

Mar-a-Lago and on Saturday at

the nearby Trump Interna-

tional Golf Club — with

Fox host Sean Hannity. An

outspoken immigration

hard-liner, Hannity is a

Trump booster and informal

presidential adviser, in addi-

tion to hosting a radio show

and prime-time Fox show.

Trump's tweets baffled

some Democrats, who had

seen the president distin-

guish between DACA recipi-