Data Storytelling: Best Practices for Communicating Impact

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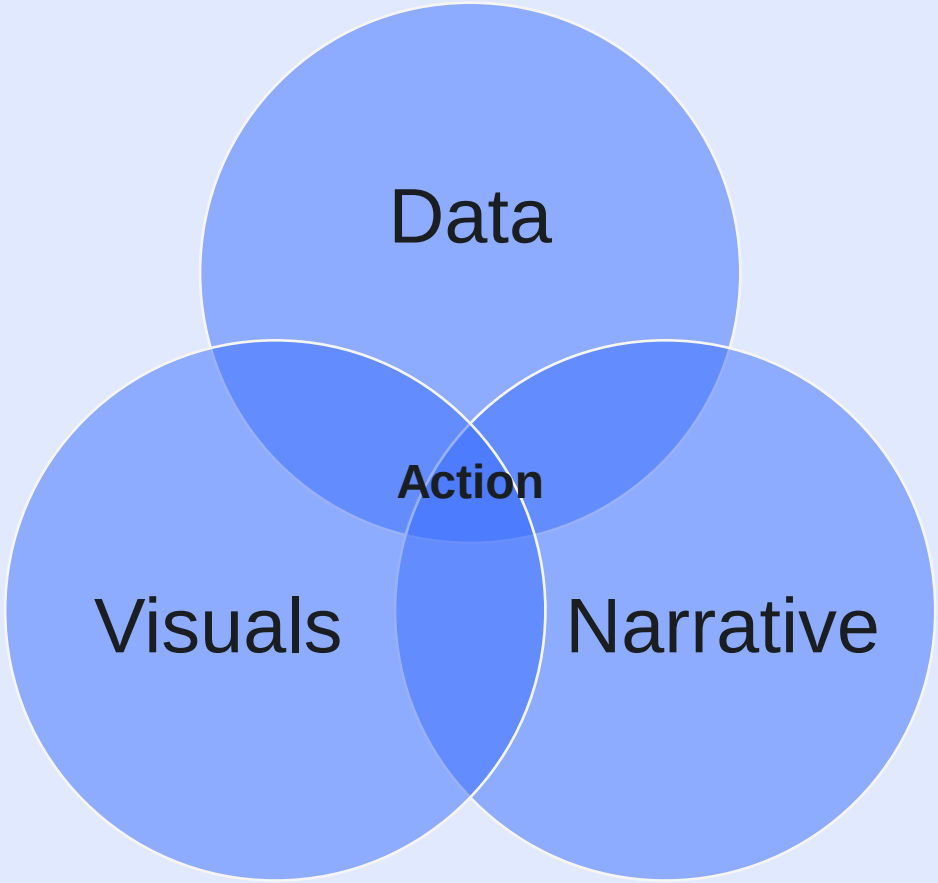
NATIONAL ACADEMIES *Sciences Engineering Medicine*

American Foundation *for* Suicide Prevention

Storytelling helps **data come alive** and **inspire action**



Adapted from Dykes (2019)

Steps for Effective Storytelling

Step 1

Knowing Your Audience

Audience-specific data communication ensures your message is **clear**, **relevant**, and **impactful**.

Step 2

Finding the Story

Knowing what the data is saying will help develop a **meaningful narrative** that is **insightful** for your audience.

Step 3

Visualizing Impact

Displaying data with the right visuals ensures your story is **communicated clearly** and **interpreted correctly**.

Mattison (2023); Standley (2020)

Knowing Your Audience

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Importance of Knowing Your Audience

	Researchers/ Academia	Funders/ Donors	Policymakers/ Staffers	Community Members
	Build credibility and contribute to the discourse	**Inspire continued or increased support**	**Motivate legislative or policy action**	**Build trust, relevance, and engagement**
	Is your data valid, reliable, and adding to the body of knowledge?	How did/will my investment make a difference?	How did/will this affect my constituents?	How does this affect me, my family, and my community?

Dykes (2019); Feigenbaum & Alamalhodaei (2020); Mattison (2023); Patton (2018); Standley (2020)

Finding the Story

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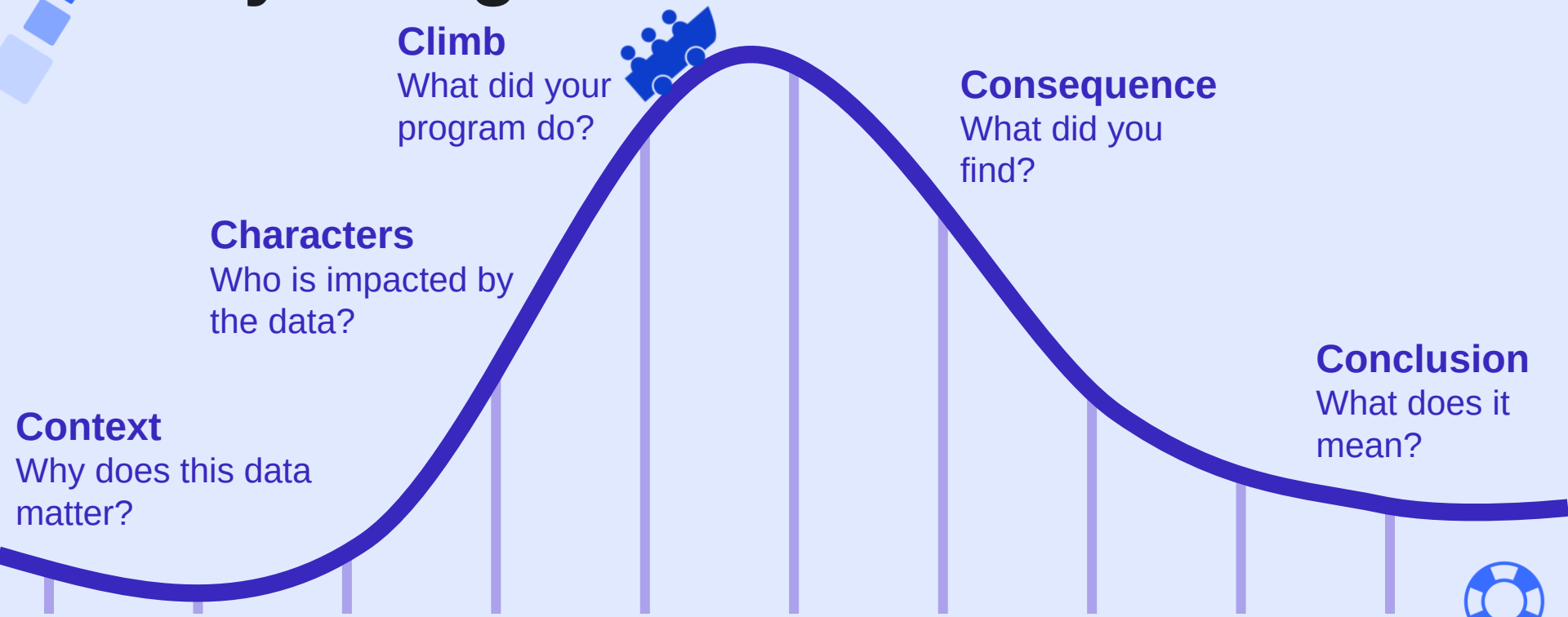
Storytelling Structure



Dykes (2019); Feigenbaum et al. (2020); Heath & Starr (2022); McAlindon et al. (2019); Ren et al., 2023

Crafting a Narrative

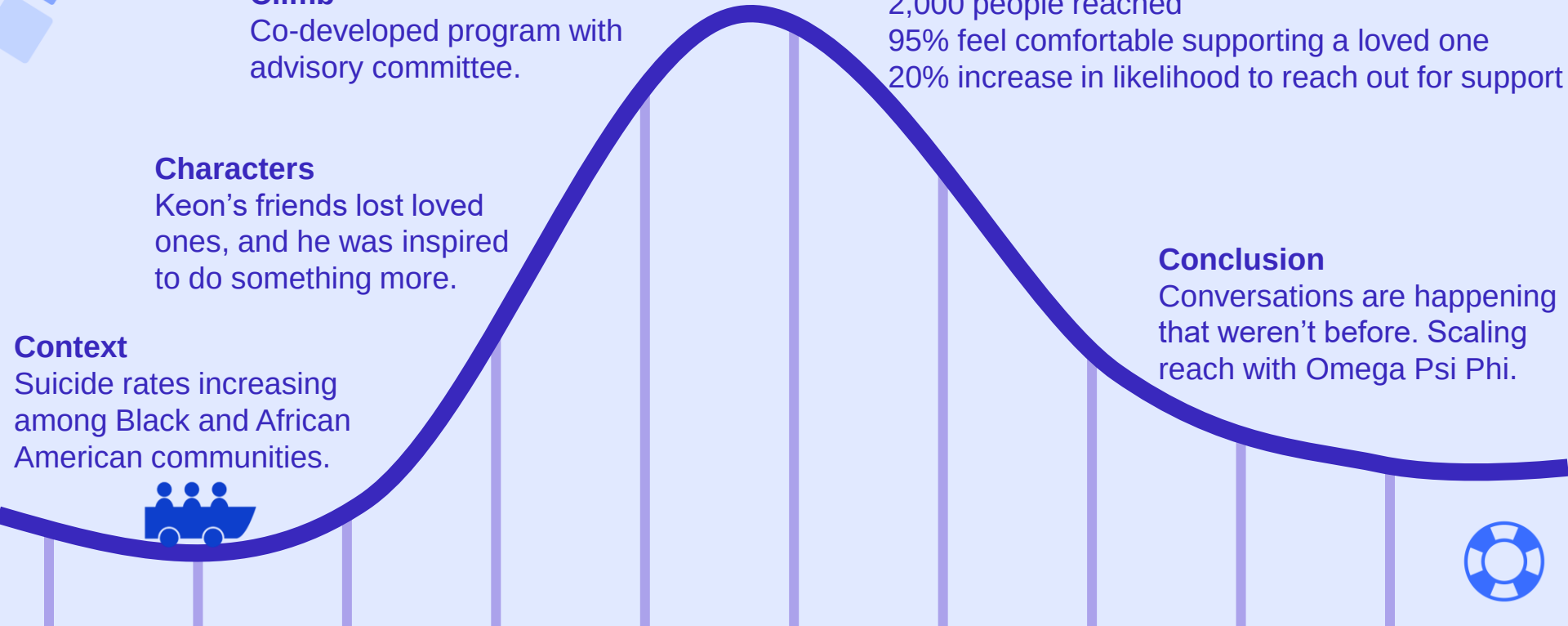
Context
Suicide rates increasing among Black and African American communities.

Characters
Keon’s friends lost loved ones, and he was inspired to do something more.

Climb
Co-developed program with advisory committee.

Consequence
2,000 people reached
95% feel comfortable supporting a loved one
20% increase in likelihood to reach out for support

Conclusion
Conversations are happening that weren’t before. Scaling reach with Omega Psi Phi.



Visualizing Impact

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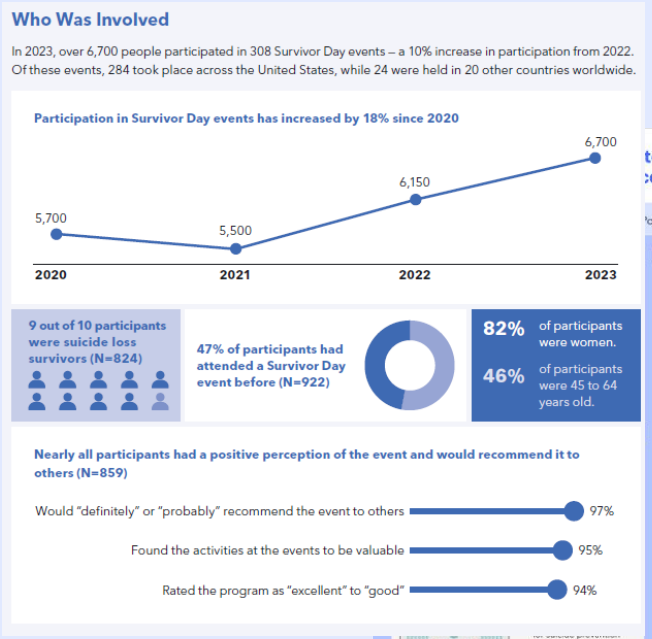
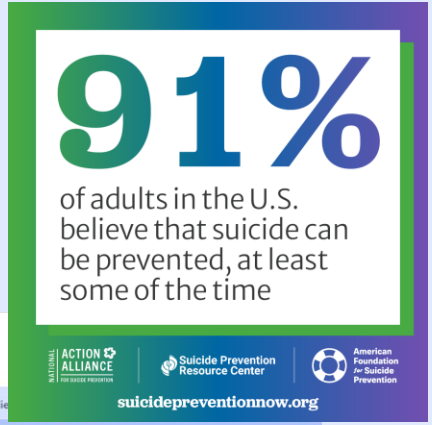
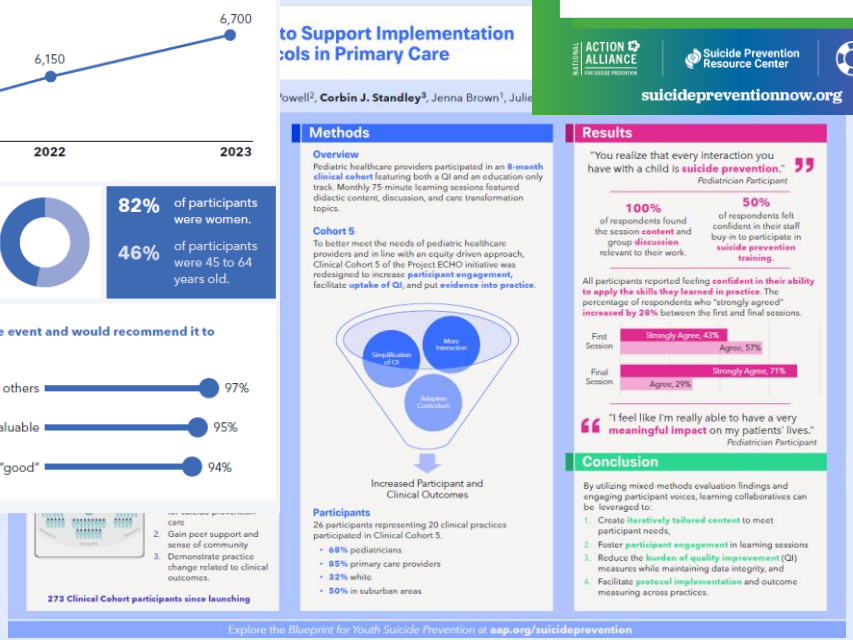
Data Visualization Mediums

- Reports
- Slideshows
- Handouts
- Posters
- Data displays
- Dashboards



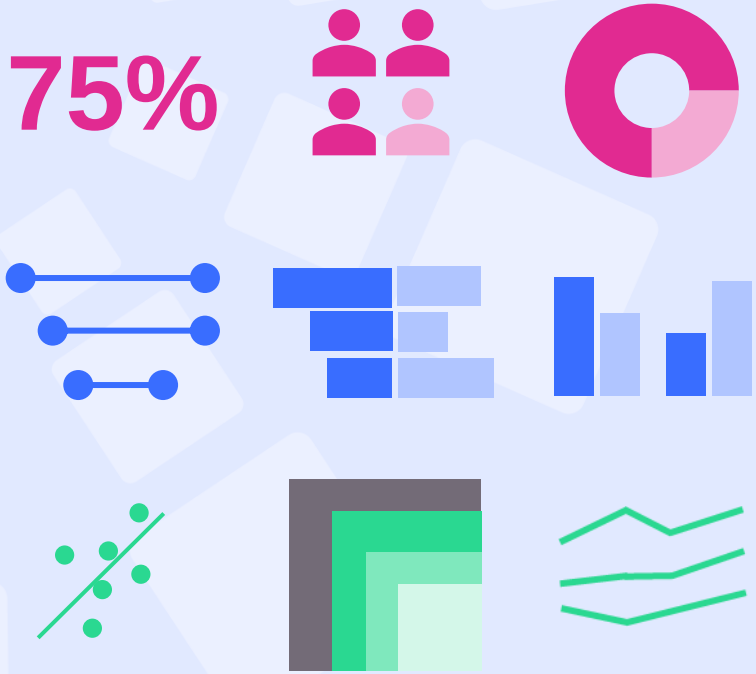




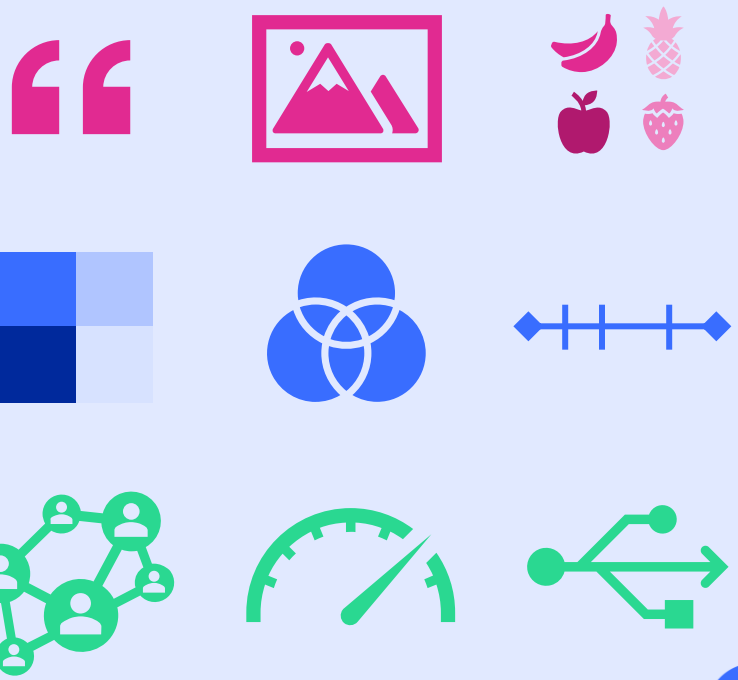
Evergreen (2018)

Types of Visualization

Quantitative



Qualitative



Examples

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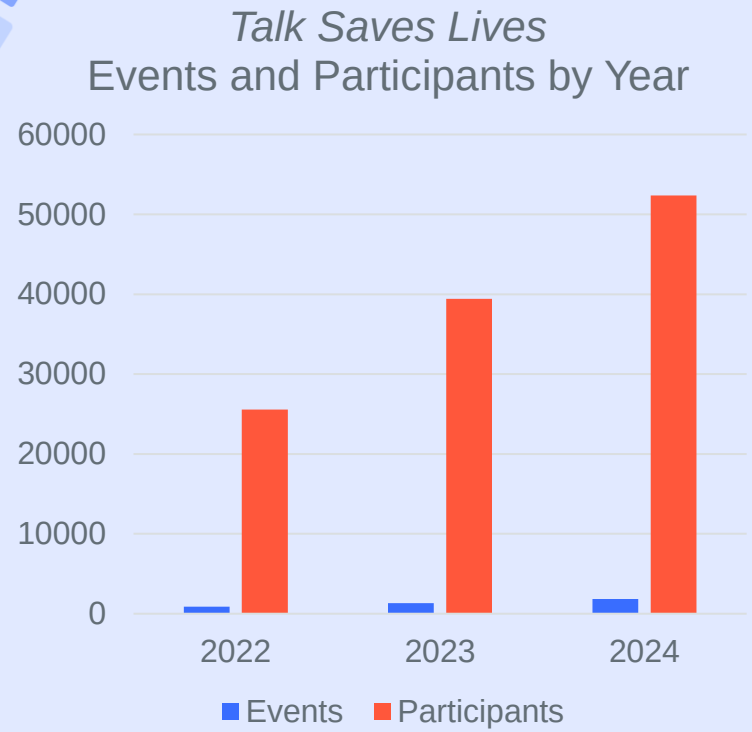
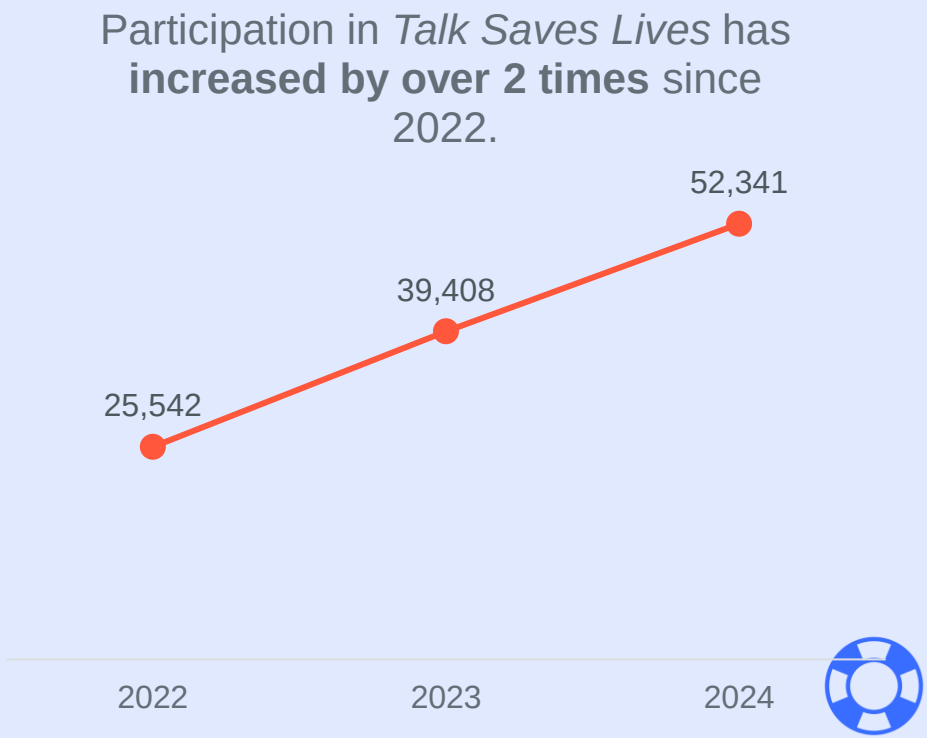
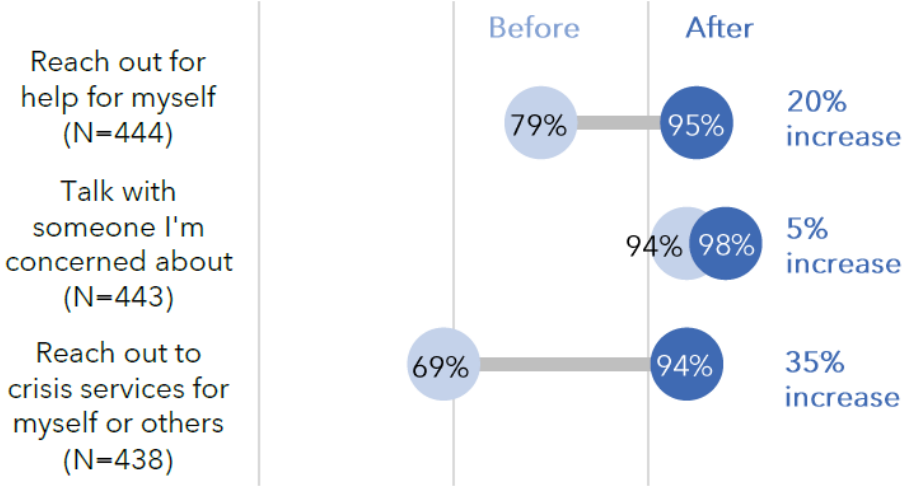
Quant: Before and After





Other Quantitative Examples

Most participants reported **increases in their likelihood to engage in suicide preventative behaviors**, including reaching out and having a conversation.



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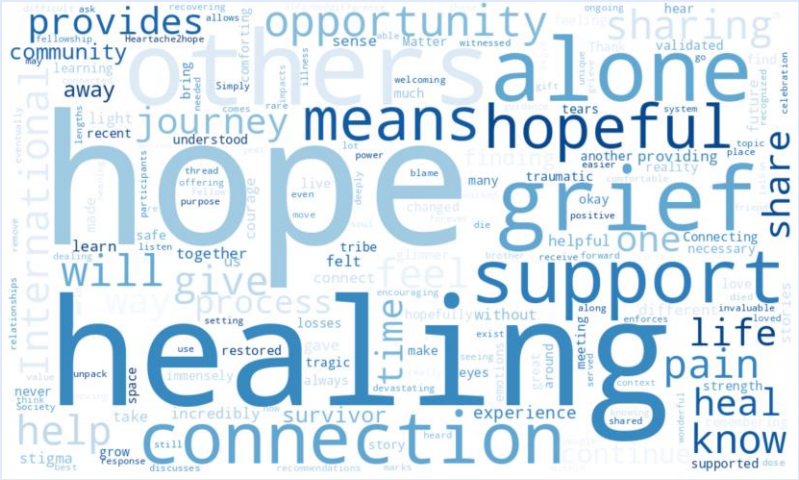
Qual: Before and After



Shared Understanding

Being among other loss survivors who "get it" and understand the grief was incredibly powerful for participants.

> "I know I am not alone."
>
> "It's a wonderful opportunity to find comfort as we head into the holidays alongside other survivors who 'get it'."
>
> "We are all members of this club we don't want to be in. At least we can be there together and find comfort in each other."

Healing and Hope

Survivor Day is an opportunity for people to find hope, chart a path forward, and learn to cope with their grief.

> "It means finding hope for me, that I will grow with my pain, instead of letting it take over me."
>
> "My life changed forever the day my brother died, but I now know the value of sharing our grief in order to begin the journey of healing."

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Other Qualitative Examples

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Thank you

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