



Family & Community Services of Somerset County

Six-Month Report - Summary of Activities For Friends of Somerset County Youth, Inc. and The Children's Hope Initiative January 1, 2019 – June 30, 2019

Agreement One - Psychiatric Wait Time Program

Family and Community Services of Somerset County (FCSSC) will provide two (2) additional hours per month of advanced practice psychiatric nursing services for children in 2017 and increase the work schedule of the Intake Coordinator an additional two (2) hours per week in 2017. The increase in time will provide counseling services to children who are impacted by child abuse, neglect, or domestic violence.

Friends of Somerset County Youth, Inc., and The Children's Hope Initiative, a Committee of Friends of Somerset County Youth will provide financial resources to FCSSC to fund these additional services for children served by FCSSC in the total amount of \$4,000. The purpose of this grant by Friends and CHI is to keep to a minimum the current waiting times for children and adolescents to see a child psychiatrist and clinician.

It is anticipated that the waiting period for children to see the advance practice psychiatric nurse or psychiatrist will be 4 weeks in non-emergent cases and the wait time for children to see a clinician will be 3 weeks.

- In the last 6 weeks, we have done intakes on about 12 adolescents/children, primarily due to hiring Maria Lopez, a Spanish speaking LCSW clinician who is expanding the number of mental health services we can provide to Spanish speaking clients. As of June 25, 2019, FCSSC has about five young people on the wait list to see a mental health clinician.
- With regard to the number of young people receiving psychiatric services from FCSSC, FCSSC has about 12 young clients seeing the psychiatrist, approximately four clients waiting for services.

Agreement Two - Groups for Immigrant Students

Family & Community Services of Somerset County will provide group counseling needed for school aged, Hispanic/Latino students who recently entered the United States from countries that include but are not limited to Costa Rica, El Salvador, Peru, Guatemala, and Ecuador. Many of these students have trauma and academic, behavioral, emotional adjustment difficulties due to their experiences in their home countries.

In September 2018, I met with Kristin Brucia, Assistant Principal at the Smalley School. Kristin assumed the lead for the ESL programs from Tarkyno Jacome for the 2018-2019 school year. When we met, FCSSC was already providing groups in Bound Brook High School and Community Middle School. Kristin expressed concern that she had 24 elementary students who could also benefit from the groups that Shantal Rybak was conducting for FCSSC. During the meeting, we decided to add group services in the elementary school and worry about securing the funding later.



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By the end of the school year, Shantal's group schedule was the following:

Monday

- 1 hour group at Lamonte Annex with an average of 5 students
- 1 hour group at BBHS with an average of 5 students
- 1 hour group at Community with an average of 5 students

Tuesday

- 1 hour group at Lafayette with an average of 4 students
- 1 hour group at Smalley 4th grade with an average of 4 students
- 1 hour group at Smalley 6th grade with an average of 4 students

The groups were broken into gender specific groups when appropriate (mostly high school and middle school) and they were further broken down by students performing at grade level and those who were not performing at grade level.

Though many of Shantal's groups are based upon a topic, Shantal has also incorporated meditation into some of her groups.

Elementary students, in general, focus on the reuniting of their family, adjusting to life in the US and the things that they miss about their country of origin. Shantal did work with coping skills with this group. Group reviewed anger management techniques. Group did work in "positive messaging" – "What makes you a star?"

Middle school students, in general, focus on coping with family stressors, anger management, and positive messaging. Discussions also include the complications and challenges with blending a family in a new country and managing all the attached feelings.

High school students, in general, focus on coping with what their future holds for them. How to set goals and receive the tools needed to achieve those goals are topics for groups in the high school. Discussions regarding feeling safe were a part of this age group. These students are also the students who seem to have the most on their "plate". These students frequently have the responsibility to babysit younger siblings and get jobs so they can contribute money to the household income. They struggle the most with learning English fast in order to keep up.

The Impact - Shantal Rybak's Summary of Group Experience

Over the past 10 months while working with the students in the Bound Brook public schools, I have been able to witness many positive and life changing situations. Some stories that affect me are related to positive change, understanding, empowerment, and most importantly about learning who they are and who they can become in this new environment.

In high school, many of the students face criticism and biases related to age, gender and responsibility. One student reported at the beginning of our groups feeling depressed and hopeless about coming to the USA without his parents. This student was able to share his feelings with the other group members who immediately related to his story since their situations were very similar if not the same. This same student at the end of the school year was



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able to speak openly about how he felt and how he was going to help other “new comers” in his community feel welcome and empowered.

In the middle school, a female student reported feeling very sad and angry with her father for bringing her to a country where she did not understand the language, faced a huge language barrier, and feared receiving bad grades. She stated, “I was an “A” student in my country but here I am nobody”. The same student stated was able to feel empowered after only 4 months and she became student of the month for two consecutive months. This student stated “ I will never forget that during group many of the group members believed in me and in my strong will to succeed”. She stated, “If it was not for the group I would have not done so well”.

Another student in 3rd grade shared with the group about the injury he had when he was only 3 years old. He reported that after he was burned with hot water, his foot became a horrible thing to see every day because it was deformed. When he shared his accident and showed his scars to the group, he reported feeling loved and accepted by all his group members, the same student who did not feel ready to have another surgery to correct his deformity, stated on the last day of group, “I have received the surgery date and it will be on June 19”. He continued, “I know I can do this because I learned that I am strong”. This same student has gone through so much pain due to his cousin being killed on April 2019, and parents being separated during the month of May.

A kindergarten student who was detained, separated from family, and sent to Michigan after crossing the border was experiencing fear, abandonment and significant adjustment issues. He was able to adjust quickly to life in Bound Brook and he is number one in Math and has learned the English language in only 4 months. This student was able to share his detention story with his group members, he also received so much compassion from all of his group members that he stated on the last day of group “ I am sad to not talk to my friends anymore until September”.

Another student in 4th grade shared with his group members how he and his family came to the USA even though he had a privileged life in his country. He shared his love for the USA and was able to help other students like him feel loved and welcomed. This student has been named teacher’s helper with every new student that comes in his classroom. I believe that once the students are heard they can accomplish great things not only for their benefit but for the benefit of their peers too.

I see the difference the groups make every day, their faces light up, they smile often and most of all they believe in themselves. These are only few stories there are more.

Some barriers the students face were also related to lack of integration into their families and community, inadequate access to mental health help, and a lack of proper information about receiving mental health care.

Respectfully submitted,

Richard W. Schumann

Executive Director