

CHILDREN'S HOPE INITIATIVE ASSESSMENT OF UNMET
NEEDS FOR ABUSED AND NEGLECTED CHILDREN IN SOMERSET COUNTY
OCTOBER 2020

(Listed in order of CHI Funding Priorities)

Mental Health Therapy

- Eliminate/reduce waiting lists
- Ensure that every abused & neglected child has access to needed mental health treatment
- Promote use of arts and innovation including trauma informed care
 - Summer Camp experience

Fill the Learning Gap Created by Covid (tied with Mentoring)

- Provide tutors for abused & neglected children
- Provide support for caregivers to equip them to help the child
- Work with Youth Serving Organizations (YSOs) and schools to coordinate resources so that abused and neglected youth may be equipped to successfully continue their education

Mentoring (tied with "Fill the Learning Gap")

- Children & teens who have been abused
- For parents and caregivers to model good parenting
- Promote parent education to avoid abuse/neglect

Fun Activities

- To help build self-esteem and provide "good life" experiences

Immigrant Children (tied with Support for YSOs)

- Mental health services that meet the special needs of immigrant children who were abused/neglected/traumatized before their arrival in US
- Mentoring for immigrant abused/neglected/traumatized children to help them become a successful part of the community

Support for Youth Serving Organizations (YSO) (tied with Immigrant children)

- Our goal is that none be lost because of funding cuts
- CHI to work with those YSOs who need financial support

- Promote the story of those in need to the community so that community has the opportunity to respond by giving support

Program to Promote YSOs Programs and Information Center for Kids and Caregivers

- “Family Navigator” services so that abused and neglected children and their caregivers are able to find services they need within Somerset County
- Hold an event where all YSOs can share with public and each other what they do so as to promote the possibility of collaboration and cooperation among agencies

Our goal is to ensure the safety and protection of abused children...prevent future abuse...reduce the long-term psychological and physical consequences of abuse and to help abused children learn to trust and to heal

ALL SERVICES SHOULD BE BILINGUAL

**IMPLEMENTATION POSSIBILITIES FOR THE
CHILDREN’S HOPE INITIATIVE ASSESSMENT OF UNMET
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HIGHEST PRIORITY LISTED FIRST AND WITH NO COMMITMENT AT THIS TIME

Mental Health

THE NEED: DCPD has already said that because of budget cuts, there is not sufficient money for all children who need mental health services to receive what they need AND that the scholarships that allow abused and neglected children in their care to go to summer camp may not be available in 2021. ALSO, the strong conclusion by virtually all of the Youth Serving Organizations (YSOs) we interviewed is that children, especially abused and neglected children, are facing and will continue to face mental health issues arising from the pandemic and isolation.

SOMERSET SERVICE PROVIDERS WHO CAN PROVIDE MENTAL HEALTH HELP:

- Richard Hall Community Mental Health Center (RHCMHC) Summer Program for 10 or 20 children/youth
- CHAP after-school program for ancillary services at RHCMHC if they decide they need to reinstate after Covid passes
- Family & Community Services (F&CS) will we continue to provide support to cut waiting times?
- Safe & Sound – if domestic violence is present, they provide mental health services for victims of DV and their children
- Catholic Charities – they provide mental health services
- Catholic Charities – See Rider #1 on their report -- \$10,000 seed money to fund application for satellite office at schools/Franklin Youth Center for Medicaid approval so their therapists and doctors can provide services where the children are, rather than requiring children to come to their Bridgewater office
- Jewish Family Services – provides mental health services
- Tri-County CMO: they arrange mental health services for children in their care

Fill the Learning Gap Created by Covid

THE NEED: There was a need for tutoring services for children removed from the care of their parents even before Covid. These children more often than not were behind their peers educationally because of the trauma they suffered, change of school when they were removed, and educational classifications. With Covid, the consensus of YSOs is that abused and neglected children are suffering more and need more services because of

- social isolation
- remote learning is even more difficult for children not living in a healthy family unit
- abuse cases not being reported during Covid and living with more abuse during the additional months of continuing abuse and neglect
- food insecurity, parents' lack of work, educational and life disruptions— leading to increased insecurity and decrease in trust in family and social institutions

SOMERSET SERVICE PROVIDERS WHO CAN PROVIDE EDUCATIONAL HELP:

- CASA-SHAW tutoring program is in place and ongoing. CHI presented the idea to CASA and has been a funder since the outset.
- Middle Earth is a resource who can help the children they serve receive additional tutoring
- Tri-County CMO arranges educational services for children in their care
- At the suggestion of CHI, the Somerset County Youth Services Commission will hold a forum of educators and all interested YSOs to determine what can be done educationally to help children now and after Covid passes. This forum will focus on all children who have been hurt by remote learning and are falling behind, including, of course, abused children. CHI will learn more of what can be done—and will likely identify partners who can help those children under the care of DCPD.

MENTORING

THE NEED: Mentoring was recognized by CHI as the greatest unmet need of abused and neglected children in Somerset County three years ago in our last needs assessment. Today, it is tied for second place in the findings of our Board, surpassed today by the need for more mental health services because of Covid restrictions and funding cuts. In our meeting with the Children in Court team (judge, attorneys, CASA, DCPD, Family Support Organization) that handles all child abuse court cases, the need for mentors for children and for caregivers/parents is a chronic and compelling unmet need. What is needed is for DCPD to fund paid mentors for each child. Although this service exists in some counties in New Jersey, it has NEVER been available in Somerset County. With funding cuts at DCPD, it will not happen for the foreseeable future. CHI has dealt with the need for mentors for children by funding Middle Earth's lunchtime mentoring for elementary and middle school children in five schools (30 children), and by funding Middle Earth programs that mentor and provide services to aging out youth (18-21) and high school students (8-10 youth in each program). In the past, the need for mentors extends to mentors for parents and caregivers. Caregivers

need mentors because they need help parenting children who are not theirs by birth, and have special challenges in terms of providing guidance and care for children who have been so hurt and traumatized by their life experience. Parents need mentors to help them do better and to help them help their children overcome the hurt and abuse the children have suffered in the past—and to ensure that it does not occur again in the future.

SOMERSET SERVICE PROVIDERS WHO CAN PROVIDE MENTORING HELP:

- Jewish Family Services has an existing parent/caregiver mentoring program in the State of NJ.
- Catholic Charities is able to provide mentoring support for parents and caregivers.
- Middle Earth provides mentors for children
- Visions and Pathways provides mentors for children
- Tri-County CMO arranges mentoring for children in their care within budget limitations

FUN ACTIVITIES

THE NEED: All children need to have fun activities to help build their sense of self-esteem and to give them “good life” experiences that can broaden their horizons in terms of what to expect from life and what they may be able to do with their lives. This is especially true for abused and neglected children who likely have fewer or perhaps none of the healthy, nurturing fun activities that other children have. Three years ago, this was the third area of greatest unmet need found by the CHI Board as part of the 2017 needs assessment. This year, it is fourth, only because the educational need which only existed marginally before, now is a predominant need. In the past, CHI has done its part to meet this need by funding trips provided by Middle Earth. Fifty children were able to go to a ropes adventure course, a farm, Great Adventure and sculpture gardens in Hamilton Township. Children were referred by DCP, Tri-County CMO, and Richard Hall Community Mental Health Center. In past years, we have been able to increase the amount available for this by requesting and receiving grants from the Dombal Vogel Foundation.

SOMERSET SERVICE PROVIDERS WHO CAN PROVIDE FUN TRIP HELP:

- Middle Earth as they have provided this service in the past and will again when Covid passes.
- Visions and Pathways
- Family Service Organization is able to provide fun activities for the families they serve
- Pioneer Family Success Center is able to provide fun activities for families
- YMCA and other summer camps (Note: DCPD may be unable to fund YMCA camps for children in out of home placements in 2021 as it appears funding will not be available as it has been in the past.)

IMMIGRANT CHILDREN

THE NEED: Somerset County has a significant immigrant population. Many of the children who arrive have been the victims of abuse, neglect and/or suffered significant trauma before arriving in the United States. Many do not speak English upon their arrival making it difficult to integrate into the community. They need access to mental health, mentoring, educational and social services. In the past, CHI has sponsored middle school and high school sessions for 15-20 Spanish-speaking young people. Our grant allowed Family and Community Services to offer this unique service.

SOMERSET SERVICE PROVIDERS WHO CAN PROVIDE IMMIGRANT CHILDREN HELP:

- Family and Community Services as they have in the past. With Covid, programs are no longer being offered
- Middle Earth
- Bound Brook and Manville projects—a joint venture between Middle Earth, Catholic Charities, Family and Community Services and others to provide needed services to the immigrant communities generally (currently not focused on abused and neglected children)

SUPPORT FOR YOUTH SERVING ORGANIZATIONS

THE NEED: Somerset County has a large number of youth serving organizations (YSOs) that meet a wide range of needs. As part of our needs assessment, we met with 15 such organizations that have programs for abused and neglected children. There are more than 50 YSOs that are represented on the Somerset County Youth Services Commission. CHI's hope is that none of these YSOs cease functioning for lack of money and resources.

PLAN: To the goal of helping existing YSOs, whenever possible, consistent with our mission, CHI will work with those YSOs who need financial support to continue to survive. CHI is also positioned to be able to promote the story of those YSOs in need to the community so that community has the opportunity to respond by giving support to help keep them open. To the extent that merger of resources between two struggling organizations may be the best answer, to be available to help them work together through either collaboration or merger.

Program to Promote YSOs Programs and Information Center for Kids and Caregivers

THE NEED: There are two separate and distinct audiences to be served: (1) parents/caregivers of abused and neglected children AND (2) YSOs themselves so that each knows what the others in the County are doing and the services they offer so that there can be referrals and hopefully collaboration.

THE PLAN: As to #1, provide "Family Navigator" services so that abused and neglected children and their caregivers are able to find services they need within Somerset County. The county has a website describing all YSOs and service providers in the county. However, many families don't have the ability to use the internet and even if they do, lack the ability to successfully figure out what they need—and where to go for what they need. Safe & Sound provides this service for their domestic violence clients and Catholic Charities shared the need and their own interest in this service during our needs assessment meeting with them. Another possibility is CASA using a CASA volunteer to run this service for parents, caregivers, youth, as well as other CASA workers.

As to #2, CHI could hold a one-day forum to promote YSOs programs. The Youth Services Commission held annual conferences such as this for many years, but

stopped more than 10 years ago. Such a forum would be successful in making YSOs aware of the services other YSOs offered—and in promoting the services that each YSO provides to the community.