



Family & Community Services of Somerset County

Interim report for Childrens Hope Initiative

Program

Support groups for “newcomers” who experienced trauma in their country of origin and a having difficulty adjusting to life in the United States. Groups are conducted in Spanish.

Number of children served by FCSSC in calendar year 2019

34

Summary of how a child’s life has been positively impacted by your good work

Male – 10 years old – 5th Grade – From Guatemala – Attended Smalley School (last school year)

This student’s story is different from the stories of many of his “newcomer” classmates but it still speaks to the impact that trauma has on children. His father sent him, his mom and siblings to the US in 2018. The family has personal wealth and the father has a successful business in Guatemala. The family is here legally. The father sent the family here because of the trauma caused by natural disasters where they live. Floods and earthquakes have had a great impact on this student. He has seen his home destroyed by the natural disasters. In addition, a river runs very close to where his home existed and when it floods and overflows, bodies are often found floating out of the river. The student shared that bodies are dumped in the river because of criminal activity.

The separation from his father, the loss of the life he lived in Guatemala (wealth), the trauma from seeing dead bodies float out of the river, and the relocation to a new country resulted in a great sense of sadness and depression. Though he has the academic skills needed to complete the work, he was shy and unable to focus because of his feelings of sadness. His attendance in the groups has provided him with an opportunity to make friends and lean on others for support. When his uncle died in Guatemala, in an earthquake, he asked to speak with the FCSSC group leader and later discussed the loss of his uncle in the group. Teachers have reported that they see a big change in him.

Female – 11 years old – 5th Grade – From Mexico – Attended Smalley (last school year)

Student’s parents crossed the border approximately 5 years ago leaving her and her brother (newborn) in Mexico with a grandmother and an uncle. Her parents eventually ended up living in New Jersey. She reported that 2 years ago her uncle in Mexico started sexually assaulting her. Approximately 1 year ago, she and her brother crossed the border alone and were separated for a couple of weeks upon their arrival. Eventually they were reunited with their parents in NJ. Her experiences resulted in trust issues, abandonment issues, trauma from the assaults, and difficulty interacting appropriately in social situations.

Her participation in the groups has helped with improving peer relationships. She is displaying an improved ability to concentrate and complete tasks.

What we hope to accomplish in 2020 if funded again to the same level as 2019

As we do every year, In September and October, FCSSC staff met with Bound Brook school officials to discuss the needs of the schools and the needs of the students. Once again, we were informed that the groups were being requested for all age groups. In fact, students who transitioned from the middle school to the high school already inquired about the start of these support groups as they themselves recognize the impact the groups have in providing support. We would hope to continue the groups for as long as they are wanted and needed.

Respectfully submitted,
Richard W. Schumann
Executive Director