



A COMMITTEE OF FRIENDS OF SOMERSET COUNTY YOUTH, INC.

*Newsletter—Fall 2015/Winter 2016*

### **New Afterschool Program at Richard Hall Community Mental Health Center (RHCMHC)**

The Children's Hope Afterschool Program (CHAP) in memory of Paige Whitney Imperatore began at the Richard Hall Community Mental Health Center in April 2015 as the result of the generosity of Paige Whitney's parents, grandparents, and family, as well as their friends.

The target population for CHAP is middle and high school age youth who are struggling due to life stressors and/or biological circumstances. Our goal is to use the arts, in conjunction with therapy, to help children deal with their trauma. Thus far, with the more than \$50,000 of funding provided by the Children's Hope Initiative (CHI), CHAP has been able to provide services to 38 youth, each of whom receives up to 12 hours of afterschool treatment and programming each week for as long as they need this intensive care, often for several months. By meeting transportation needs, CHI funding has resulted in more consistency in treatment and, in turn, a higher program-completion rate.

CHAP has been able to incorporate yoga, drumming, meditation, and music therapy into the curriculum. All of these have provided adolescents with a non-verbal therapeutic modality in which to cope with their stressors.

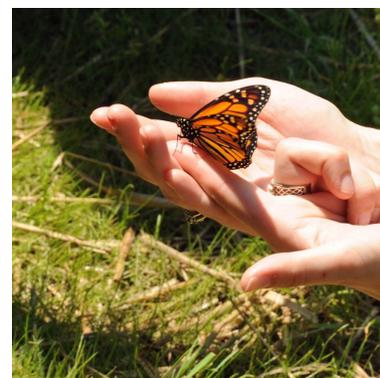
We know that this program and the wonderful people at RHCMHC change lives by helping to heal children and by giving them what they need to overcome the hardships they have experienced in their young lives.

### **Our Mission**

To meet the unmet needs of abused and neglected children and their families by providing resources for existing organizations in Somerset County.

*"Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has."*

Margaret Mead





*Paige Whitney's Family, CHI Board Members, Nicci Spinazzola (RHCMHC Executive Director), and Brian Levine (Somerset County Freeholder) at May 27, 2015 Dedication of Children's Hope Afterschool Program*

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### **CHI is Helping to Cut Waiting Times at Family & Community Services of Somerset County (F&CS)**

“Children and families in Somerset County have benefitted from a very generous new source of funding. The Children’s Hope Initiative provided F&CS with a \$6,000 grant in 2015 to help increase the level of services to youth who have been traumatized by abuse or parental neglect or by witnessing domestic violence. This funding has been targeted towards this vulnerable population by increasing the hours of our part-time clinician who works specifically with children and adolescents and also by increasing the hours of our child psychiatrist. This has led to a decrease in our waiting period for counseling services from an average of 5 weeks (2 to 8 weeks) to an average of 3 weeks (1 to 5 weeks). Children and families experiencing emergency needs are prioritized and seen as soon as possible. In addition, the waiting period for our clients who need supplemental services from our child psychiatrist has decreased from a minimum of 6 weeks to 4 weeks.

“The requests for clinical services for lower income at-risk youth (and their families) have increased greatly in the past year here at F&CS. We are so appreciative of the tremendous efforts of the caring and dedicated volunteers of the Children’s Hope Initiative and the funding that they provide to benefit this vulnerable population.”

Eric Harris LCSW  
Executive Director, Family and Community Services  
<http://fcssomerset.org/supporters/>

## Lunchtime Mentoring Changes Lives

Through the generous support of our donors, CHI gave \$10,000 in 2015 to allow Middle Earth to expand its Lunchtime Mentoring Program. Paid mentors work one-to-one with elementary and middle school children—boys and girls—in Bound Brook, Somerville, Franklin, and Warren. Thirty-four children were served in the last school year.

Significant improvements were noted in conduct and classroom performance. Parents and teachers rated the students' grades at the start of the program as a 4, on a 1 to 10 scale—and at the end, rated their satisfaction with their mentees' current grades at 9. Parents and teachers rated their satisfaction with the Middle Earth Lunchtime Mentoring Program at 10—on a 10 point scale. The children rated their overall satisfaction at 9.

### Jake's Story

Jake is an 11 year old who has no contact with his father. Staff of the lunchtime mentoring program needed to make a referral to DCP&P (child welfare) about his mother. His mother, although upset by the referral, agreed to allow Jake to remain in the program—and to participate this past summer because she saw the difference it made in Jake's life. Jake was angry and acted out at the start. He had difficulty making friends and wasn't doing homework, saying "I don't really care about this anyway." Eventually, Jake and his mentor were able to connect over a game that Jake "had always wanted to try"—chess. In learning the game of chess, Jake began to open up and to let his guard down—and to talk about issues at home and at school. By addressing the issues, he began to acquire the tools he needed to navigate his home life. His increasing confidence helped him to make friends. His mentor observes: "Jake has opened up and has begun to address the greater, underlying issues in his life himself as the program facilitates a safe space for him to do so."

### Sara's Story

Sara is a fourth-grade student who lived with her mother until DCP&P removed Sara from her home because of her mother's neglect and alcohol abuse. Sara then had to ride a bus because her foster placement was out of district. She was no longer able to attend the afterschool program with her friends and had to go home to a house of strangers. Her mentor in the lunchtime program was one of the few stable and consistent things left in her life. At first, Sara did not want to talk much about how she felt. Gradually, "she became more open and trusting, which also allowed her to articulate some of her thoughts and feelings more effectively." In September 2015, Sara returned to her same school (still in foster care) and is continuing to work with her mentor in the lunchtime program.

### Special Thanks

Special thanks from CHI to the caring people of Couch Braunsdorf Insurance in Liberty Corner! As individuals and together, they have found so many ways over the past two years to donate their time, talents (including designing and maintaining our website), and their money to help us serve children! Thank you one and all!

## **CHI Initiates Tutoring of Children in Out-of-Home Placements**

CASA of Somerset, Hunterdon, and Warren Counties (CASA SHaW) provides volunteer advocates for children living in the foster care system. Statistically, only 50% of these children will graduate from high school and fewer than 3% will graduate from college.

Beginning in January 2015, CHI worked with CASA SHaW to initiate the Traveling Tutor program, pairing vetted and experienced CASA volunteers with educational backgrounds with 10 Somerset County CASA children who are struggling academically. The 4 tutors are tutoring 10 Somerset children, and they are also advocating with DCP&P, the foster parents, and the school to address educational challenges. The report to us from CASA is that “The children are beginning to see education in a more positive light as they have ‘book club’ instead of reading, receive praise for the completion of weekly assignments, and are becoming more successful and confident learners.”

As a result of the generous support from the wonderful people at FinPro, Inc., Gladstone, NJ, the tutoring program is fully funded for 2016 and, in fact, will be expanded to serve up to 15 additional CASA children living in Warren and Hunterdon Counties while continuing to serve 10 Somerset County children.

### **Karina’s Story**

“Karina” has been our ‘star student’ this past year. She was two grades behind in school because of her many foster home placements. Her tutor has worked with her and her teachers to identify the areas most in need of remediation, which were reading and math. With her tutor’s help, Karina not only mastered the grade she was in, but also she was promoted to her age-appropriate grade level in September as a direct result of her tutoring and CASA advocacy on her behalf. Karina’s sister, “Kelsea,” was classified as having a reading disability earlier this year—and tested near grade level by June. “While not all of the children served by the Traveling Tutors have made such dramatic progress, all of them were promoted to the next grade this past September, which is a victory in and of itself!”

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### **We Need Your Help!**

Please join with us to continue serving Somerset County's abused children in 2016. Your donation is fully tax deductible, and 100% of your donation goes directly to support the programs described in this newsletter.

To donate, please go to our website:

[www.childrenshopeinitiative.org](http://www.childrenshopeinitiative.org)

or make your check payable to:

Children’s Hope Initiative

and send to:

Friends of Somerset County Youth

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