

The Children's Hope Afterschool Program (CHAP) is an intensive after school therapeutic program which focuses on each individual's right to be able to identify, practice, and utilize resources and skills that help them work towards self-determination, wellness, and recovery. In alignment with the mission, vision, and values of the Richard Hall CMHC, CHAP provides youth struggling emotionally and behaviorally with a highly structured milieu run by a multi-disciplinary team of professionals. The target population for CHAP is middle and high school age youth who are struggling due to life stressors and a myriad of other issues. Behavioral, emotional, and social impairments contribute to disturbance in academic and developmental progress, as well as family and interpersonal relationships. CHAP offers youth the opportunity to overcome these obstacles and create new lasting relationships that will support their recovery.

With the support provided by the Children's Hope Initiative (CHI), CHAP provided services to 25 youth and their families in our afterschool program thus far in 2016. In January 2016, we modified the schedule and format of the program based on feedback from our families. It was reported that the four day per week program interfered with extracurricular activities and the opportunity for family time. The program was modified to a three day per week structure and presently runs from 4pm to 7pm. As a result of this change, attendance for participants has improved and program participants report positive feedback regarding the schedule as well.

On a sad note, we lost our original pet therapist Cecilia and her dog Danny. Cecilia and Danny moved to Pennsylvania and will not be able to continue their work with the CHAP program. We are interviewing new Pet Therapists and hope to be able to one to join our team soon. We continue to utilize other non-traditional treatment modalities such as music therapy, yoga and art therapy to provide adolescents with alternative options for expression. All of these adjunctive therapies provide adolescents with non-verbal therapeutic modalities and coping strategies to manage their many stressors. Many of our youth have voiced that yoga, meditation, music therapy, and pet therapy are not coping strategies they would not have thought about incorporating into their "tool box" without the exposure they received in program. During one family session, a current CHAP participant told her mother that she preferred to be in CHAP, because she felt that she was "understood and can be myself". This young lady has a history of sexual abuse, is a victim of bullying and who self-harmed in the past as a way to regulate her emotions. Currently, she reports that she has not self-injured since beginning the CHAP program.

Another young man who recently graduated from CHAP continues to use the tools that he learned in the program. “John” had a long history of physical and emotional abuse, being taken from his biological parents at the age of 6 following a hospitalization due to injuries sustained from abuse and neglect. He was placed in foster care and was initially very compliant, but became more of a behavioral problem as he got older. By his adolescent years he was out of control at home and school, although his behavior at school was tolerated due to his athletic abilities. His foster mother had brought him to RHCMHC as he was almost 18 and she feared his behavior might haunt him as an adult. John began with RHCMHC in outpatient therapy. He clearly stated upon meeting with his therapist that he wanted “nothing to do with her or counseling”. After about 3 sessions of being an angry adolescent, he came in one day in a crisis and was “open” to a discussion. That was a turning point for John, and he began to engage in treatment as this crisis continued to escalate. Believing he could use a higher level of care, his therapist discussed the CHAP program with him and although initially resistant he reluctantly agreed. Group leaders and John quickly learned that he had great feedback for other members, and John was able to put himself out in the group more and more. He also willingly participated in yoga and art therapy, two activities he reported he would have never even considered in the past. John stayed in the program 4 weeks and asked to be discharged back to individual therapy, where he continues today. His foster mother reports he is doing better at home and his grades are improving and that he still utilizes art at times at home when he is feeling particularly stressed. He is scheduled to attend camps for his sport this summer and is being actively recruited by Division 2 and 3 colleges and universities. He continues to discuss this stress with his therapist but reports his depression and anger are improving.

Finally, the lack of public transportation continues to be a major barrier to accessing services for Somerset County residents. Funding by the Children’s Hope Initiative assists families who lack transportation or have work constraints that cause them to be unable to transport their children to or from the program. The CHAP staff coordinates with other system partners to ensure that an adolescent can attend the program even if transportation is a barrier. With executed releases of information, CHAP staff contact caseworkers at DCP&P, the Tri-County Care Management Organization (CMO) and schools to assist in providing transportation to and from program. In the event a family is not linked up with any of these entities or the child does not have an IEP, we have brokered an agreement with a local taxi service to transport participants to or from Richard Hall at no expense to the family.

CHAP is committed to providing youth and their families with a well-rounded program that can offer a variety of different therapeutic modalities to ensure that each youth is getting an individualized program to meet their needs. We are an evolving program and dedicated to bringing new and innovative evidenced based services to the program as opportunities arise. Thank you for the opportunity in allowing us to continue to work with Somerset County adolescents and their families in the CHAP program as we embark on our second full year.

Below are some images from CHAP participants. These images include pieces recently created on the sidewalks around the perimeter of the agency utilizing sidewalk chalk and pieces that now adorn the bulletin boards throughout the OPD area. CHAP group members have enjoyed being able to display their artwork for others to enjoy not only their images but the messages they convey. Enjoy!

SIDEWALK ART



GOOD VIBES