

07/24/2018

### *The CHAP Program at Richard Hall CMHC*

The Children's Hope Afterschool Program (CHAP) initially started in 2015 as 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. 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 has provided services to over 190 unduplicated youth and their families since beginning in 2015. As a program, we continuously strive to service our community and the youth to the best of our ability.

We have found that group therapy is the most helpful treatment modality and what children and adolescents enjoy most. Rather than requiring youth to commit to a multi-day schedule, the program changed in 2017 to offer a variety of stand-alone groups for younger children, adolescents and older teens so that they can attend based on the particular need that brings them to the Center and what works in their schedules.

Since implementing our new a la carte group menu we have noticed an increased commitment by children as well as their families in certain groups. The current groups that we offer include Teen Yoga, Social Butterflies (a social skills group for 8-10 year olds), and Teen Coping Skills. With the support provided by the Children's Hope Initiative (CHI), we have been able to offer weekly yoga to the Teen Yoga group. Our clinical staff has reported a notable change in participating youths' abilities to use this healthy coping skill in group as well as on their own time. Many of those engaged in these classes have also indicated that without exposure to yoga through CHAP, they would not have had the opportunity to learn this skill.

In the summer of 2017 we launched the "CHAP Health and Wellness Camp". The camp was for children ages 9-13 who have experienced abuse, neglect and or trauma in their lives. The objective was to create a camp that gives children the tools to assist them in all areas of their lives, and to have FUN while doing it. CHAP Health and Wellness Camp was not your traditional camp with dodgeball and swimming, but instead provided an experience to give children the tools to assist them in all areas of their lives including but not limited to managing frustration, working as part of a team, negotiation skills, effective communication, self-awareness and conflict resolution.

We incorporated adjunctive therapies that have been effective in working with children who have experienced abuse/neglect and trauma. The goal was to address the mind and body, as research on trauma indicates the connection between whole health treatment and healthy outcomes.

In 2017 the camp had two cycles and both cycles ran Mon 9:30-2:30, Wed and Friday from 9-2. We accepted referrals from Somerset County DCP&P, the Tri-County CMO, as well as community agencies including Richard Hall. We wanted the camp to be a small camp providing each youth with an

07/24/2018

individualized experience. The summer of 2017 we introduced 18 children to equine therapy, karate, art therapy, yoga, physical conditioning, a certified nutritionist and music therapy. Although the campers enjoyed all of the activities, equine therapy, karate, and strength and conditioning were among the favorites when we received feedback at the conclusion of the camp.

For this year's CHAP Health and Wellness Camp we were able to incorporate some of the campers' suggestions and make the camp even better. The camp began its first cycle on July 8<sup>th</sup> and is scheduled to conclude on July 27<sup>th</sup>. We again accepted referrals from Somerset County DCP&P, the Tri-County CMO, other community agencies, and families. We have six active participants in the first cycle. The camp's second cycle is scheduled to begin July 30<sup>th</sup> and we have 11 campers registered to begin. The camp currently runs on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays from 9am-3pm. We continue to keep our promise to keep the camp small, providing each youth with an individualized experience.

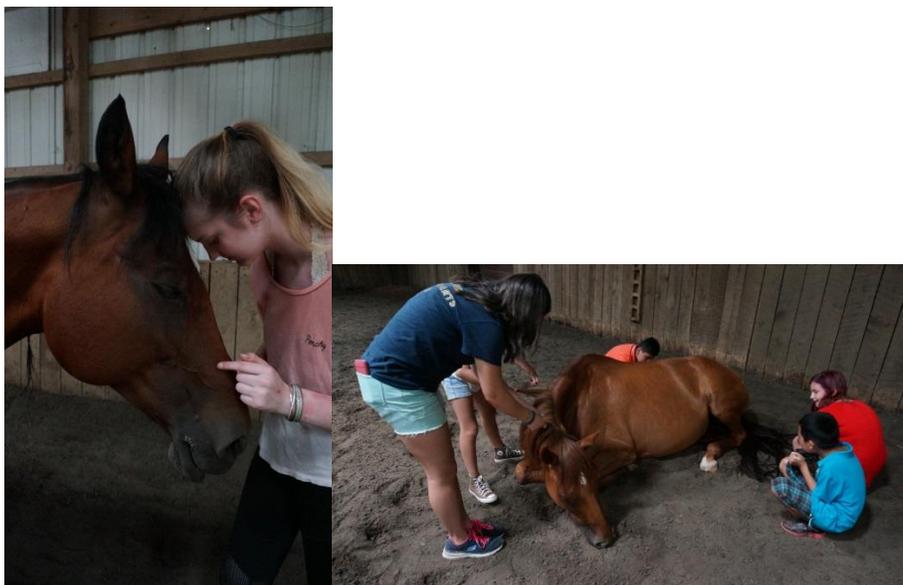
We wanted to ensure that in providing the youth with tools we were addressing mind and body, as research shows strong evidence of interconnectedness between our physical and mental health. Each day the camp is broken up into various activities. These activities include karate, physical fitness training and conditioning as part of karate, yoga and meditation, equine therapy, art therapy, and music therapy. In addition, we have been able to arrange for each cycle of campers to take field trips to the RVCC Planetarium and to Grounds for Sculpture.

We have received positive feedback from parents regarding the experiences the children are having. We have also received positive feedback that extending the hours of the camp from 9-3 has been beneficial to working parents as longer camp days allow for more flexibility in dropping and picking up their children.

We have had many successes over the years but below are a few highlights from Camp 2018 that clearly depict the benefits of CHAP to our youth.

On July 8<sup>th</sup>, our first day of camp we spent the day at Spring Reins of Life, an Equine Assisted Treatment facility, in Three Bridges New Jersey. The equine assisted psychotherapy model is proving to be effective for helping youth overcome defiance, anger, low self-esteem, grief and loss, and mood disorders. Working with the horses helps at-risk youth to: enhance problem solving and social skills, learn empathy, stimulate creativity, accept responsibility and accountability for their choices and behavior, gain a sense of personal control, learn stress reduction, manage anger and frustration, decrease feelings of hopelessness and depression and build a strong and positive perception of self. After lunch, our newly formed group of campers surrounded soundly sleeping horse "Freedom". The group identified "Freedom" to be in need of support and comfort. The group remained surrounding this horse for approximately 25 minutes, providing gentle support in the form of petting, braiding hair, and verbal comfort. During group processing, group members were able to relate this experience back to their own. They identified times in their life when support was necessary and ways in which support was gained from those in their lives, verbally and non-verbally. They were able to identify what their verbal and non-verbal communication looks like when in need of support. What we found most interesting is that campers were not aware that "Freedom" was feeling a bit under the weather, but gravitated to him as they felt he needed their attention the most. Below you will find two beautiful pictures from their first day with the horses.

07/24/2018



Next, we have a 12 year old Hispanic male who is a returning camper from last year. He presents to us with a diagnosis of Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder and Autism Spectrum Disorder which is exhibited by behaviors of impulsivity, limited peer interaction, decreased problem solving skills, and decreased expression of thought and emotion in a healthy way. Last year, he struggled with interactions with peers while in camp, having meltdowns on a daily basis, need for redirection from staff consistently, and struggled peer interactions. This year, staff has seen a vast difference in his interactions with others. He is able to verbalize his frustrations and emotions, and identify when his interactions with others are not appropriate and correct them. Our karate instructor has also identified a marked difference in his behavior and his ability to maintain focus during lessons. It is extremely rewarding to see his growth and progress over the past year. He reported that the most helpful part of CHAP is the support he receives from peers.

A few additional pictures have been attached to show the campers participating in art therapy, karate, music therapy, and yoga.

CHAP continues to be 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.

07/24/2018

