

Care, Comfort and Hope

Wisconsin Hospitals Community Benefits

Mental Health and Mental Disorders: children/teens

Mental disorders vary in severity and in their impact on people's lives. The symptoms can be severe and extremely destructive, causing immeasurable suffering for the patient and their families. Hospitals see an ever-increasing number of patients seeking treatment for mental disorders in their emergency departments. Inpatient mental health services are offered at 44 hospitals in Wisconsin and are generally operated at a loss, but because of the importance of treating these patients in the community, hospitals continue to place a high priority on providing mental health services to patients and their families. Sadly, nearly a third of those who are homeless suffer from serious mental illness.

Focus on teens at Aurora Psychiatric Hospital

Paul Zenisek, a therapist at Aurora Psychiatric Hospital's Adolescent Chemical Dependency Program, saw a problem and created a solution.

Paul noticed a disturbing trend. Just as teen substance use was on the rise, teens' access to treatment was declining. Low reimbursement from insurance, the tough logistics of getting kids to participate in an intensive outpatient program and a societal bias that teen drug and alcohol use is a normal phase of adolescence, all combined to create barriers to getting teens the help they needed.

Working with seven local high schools, Paul designed a four-week group program to respond to the difficult process of getting teens to consider changing their substance use behaviors.

His idea was simple: Engage the students in a non-judgmental dialogue about their current use of drugs and alcohol. Provide feedback on their use patterns. Explore the consequences of their substance use today and in the future. Provide facts.

No pressure. No preaching. No shoulds.

The result? Forty percent of the nearly 150 teens that participated in one of Paul's four-week groups were able to spontaneously change and decrease their substance use, particularly with high-risk drugs like cocaine. Twenty five percent entered into a formal drug and alcohol treatment program. Some were willing to agree to participate in a sobriety sample – 90 days substance free. Statistics show that teens who stay clean for ninety days have a 90 percent recovery rate.

Paul describes one memorable participant. "One kid from a nearby community went through the program but was resistant to changing his behavior. He was using marijuana and prescription opiates daily and often combining them with alcohol. I was shocked at the amount and frequency of his use and I told him this."

Paul maintained an open dialogue with the student. It took two years before the teen agreed to try a sobriety sample. Within those ninety days, he saw positive changes. The student has now been substance free for 120 days. His grades have improved to A's and B's, he's secured a part-time job and his peers voted him into a class leadership role.

"There's no silver bullet that cures these kids," Paul states. "It's about building strong partnerships between the school, the family, law enforcement and the treatment community. We need a strong network supporting teens to make better choices."

Paul's work in the schools is supported through a grant from the Wisconsin Partnership.

Aurora Psychiatric Hospital, Wauwatosa

On campus of Aurora Psychiatric Hospital...Kradwell School

Kradwell School provides a safe, supportive environment for students in grades 5-12 who have behavioral health needs.

The unusual aspect of Kradwell is its affiliation with the largest not-for-profit integrated health system in the state – Aurora Health Care. It is a school that is vital to students throughout southeast Wisconsin who cannot succeed in traditional school environments because of learning disabilities, depression, bipolar disorder, and other problems. This puts them at risk for failing to graduate from a traditional school. Aurora supports Kradwell School by providing the teaching staff and payroll, human resources and accounting services, maintenance and administrative costs and charges no rent for the facility.

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Kradwell's structure is unique, yet fulfills all the requirements necessary for any other Wisconsin school. Students attend a half-day, either in the morning or afternoon. Individualized instruction is key. Kradwell teachers help students learn and grow by tailoring the education to fit each student. For example:

One high school student with a diagnosis of Obsessive Compulsive Disorder, anxiety, and depression had just begun taking medication. He had poor time-management skills—one of the characteristics of Obsessive Compulsive Disorder. Reaching back to their roots when the school served inpatients, the teaching staff collaborated with the clinical team on campus to deal with each of these challenges. The student was able to achieve above-average academic performance, and ultimately he returned to his former high school as a junior.

Although Kradwell is a private school, scholarships are available. Many school districts pay the tuition for students who need a specialized learning environment, with Kradwell receiving referrals from about 24 school districts in the area.

Aurora Psychiatric Hospital, Wauwatosa

Weaving lives together - with the schools

Agnesian HealthCare is reinforcing its commitment to future generations by partnering with the Fond du Lac School District on its TeenScreen program.

A longstanding collaboration that involves several community partners, TeenScreen promotes a healthy student body by providing emotional health screenings for students – all at no cost.

TeenScreen is completely voluntary, confidential and requires parental consent. The program, developed by Columbia University, is used in many schools throughout Fond du Lac County. To date they have screened nearly 4,000 students at risk for depression, anxiety and alcohol/substance abuse, referring 700 for treatment.

Agnesian HealthCare's support includes a medical expert on the advisory board and a funded staff position, Michelle Neill, RN, to help conduct screenings, provide education and serve as a resource. Neill stresses the importance of her work.

"If these issues went unidentified, students may not be able to finish school, go on to college and succeed in life," Neill says. "But by screening them now and catching concerns early, we are able to refer them to the appropriate resources they need and ensure they are physically, socially and emotionally healthy."

Agnesian HealthCare, Fond du Lac

ThedaCare collaborates with competitors to meet kids' mental health needs

Until recently, Fox Cities kids with mental health issues had few options — and those on Wisconsin's medical assistance plan had even fewer. The problem, called out in a 2006 quality-of-life study commissioned by United Way Fox Cities, meant that families, and particularly financially strained ones, had to travel to Milwaukee, Madison, or Green Bay to see a pediatric psychiatrist — if they were able to see one at all.

That all changed in fall 2008 with the opening of Fox Valley Children's Mental Health Center, created through the vision of community leaders and an innovative partnership among competing health systems.

"Pediatric mental health care is one of the area's biggest healthcare needs, and ThedaCare is working with Children's Hospital of Wisconsin-Fox Valley and Affinity Health System to meet those needs," said ThedaCare senior vice president Kathryn Correia.

To staff the clinic, located on Goodwill Industries' Menasha campus, Children's Hospital recruited child psychiatrist Mark Rovick, DO, while ThedaCare and Affinity supply therapists that operate on a sliding-fee scale and help patients overcome financial barriers to treatment.

"Since we opened, we have received about 500 referrals for care and have scheduled 262 new patients," Dr. Rovick said. Some 56 percent of those patients receive state medical assistance benefits — children that psychiatrists with local private practices would not accept as patients.

Families of these children "used to drive three hours for an appointment, or couldn't get in to see anybody," Dr. Rovick said.

Now they have somewhere close at hand to turn. Said Dr. Rovick, "Most families tell me that they see this program as 'a godsend.'"

ThedaCare, Appleton

Submit community benefit stories to Mary Kay Grasmick, editor, at mgrasmick@wha.org.



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