Pediatric Mental Health Care Access Program (BSCA) FY 2022 Expansion Award

This project will primarily address the mental health needs of students and their families within our district that are related to, or have been caused by the stress and anxiety of the pandemic. We will contract with a local agency, Brighter Futures Counseling, to provide dedicated, fully credentialed, licensed therapists, on an hourly basis, to meet these needs. (A copy of our contract with this community agency is attached.) We have contracted with Brighter Futures Counseling in the past to provide on- site therapists in our schools, and this would increase our ability to meet the needs that have been caused by the Covid pandemic. Individual and group counseling will be provided to clients who have first been assessed to have issues resulting from the pandemic experience, such as grief over the loss of a loved one, anxiety over loss of income and parental unemployment, concern/worry over food insecurity and housing issues, anxiety over academic non- performance due to long periods of virtual learning, breakdown of interpersonal relationships due to stress, etc. Risk assessments will be provided when warranted, with parental permission. Training for teachers will be provided according to assessed needs indicated, such as Youth Mental Health First Aid, early detection of suicide warning signs, self care, etc., both in person and in virtual formats.

The owner/supervisor at Brighter Futures Counseling is also a certified trainer for childcare workers, and through this grant and the hourly contractual amount paid, would provide pandemic relief related training to the area child care centers within our school district boundaries that will meet their ECTRIS training requirements.

Our Brighter Futures therapists will also address the Early Childhood area by providing child development and strengths based training and support to pregnant/parenting teens and young first time parents, as needed.

Our target population for this project will be low/moderate income families with students in our school district who have no insurance or inadequate insurance and who are assessed to be experiencing emotional hardships due to the pandemic. 47.7% of our students are economically disadvantaged. Special consideration will be given to minorities, the disabled, the LGBTQ population, and limited English speaking families. Information will be shared, when necessary, through our limited English speaking teacher and through our Special Education Dept., if we need to communicate to the deaf/blind population. Of the approx. 2300 students in our district, 67.7% are white, 11% African American, 10.3% bi-racial, and 11% other races. According to the Kaiser Family Foundation, due to the pandemic, about 4 in 10 adults in the U.S. have reported symptoms of anxiety or depressive disorder, up from 1 in 10 reported in a poll conducted two years ago. Negative impacts on their mental health and well being that were reported were difficulty sleeping and eating, increase in alcohol consumption or substance use, and worsening chronic conditions, due to worry and stress over the corona virus. As the pandemic continued, on-going and necessary imposed health measures caused parents to experience job loss and isolation, contributing to further mental health deterioration. This creates concerns for the well-being of the children in these homes, who have experienced challenges with school closures and virtual learning. According to our school district data, a significant number of students are failing or behind grade level after this year of challenges. This has created higher levels of anxiety and depression among the students, as well, as they struggle to make up the work that they are lacking, and facing the ostracism of being held back in the same grade for another year. It is safe to say that at least 1 in 4 disadvantaged children are evidencing the same issues as their parents.

We already have a seven year relationship with Brighter Futures Counseling, so we will be building on that collaboration with this proposal. There are child care programs in our school district who serve two and three year olds, and we will reach out to each of them to offer training opportunities addressing the challenges associated with the pandemic that will meet their ECTRIS requirements. These therapists will help with outreach and marketing these trainings. Also, pregnant and parenting teens will be referred to the therapists for services, as well, to help them learn appropriate child development milestones and proven effective parenting strategies. Referrals will be made to the First Steps program and Hands through the Lincoln Trail District Health Dept. When risk assessments are performed and a higher level of care (inpatient) is deemed necessary, referrals will be made to the local community mental health center’s (Communicare) Children’s Crisis Stabilization Unit, or to the psychiatric unit at Baptist Health Hardin for adults. Adolescent girls with sexual abuse trauma or substance abuse issues may be referred to Lincoln Trail Behavioral Health Systems. If inpatient treatment is not indicated, but a psychiatrist is needed, those referrals will be made to local providers.

Participant Engagement:

Upon receipt of the grant award, information will be shared with staff, students and parents regarding the services offered, and disseminated on our website and EIS Facebook page. The therapists will be available to meet with groups of students who have been identified by their teachers, principals and guidance counselors to have issues related to the pandemic, and services will be offered to them individually and to their families, as well, if issues are not resolved within the group setting. Support groups for parents will be organized as warranted, such as grandparent/caregiver support groups, parents dealing with unemployment/ underemployment issues, parents dealing with substance abuse issues, etc.

This project proposal will address all 5 Standards of the Strengthening Families/Youth Thrive Protective Factors. As pandemic related issues are detected and treated, the therapists will adapt a Family Centeredness approach with clients, realizing that the whole family system needs to support and be involved in the therapy that is being offered. The various activities and treatment modalities that are offered will create Family Strengthening by providing support groups and referrals, as needed, to other community agencies and programs and by providing training for teachers and child care workers to support the family system. The project will be made accessible to and marketed to all of our students in need, Embracing Diversity and addressing and celebrating differences and uniqueness. This project will rely on the strong Community Building relationships and trust that have already been established by the FRC/YSC in our district for the last thirty years and with Brighter Futures Counseling for seven years. The project has a strong Evaluation component that will assess all clients in the beginning, at the midway point, and at the end of treatment. This project is designed to respond to individual student and family crises and to link students and families to services and opportunities, while valuing and supporting parents to strengthen their childrearing skills and facilitating the social and emotional development of their children (our students). We hope that through the support groups and attendance at educational programming that is offered, that friendships and mutual support will grow between families and the parents will know that they are valued and supported. The therapists will be in a prime position to detect any early warning signs of child abuse or neglect, and to make appropriate referrals, and find methods of addressing the whole family system in those cases to try to prevent children being removed from the homes, and to promote reunification, when possible.

Evaluation:

Records will be kept of all students, parents and educators who receive services through this grant. All referrals and risk assessments will be documented. We expect to serve between 200-250 unduplicated clients. For middle and high school students who receive on-going therapy, the PHQ-9 (Patient Health Questionnaire) and the GAD-7 (Generalized Anxiety Disorder) scale will be used at the onset of services and at the end of therapy to monitor change. The GAD-7 is one of the most frequently used diagnostic self report scales for screening, diagnosis and severity assessment of anxiety disorder. An additional survey tool will be developed for parents and teachers to be given at the beginning and end of therapy to review change, if deemed necessary.

For any trainings that are offered to teachers, parents, child care workers, student groups – we would offer an evaluation tool at the end to be completed by the participant, to determine the effectiveness of the presentation and the presenter and to make changes, as needed. This evaluation information will be presented and discussed periodically at the FRC/YSC Advisory Council Meetings to determine the effectiveness of the overall project and if any changes need to be made moving forward.

Budget/ Budget Narrative:

0349 Other Professional Services $46,000.00 (460 hrs x $100/hr.)

We will contract with Brighter Futures Counseling to provide therapists to this project at $100 per hour, who will provide pandemic related individual and group therapy sessions, educational parent sessions, risk assessments, and teacher training/ consultations. Brighter Futures will also provide training to local daycare center staff that meets their ECTRIS requirements, by a certified trainer, and trainings/support will be extended to teen/first-time parents in assessing appropriate child development stages and early parenting strategies.

0692 Health Supplies $ 1,000.00

Play therapy materials, materials to help with mindfulness and grounding, resource books and workbooks for students and their families.

0616 Food – Non Instruction $1500.00

Food to serve at programs for students and families attending programming.

0617 Food - Instructional $ 500.00

Food for programs designed to teach families healthy eating and the importance of dinnertime discussion

0679 Other student activities $1,000.00

Program supplies for student activities conducted to address emotional needs

Total: $50,000