



SAGINAW COUNTY
COMMUNITY MENTAL
HEALTH AUTHORITY

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Saginaw County Receives Children's Mental Health Grant

SAGINAW – Everyone knew DeShawn needed help.

His grandmother, now his guardian, knew his temper outbursts, long periods of withdrawal and trouble with the law were the result of emotional issues.

His juvenile probation officer knew that the emotional scars left by DeShawn's early childhood would require some form of mental health treatment.

His teachers offered as much support as they could, but lacked the resources to get him all the help he needed.

There are simply too many cracks in a complex system for children like DeShawn to fall through, says Sandra Lindsey, CEO of Saginaw County Community Mental Health Authority (SCCMHA). "And those cracks meant that, without the comprehensive, coordinated help they needed, hundreds of young people with Severe Emotional Disorders would become part of an ever-growing cycle of crime, unemployment, poverty and substance abuse."

Many of those cracks are about to be filled by a six-year, \$9 million grant from the federal Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA). Joined by \$11.5 million in local and state resources, the funds will be used to continue the development of the Saginaw Children's Mental Health System of Care.

The system, which brings together a broad-based coalition of service organizations, will target 500 Saginaw County children with serious emotional disturbance and their families.

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"These are young people from age 6 to age 21," says Lindsey, "with severe emotional problems who are experiencing difficulties at school, at home and/or in the community. They all require services and supports from at least two public child servicing systems," such as mental health, juvenile justice, child welfare or special education.

The grant will support the expansion of evidence-based practice interventions, as well as new services not currently offered in Saginaw County. But the programs themselves are only part of the picture, Lindsey says. "The project is just as focused upon transforming the way we deliver service," she says, "and creating an infrastructure to support it."

The groundwork for that infrastructure has been laid over the past several years, Lindsey says, through the development of the Saginaw Children's System of Care Partners. The group includes senior leaders and middle managers at SCCMHA, Saginaw's Michigan Department of Human Services office, the Saginaw Intermediate School District, Saginaw County Family Court, local school districts and law-enforcement agencies, as well as a number of private organizations that provide mental health, rehabilitation and medical services.

"This funding means we will be able to fully support this partnership," Lindsey says, "and develop a mechanism to make sure children get all the services they need without any gaps." It will also mean enhanced support to the governing infrastructure to oversee implementation. "All these services will adhere to a system of values and principles – including that the work be family-centered, youth-guided and culturally and linguistically competent."

All three of those elements are critical in Saginaw, Lindsey says, where services have traditionally been top-down and driven by specific needs of the agency or provider. "The schools would look at part of the child's picture, and address it with their resources. The courts would look at their part, and address it with what the law allowed. Nowhere in the process was there a point at which someone worked with the young person and with the family to coordinate an integrated approach to actually meeting the child and family's treatment and support needs.

"This grant funding and the technical assistance that will accompany it, is a game changer for services to some of the most needy and complex-to-serve kids and families in our community," says Lindsey. "It will help us enhance existing services, expand services where capacity was inadequate and develop new services

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that did not previously exist in our community. Another focus is on work force development training of clinical staff that provide treatment to these families and will allow us to move our evidence-based practice expansion agenda further along than we ever could have accomplished without these funds.”

Other elements of the project will include:

- An expanded Family Advisory Board and Youth Advisory Board to engage more families and youth in the decision-making and planning for services
- Expansion of Wrap Around Services as the case management model to oversee the coordination of care
- Development of new services like therapeutic foster care and group home living
- Expansion of mobile crisis outreach to families
- A very rigorous program evaluation component and participation as a local site in the federal research project on System of Care development

The need for this project in our community, Lindsey says, was critical. Saginaw County has some of the highest levels of violence, trauma, unemployment and poverty in the country, and about 12 percent of the county's children have a severe emotional disorder. “While we have great providers of services, the lack of system-wide coordination was keeping us from getting those children all the help they need.

“This grant will further expand innovation and service expansion across the lifespan of childhood.”

The System of Care initiative will coordinate its efforts with Project Launch, a SAMHSA initiative to promote wellness in children from birth to age 8, and the Saginaw County Great Start Collaborative.

“We could not be more appreciative or proud,” Lindsey says, “and a bit surprised. Most applicants aren't funded on the first try.”

“That we were awarded the grant underscores the need faced by the community. It's also a complement to the partners who have worked so hard to develop a system of care for our community.”

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Saginaw County Community Mental Health Authority is headquartered at 500 Hancock Street in Saginaw. SCCMHA provides numerous services including evaluations, screenings, treatment and referrals. SCCMHA assists approximately 5,000 Saginaw County citizens annually. Learn more at sccmha.org.