

Saginaw MAX System of Care

Now in its sunset phase of operation with just a matter of weeks left to prepare for its September 30, 2018 closure, the Saginaw MAX System of Care Expansion (SOC) initiative leaves behind an indelible imprint in the community. The Expansion Grant afforded us the opportunity to build upon the many successes of the initial Cooperative Agreement between the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), Saginaw County Community Mental Health Authority (SCCMHA) and all of its systems partners. The System of Care principle of cross systems collaboration required partners to work together to help transform the children's mental health system in Saginaw County by integrating and embedding all system of care principles across all child-serving agencies and community-based organizations. The expansion funding also afforded us more time to further address challenges which had been identified but needed additional resources, strategic planning and cross systems attention to achieve the desired positive outcomes.

Successful completion of SOC and Expansion initiatives result in enhanced and sustainable services, relationships and family, youth and community participation. Partners, many of whom were new to the concept of youth and family voice, cultural competency, cross systems training and other SOC principles will be committed to continued growth and development even after the grant dollars are no longer available. Saginaw MAX has accomplished this community 'buy-in' in such a meaningful way that there are numerous and very positive services, programs, positions and policy/procedure changes which will benefit the families we serve and the entire community for many years to come. When properly implemented, it is often difficult to identify a particular SOC inspired transformation – it may appear to have been an integral part of the community all along.

Over the past eight years, SOC has launched and/or strengthened multiple services which help to reduce stigma associated with severe mental health and behavioral diagnosis. There are many which will be shared in more detail during the final community forum during the month of September. The following highlights of the past eight year initiative give a glimpse of how a community committed to the betterment of its citizens has achieved results far beyond the initial planning and goal setting phase of the two grants:

Family Guides: newly created positions within SCCMHA made it possible for families to receive a level of support at the very critical initial point of contact that would make the intake experience less stressful.

Wraparound: While SCCMHA provided Wraparound services prior to grant funding, the SOC funding enabled us to enhance this service by adding eight new trained and certified Wrap Coordinators to the team.

Mobile Urgent Treatment Team (MUTT): MUTT services were also enhanced using grant funding including an increase of hours of operation (from after school only to include the entire school day).

SOC Summer Day Camps: These camps were strategically placed throughout the community providing full day STEM and summer enrichment activities for children and youth.

People Achieving Change Today (PACT) mentoring program: Recruitment, training and retention of mentors for children with mental health and behavioral challenges requires great skill and commitment. The PACT mentoring program was developed to provide the much needed service for children who might otherwise languish on extensive wait lists.

Open Table: SOC provided resources and extensive training in the development of partnerships between the Open Table initiative and the faith community to provide support to Transition Aged Youth involved in two or more of the child-serving systems in their efforts to experience successful transformation into adulthood and independence. The Open Table Team has become a sought after model now offering service to other groups and populations in Saginaw.

School-Based Clinicians: A school based mental health clinician is posted in every Saginaw Public School District (SPSD) Elementary School and the Middle School. Collaborating with the SPSD School Social Workers, SPSD Behavior Interventionists, MUTT team workers and other school personnel, students and families experiencing the most severe obstacles to success have a support team available to offer guidance and support as needed.

Governance Team: Saginaw was fortunate to have had leaders of the child-serving systems buy into and then begin this partnership journey over eight years ago. This commitment ‘from the top’ has proven to be one of the major accomplishments of the entire SOC initiative. SCCMHA, DHHS, Juvenile Court, Saginaw Public Schools, along with leaders of the faith community, youth and families established a governing body which continues to meet on a monthly basis to share information, present and address barriers to providing service and to be as transparent and accountable to one another as possible on behalf of the children and families we serve. Sustainability is critical to maintain the growth a community experiences during the life of the grant. The Governance Team will continue to collaborate when the program ends – our SAMHSA support and evaluation teams tell us that unfortunately, most communities lose their leadership involvement at the end of the grant funding.

This brief list of enhanced services, many piloted using SOC and Expansion funding have helped to reduce the stigma often associated with individuals experiencing mental health challenges. The SOC initiative has presented the community with evidence based models and a few new and innovative approaches to meeting the needs of the children and families we serve. A great deal of effort has also been devoted to researching and addressing the needs of children, youth and families whose Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity needs place them in vulnerable positions in school, home, church and community. As a result, an intensive training has been developed to support safety and educate professionals and allies in efforts to promote the physical and emotional safety and well-being of youth in Saginaw County.

Extensive training has been provided to literally thousands of community members across all spectrums of the systems. Cultural Competency training (California Brief Multi-Cultural Competency Scale), Trauma training (Resource Parent Training), Parenting classes (eight week Strengthening Families model), are a small sampling of other trainings provided at no cost in our efforts to educate all segments of the community of our responsibility to keep our children’s safety our priority. Over the next several weeks, SOC will pack our boxes and move into new and challenging positions. Fortunately, the legacy of SOC will remain – a network of systems, families and community partners working together for the betterment of children, families and the community at large. Thanks to all who have shared in this journey.