

# Effective risk reduction for transition age youth using a unique Systems of Care approach

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## Introduction

K-Town Youth Empowerment Network, a mental health initiative in Knox County, Tenn., is the only *System of Care* in the state that focuses specifically on the needs of transition-age youth with serious emotional disturbance and/or mental illness.

K-Town offers an effective approach to delivering mental health services through a *culturally competent, family-driven, youth-guided, and community-based* system of care, serving youth ages 14-21, as they transition to adulthood.

This program encourages youth to build on their own *unique strengths*, talents, culture, as well as “*natural supports*”<sup>1</sup>, such as other family members, friends, or neighbors, to achieve their goals and function better at home, in school, in the community, and throughout life.

## What is a System of Care?

A System of Care is a *network* of community-based services organized to meet the challenges of youth with serious mental health needs and their families.

Families work with public and private organizations to design mental health supports that address each person’s *specific needs*.

Nearly 100 of these networks have been established nationwide, with a *strong track record* of improving school performance and decreasing suicide attempts, juvenile justice involvement, and the need for higher levels of care.

### National Outcomes<sup>3</sup> show how Systems of Care help youth stay at home, in school, and out of trouble:

- School suspensions and expulsions decreased by 44%.
- Achievement of passing grades increased by 31%.
- Youth reported significantly lower levels of depression (22%).
- Youth suicide attempts were reduced by more than two-thirds.

## Facts about Knox County youth

It is estimated that 9,000<sup>2</sup> youth in Knox County ages 14-21 have experienced a mental illness that significantly impacts their ability to function at home, in school, and in the community, placing them at *extremely high risk* as they transition to adulthood.

### Youth Risk Behavior Survey Results vs. K-Town evaluation data.<sup>2</sup>

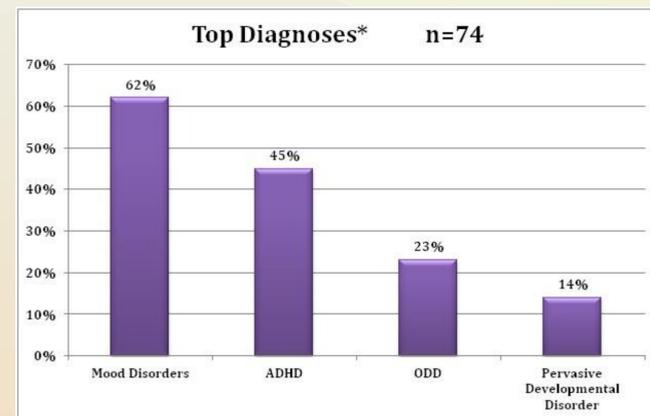
Risk Behavior	Knox Co	K-Town YEN
Got into a physical fight within the last 12 months	25.7% (n=896)	50% (past 6 months) (n=58)
Considered suicide attempt in the last 12 months	13.3% (n=900)	46.6% (ever) (n=58)
Made a suicide attempt in the last 12 months	8.7% (n=903)	20.7% (past 6 months) (n=58)
Had at least one drink of Alcohol before age 13	13.4% (n=890)	25.8% (n=35)
Used marijuana (ever)	38% (n=891)	59.6% (n=57)
Used cocaine or crack (ever)	5.5% (n=866)	10.5% (n=57)

## K-Town Youth Empowerment Network

The K-Town Youth Empowerment Network is a mental health initiative in Knox County, Tennessee, serving youth who are *transitioning into adulthood*, while struggling with emotional, behavioral, or mental health disorders, unable to function well in their family, school, or community.

*“Sometimes, looking for help can seem like wandering through a maze of wrong doors and frustrating barriers. At K-Town, we understand that maze because we’ve walked it ourselves.”<sup>1</sup>*

Trained staff and volunteers draw from their own similar struggles to guide youth and families through the *Wraparound process*, to find needed services, learn to manage their own care, and develop the necessary supports to develop *independence* and become *successful members of the community*.



## Culturally Competent & Family-Driven Care

The *Wraparound Process* is very important tool used by K-Town and other Systems of Care to “*wrap*” *services and supports around the youth and family* through a structured *team approach* that includes professionals, as well as “*natural supports*” such as relatives or others in the community. It is based on these principles<sup>3</sup>:

- Strength-based:** Focus on *assets* rather than deficits.
- Unconditional:** Services change to meet *changing needs* of the family.
- Owned by the parent:** The *parent* has ownership of the plan.
- Individualized:** Services created to meet the *unique needs* of the family.
- Community-based:** Services provided in the *community* when possible.
- Culturally competent:** Services are tailored to the unique values of the child, family, and *culture* that the family identifies with.
- Comprehensive:** Planning and services are *comprehensive*, addressing needs in three or more life domain areas.
- Crisis plan:** Each family develops a *crisis plan* with their team.
- Outcome measures:** The plan is *evaluated* systematically and often.

## Collaboration with system partners

K-Town Youth Empowerment Network is supported by a generous grant from the *Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration Centers for Mental Health Services*, with partnership among Tennessee Department of Mental Health, Tennessee Voices for Children, Helen Ross McNabb Center, and Centerstone Research Institute, and others.<sup>1</sup>



## K-Town Youth Action Council

The Youth Action Council is a group of teens and young adults who exemplify the “*Youth-Guided*” principle by acting as *change agents* and leaders committed to:

*Representing the youth voice* and advocating for peers within the system of care and guiding the development of new programs, policies, and resources.

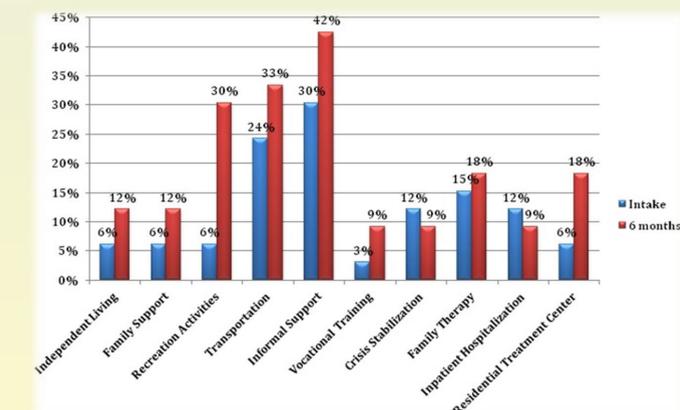
*Offering opportunities for leadership* development and peer support.

Promoting system of care values and *providing education* to other youth and the community about mental health and other issues affecting youth.<sup>1</sup>

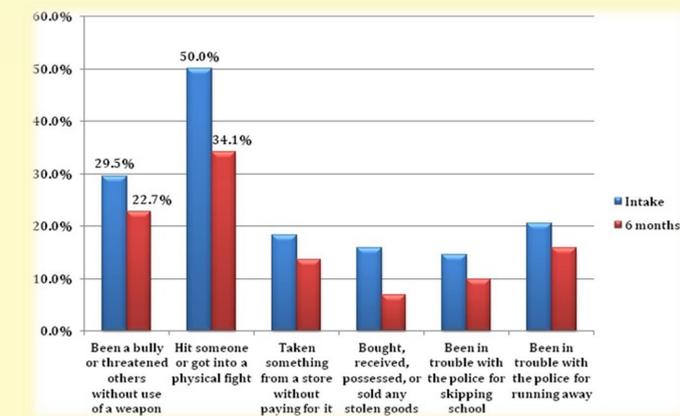
## Conclusions

K-Town offers an *effective approach* to delivering mental health services and system transformation through an enhanced culturally competent, family-driven, youth-guided and coordinated System of Care.

### Service Use at Intake and at 6 months<sup>2</sup>



### Delinquent Behavior<sup>2</sup>



## References

- Retrieved from the K-Town YEN website, updated 2010: <http://www.ktownyen.org>.
- Retrieved from <http://www.ktownyen.org/outcomes-for-systems-of-care/local-statistics>. Sources cited: Knox County Youth Risk Behavior Survey; Kids Count (Annie E. Casey Fdn.); Tennessee Commission on Children & Youth; Tennessee Department of Mental Health and Developmental Disabilities; The Data Profile Report produced by CMHS.
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