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, Ten., 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”, 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.

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.

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.

Baselines of care and providing education to other youth and the community about mental health and other issues affecting youth.

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:

- Strength-based: Focus on assets rather than deficits.
- Individualized: Services change to meet changing needs of the family.
- Community-based: Services provided in the community when possible.
- Culturally competent: Services 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.

Facts about Knox County youth

It is estimated that 9,000 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

K-Town Community

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Risk Behavior</th>
<th>K-Town YE1</th>
<th>K-Town YE2</th>
<th>% Change</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Got care for physical health within last 12 months</td>
<td>95% (n=581)</td>
<td>96% (n=328)</td>
<td>1.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Had a visit to a doctor in last 12 months</td>
<td>87% (n=581)</td>
<td>97% (n=328)</td>
<td>10.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Had a visit to a dentist in last 12 months</td>
<td>75% (n=581)</td>
<td>85% (n=328)</td>
<td>13.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Used marijuana or crack in past 30 days</td>
<td>5.5% (n=581)</td>
<td>7.9% (n=328)</td>
<td>4.4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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.

Conclusions

References

2. Retrieved December 15, 2014 from the Children’s Mental Health Service Systems Model: Knox County Youth Risk Behavior Survey: Knox County Youth Empowerment Network: Knox County Youth Empowerment Network is supported by a generous grant from Mental Health Services Administration Centers for Mental Health Services, with partnerships among Tennessee Department of Mental Health, Tennessee Voices for Children, Helen Ross McNabb Center, and Centerstone Research Institute, and others. 
3. Retrieved from the Knox County Convention & Visitors Bureau:
5. Retrieved February 2015 from the Department of Health and Human Services: SAMHSA Center for Mental Health Services.