

ABHI Children's Mental Health Initiative Meeting Summary (draft)

ICS Branch: **Youth and Youth Service Agencies**

Meeting Date: **March 30, 2022 2:00 p.m.**

Participants:

- John Soghigian – ABHI Board member as consumer/family representative, project leader for Early Childhood Mental Health Initiative
- Dr. Dean Grace – retired Children's Mental Health Professional, working as a consultant for Northwoods Children's Services, providing training in trauma-informed practice for Families and Children Together (FACT)
- Sarah Gardeski – with United Way of Northeastern Minnesota (Chisholm-based), serve Iron Range, Koochiching and Lake of the Woods Counties.
- Annmarie Florest – Clinical Director for Range Mental Health, oversee clinical mental programs including children's programming
- Anne Parish – Program Coordinator for REACH Program in Carlton County, serve youth 10-21 who live in or attend school in Carlton County
- Alex Adolfs – System of Care Coordinator for Carlton County
- Alli Pikul – Director of Outpatient Services for HDC in Duluth.
- Donna Lekander – Carlton County Public Health and Human Services, work with Children's Mental Health and Family Services with Collaborative, also in the Community and Family Initiatives Department
- Nelle Rhicard - City of Duluth with the Youth Employment program.
- Lisa Perkovich – Supervisor for Check and Connect (29 school in the region)
- Mika Baer – UCare
- Kaylee Cahill Mathews – mental health therapist in Lake County, primarily work with children and adolescents

Participants introduced themselves and identified their reason for attending or areas of specific interest related to this working group:

- The idea of positive youth programming is important and intriguing
- Have a great curiosity about how to get youth connected in positive ways
- Want to be better connected with everyone working with children
- Our organization (REACH Program in Carlton County) serves youth 10-21 who live in or attend school in Carlton County; have youth-focused, youth-created leadership group called Students Offering Supports program in most of the schools that builds social-emotional learning skills, coping skills and creating a supportive and belonging environment. Also run out of school programming after school five days per week, we also have a very active youth advisory board that meets weekly. This group supports initiatives for the Reach Program as well as other county partners, making sure that young people's voices are heard and their actions are taken

seriously. Have worked with MACMA (Minnesota Association for Children's Mental Health), work with the Community and Family Initiatives group (Donna Lekander), DHS, MDH and a number of other state initiatives. Excited to join this group.

- HDC serves in St. Louis, Carlton and Lake Counties. One of the primary groups that I oversee works with children and families. Also work with many other programs related to kids, as this is a primary focus for HDC.
- The City of Duluth Youth Employment Program serves students at Duluth East, Denfeld, ALC and Harbor Cities. A team of 3 serve students to help them get work experience. The first step is to reduce barriers, and mental health is often the biggest barrier. We are seeking resources to get kids connected to. Glad that group is forming.
- On this group to fill toolbox and to learn what's in the region.
- Interested in learning how managed care organizations can support this work.
- Very interested in learning more about existing resources for youth

Brief overview of ABHI Children's Mental Health Initiative.

- This is one of 8 work groups/ICS branches being convened. While each group will determine its own focus and work plan, there will likely be cross over between groups. We are not seeking to create additional silos but to promote communication between groups and integrate efforts
- Intent is to support core values of accountability, communication coordination, innovation and action in responding to mental health crisis.
- Initial meetings for each branch will be facilitated to help create action plan and reach consensus on initial goals, objectives and activities. Groups will transition to leadership from within (co-leaders preferred)

Action Plan Discussion

While Zoom format allows greater participation across distance, it can be clunky for developing collaborative work plans. A survey monkey survey will be distributed to work group members, with responses synthesized and shared for group discussion to help build the work plan and create a common understanding around goals, scope, actions, etc. Discussion today was intended as initial brainstorming about elements to consider in identifying the scope and intent of this group. How do we define what authentic youth engagement is? Are there examples of what's already happening in this area? How do we include youth perspectives in defining how we develop solutions for challenges in our region? Key thoughts shared included:

- The United Way has been interested in developing a United Way Youth Board. Looking at how other United Ways are approaching this, exploring other models of how they are involving youth. Challenge is the size of our region and making this accessible to all students who want to participate.
- The Northland Foundation has a Youth in Philanthropy Board for youth across the region to participate. Not sure if it's still in place.
- Different schools in Duluth have leadership councils, some related to academics and some related to life experiences. When we approach schools, make sure to capture both groups.

- Planned Parenthood has a Teen Council which interacts with students and offers peer to peer health, so this would be a great group to connect with
- Lutheran Social Services Oh No Eighteen (O.N.E) program (transitioning foster youth) and Together For Youth Program for LGTQ students are both groups where people come together and feel safe to share input.
- Family Freedom Center and Men as Peacemakers also have groups. To get student inputs, it's great to meet them where they are at rather than to create a whole new opportunities.
- There are so many surveys going on right now – many provide stipends for that, which might be something this group should considers, as it could be a deterrent if there isn't a stipend.
- PAVSA may also have a youth advisory board. YWCA might have a group. LSS + the ELCA has groups, so there are several groups associated with LSS.
- It's hard to know what groups survived the past two covid years and/or are planning to be active after the pandemic. An initial task for this group could be to find out what groups currently exist and identify current contacts for those groups.
- Question for Lisa Perkovich - are student councils in the schools she has programming an appropriate place to connect with kids? Each school might have a student council focused on specific initiatives. Would they be a resource we could tap into? Do schools have other groups that do service learning? Caution that the divide between hyper-connected kids and those not connected at all seems to have widened. Are there created avenues to make sure we tap into kids that are not well connected?
- REACH programming, Youth in Action through St. Louis County is seeking a different avenue, community focused area. Taryn Burnett would be the contact person.
- Question for Lisa Perkovich - are student councils in the schools she has programming an appropriate place to connect with kids? Each school might have a student council focused on specific initiatives. Would they be a resource we could tap into? Caution is that the divide between hyper-connected kids and those not connected at all seems to have widened.
- In northern St. Louis County, the former mentor for LSS LGBTQ group is now aligned with an advisory committee – Youth Empowerment Support and Safety – continuing services she provided but no longer associated with LSS. John Soghigian can provide contact information.
- Promoting youth engagement and seeking a youth voice is important, but should we also be looking at a focus that addresses what youth service agencies are doing separate from schools and therapy/treatment? Groups like the Boys and Girls Club, Youth Centers and others that improve access to resources (similar to school-based mental health) and programs that improve mental health wellness. Can we connect those agencies to broader initiatives happening? Disconnection can result in both duplication and gaps. Is our sole focus just bringing in youth, but can we have another focus on connecting youth serving agencies?
- Previous generations had more typical bell curves, with super high achievers/highly involved and a growing group that is disengaged. There is less in the middle than in previous generations. The kids that need to a voice the most may not be connected as well.

- An informal example was noted, whereby when a youth was hospitalized (usually requiring travel to distant community), when the kids in the group found out, they gathered around to offer support and encouragement. When the youth came back to the community post-hospitalizing, they welcomed the youth back. This activity did not occur in the context of schools. How can we support groups like that? Can we be on the look out for this type of effort and encourage it?
- Participants noted that many of the youth they are involved with are not highly connected and are disconnected from a lot of services and opportunities that other students are connected to, so it may not only be the “high achievers” that are connected into programming. Supporting organic youth support for others is an inherent way that we connect with youth and support them as an underlying methodology in how we partner with young people.
- We need to harness and utilize the young people we already have solid relationships with and ask them to create a strategic plan with us to reach those who are similar situations to the lived experiences that they have. We need to work side by side in partnership with our young people.
- Social media is a tremendous way for kids to stay connected. We can’t ignore this and need to harness it to help accomplish our objectives.
- A place to capture the voice of students is the data from the MN Student Survey happening this spring.

Next steps

Survey Monkey will be shared with all group participants. Responses will be summarized and shared with the group for discussion at the next meeting. Before the next meeting, participants were asked to gather the following information:

- 1) Identify which youth boards or youth advisory groups are still in place or plan to be reinstated and key contacts
- 2) Identify representatives from youth service agencies across the region who may be interested in connecting and sharing what they are doing to increase access to mental health resources or to support mental wellbeing

Future meetings

The next meeting will be held via zoom on Wednesday, April 27th at 2:00 p.m. Future meetings will ideally be held bi-weekly through early June, to support development of a work plan prior to the summer when it’s more difficult to bring people together.

Communication

A written summary will be provided for all meetings. Meetings will be recorded to facilitate accurate discussion summaries and to capture participant feedback, but links will not be made public. They will

be available for viewing upon request for 30 days following a meeting by a group participant unable to attend a meeting.

Participants consented to sharing of email addresses to support communication between group members. Email addresses of those present at today's meeting are included below.

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