

April 11, 2023

To: River Forest Township Board of Trustees

On behalf of the River Forest Township Mental Health Committee (MHC), I am pleased to present you with our Fiscal Year 2023 Annual Report of activities and services funded by River Forest Township for persons experiencing mental health issues, intellectual/developmental disabilities (I/DD), and substance use issues. This includes the period April 1, 2022 through March 31, 2023.

Grant Structure

The MHC typically recommends a combination of fee-for-service and flat grants to the agencies which we fund. Fee-for-service grants reimburse agencies for specific services provided to River Forest residents; this effort ensures that River Forest tax dollars are directed most effectively to River Forest residents. Flat grants typically fund smaller agencies and support more general outreach, education and prevention efforts which include River Forest.

During the pandemic, we maintained some flexibility with the agencies regarding funding, particularly those agencies receiving fee-for-service grants. Circumstances were in flux, often beyond the agency's control. We continued that flexibility this year, working with agencies who varied from their budgeted grant amounts. We worked to determine the reasons behind their variance and tried to meet their changing needs as effectively as possible.

We would like to acknowledge the incredible efforts of our agencies during the last year as they emerged from the pandemic, returning to in-person programs and services but still facing hiring shortages. Agencies remain strong, creative, and viable, and to continue to provide vital services to their clients in a meaningful and safe manner.

Major Collaborative Partnerships and Programs

In January of 2023 the Behavioral Health Consortium, and Intellectual/Developmental Disabilities Consortium resumed quarterly in-person meetings Positive Youth Development (PYD) continued to meet virtually, and held one in-person event – the Marijuana Prevention Town Hall. In addition, we were part of the D200 Mental Wellness Collaboration, along with the Oak Park Community Mental Health Board (OP CMHB), D200 staff, National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI), and Positive Youth Development (PYD). The D200 Collaboration held a virtual event for OPRF High School parents, Parent University, in November 2022; and is planning its first in person Parent University in three years for this current month, April 2023. Parent University has had excellent attendance.

The Township also continued to support and participate in two major collaborative initiatives, Support4U and the HUB (www.healthconnectionhub.org). Support4U is a program whereby middle school and high school students can text a licensed clinician 24/7 with mental health questions or issues (such as bullying, eating disorders, anxiety or substance use). During the pandemic, when students were not in school, use of Support4U declined. A social media campaign was launched, spearheaded by NAMI, to increase use and awareness while students were learning at home. Since students returned to school post-pandemic, Support 4U has received less focus from schools and funding partners. We believe students need this type of program more than ever; in FY2024, funding partners will need to assess whether Support4U, or an alternative, is the best way to serve students.

The HUB is an online resource and closed-loop referral system for our agencies, powered by the FindHelp software system. The HUB partnership has worked well and includes the OP CMHB, Healthy Communities Foundation and Community Memorial Foundation. The goal of the HUB is to help our agencies better connect clients with services like mental health, housing, food, and senior, legal and other resources. Despite our best efforts to train agencies and promote use of the HUB, few agencies actually use the HUB as a closed loop referral system. Most use the HUB as a starting point for information searches. Some have found better systems. In addition, the 211 resource line has gone live in Cook County, further changing the landscape. We have assessed whether to continue the HUB; we are likely recommending to sunset the program by mid-year.

The 2022 IPLAN community health needs assessment was finished in December 2022. This effort was led by the Oak Park Public Health Department, who partnered with the Oak Park Community Mental Health Board and us. We contracted with Leading Healthy Futures to conduct the IPLAN, which included a data analysis, community survey and interviews. The four goals of the IPLAN are: positive mental health, healthy natural and built environment, a community free from gun violence, and access to clinical care.

Priority Areas

- ***Suicide Prevention***
- The MHC remains committed to prioritizing suicide prevention efforts by funding suicide prevention programs like QPR training from Thrive, the “Ending the Silence” program from NAMI, and Support4U. Catholic Charities’ LOSS program, which provides support to those who have lost loved ones to suicide, began meeting in-person again at the Township in November of 2022. Thrive’s QPR (question, persuade, refer) suicide prevention program continued at OPRF High School and Fenwick High School and expanded this fiscal year to include Trinity High School.

- ***Sibling Support***

The MHC also continues to fund and support the Sibshops program delivered by Thrive Counseling Center, offering Saturday sessions throughout the school year. Sibshops is a program specially designed for brothers and sisters of kids with special needs, physical illness, or mental health challenges. Sibshops is currently seeing its pre-pandemic level of clients.

- ***Parent Support***

A continued initiative this year was to fund the website and other communication costs for FRED, a parent support group in Oak Park and River Forest for parents of children and adult children with mental illness. This group provides vital support and resource information for parents. Since its launch in January 2021, the website has already had many “hits” from local parents and from around the world; the FRED group has grown as a result as well.

- ***Older Adults***

Older adults have unique mental health needs, as they experience many life changes which come with aging: loss of family and friends, job retirement, relocation or change in home, physical health changes or decline. A new initiative for senior mental health was begun in early 2023 through Oak Park and River Forest Townships called PEARLS or Program to Encourage Active Rewarding Lives, a mental health program that meets seniors in their homes over a 19 week period. The Township also sponsored a Thrive Talk by Dominican social work professor Julie Bach, entitled “Aging Fearlessly”.

- ***Substance Use Recovery and Prevention***

The Way Back Inn has been able to make its presence more known to the community. The agency is continuing to serve D200 teens. Positive Youth Development is also supporting the community by providing substance use prevention resources and expanding to include summer and after school programming.

- ***Disability Support Services***

We continued to support many services for those with developmental disabilities, including individual and group respite, early childhood intervention, adult day programming, case management, after school programs, and caregiver and sibling support.

The Mental Health Committee (MHC)

Mental Health Committee members hold vast experience and education related to mental health and/or disabilities. Volunteer members include mental health activists, several social workers, school counselors, a psychiatrist, a pediatrician, a journalist and writer, professors, teachers, those with lived personal experience and those with affected family members. All are passionately committed to the mental health/disabilities field.

The MHC takes great pride in the accomplishments and quality of services provided to the residents of the community. The MHC looks forward to another year of success and remains committed to providing leadership and assistance with the provision of high-quality services for the citizens of River Forest. We are extremely grateful for their time and contributions.

This year, the MHC met entirely in person. The MHC by-laws were updated and a new member orientation packet was developed and introduced. Two new members joined the MHC this fiscal year, and one person took over the chairperson position vacated by long-time MHC member Richard Lim.

MHC Funding Priorities

The priorities of the Mental Health Committee are driven by the current needs of the mental health and I/DD consumers living in our geographical area and the ability of agencies to provide these services. The MHC does not duplicate funding already provided by state and federal agencies to those with developmental disabilities and mental health needs. However, provision is made to these populations for community education and family support. The current priority services for which the committee contracts are:

- Outpatient therapy – individual, group and family
- Family support
- Adolescent case management
- Prevention, outreach and education programs
- Adult care management services
- Community emergency psychiatric services
- Education and programming for drop-in center
- Sibshop programming
- Mental health screenings for children

- Development disabilities programming – early intervention, respite, in-home services, case management and day programming
- Substance use recovery support

Overview of Accomplishments and Initiatives

The River Forest Township Mental Health Committee, through local property tax revenue levied by the Township, was able to support **over 17,000** (est) hours of services in FY2023 to River Forest residents. This included:

16,632 est hours in supportive services

834 est hours in treatment services

115 est hours in prevention/education services

Services were contracted with **12 agencies** and supported **19 programs**. This included:

9 programs in supportive services

7 programs in treatment services

3 programs in prevention/education services

These services and programs constitute the core of mental health and I/DD services available and accessible to River Forest Township residents. In FY2023, services were purchased with **over \$160,000 in funding**. Through the prudent allocation of public funds, the Mental Health Committee supports services that are accessible and affordable.

Sincerely,

Sarah Schwarting, LCSW/MSW;RMPT
Administrator of Mental Health Services

