

SCHOOL-CENTERED MENTAL HEALTH

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When it comes to mental health support for children in Wisconsin, we are doing a lot of things right and well. Collectively, however, we can do more.

Students are demanding safety in their schools, parents are crying for behavior intervention and prevention and school districts, states and elected officials are weighing funding decisions that will determine the scope and sustainability of school based mental health (SBMH) programs.

Lutheran Social Services of Wisconsin and Upper Michigan (LSS) has a 136 year track record of improving the quality of people's lives by leading with compassion, challenging the status quo and encouraging collaboration and community involvement for change. Our work in SBMH and trauma informed care is a testament to that history.

Serving in 30 schools across three Wisconsin counties in recent years, students that receive LSS SBMH services have shown a 50% improvement with depression, 60% with anxiety, 70% with feelings of inferiority and 100% for students presenting with emotional withdrawal.

Additionally, the LSS piloted PATH (Providing Access to Healing) model in the Fox Cities focuses on holistically improving the quality of student's lives. PATH offers greater access to services, early identification of mental health issues, removing the bias/stigma surrounding mental health and improving case management, classroom success and graduation outcomes.

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LSS SBMH helps kids like Charlie

Charlie was five years old when introduced to LSS through a community partner. Charlie was acting out in class. He was aggressive with his teachers and classmates and had trouble engaging academically. Charlie had witnessed the tragic death of a close family member earlier that year and his father was recently incarcerated. Charlie's trauma was compounded by his mother's grief over losing her child and a separation from her husband (the family's sole breadwinner). Ultimately, Charlie's mom couldn't afford their house payments and the two ended up homeless.



Using our current SBMH model, LSS was able to provide Charlie and his mom with counseling services that focused on their symptoms of grief, depression and anxiety. What we have learned in this work is that children like Charlie and their families need more comprehensive services and support.

Studies prove that traditional SBMH programs are effective in helping students cope with traumatic events that lead to their own negative and disruptive behaviors, actions and choices. The challenge for those of us providing SBMH is a lack of funding to extend such support to those families and communities that are experiencing or have normalized trauma and are in need of therapeutic intervention themselves.

The School-Centered Mental Health Initiative

Our newly developed School Centered Mental Health (SCMH) initiative is Milwaukee-focused (to start) and designed to utilize Milwaukee schools as a health and wellness connector for groups both in and outside of the classroom including children, parents, siblings, families and neighbors. The multi-layered target group will benefit from services that reach beyond traditional school based mental health programs to include trauma-informed therapy, family coaching, behavior interventions and education/training and assessment. Partnerships with community health systems will also provide preventative health focused home visits, medication monitoring and care coordination with physicians and other medical providers.

Systems Change

LSS is creating a steering committee consisting of county/state government, mental health advocacy groups, local health systems, community organizers, and committed funders/corporations to work together and collaborate for a more robust, coordinated and sustainable approach to bringing comprehensive mental health services to the children of Milwaukee and the families who love them. The steering committee will start by addressing the need for Medicaid reimbursement of case management and behavior intervention therapies—an annual \$200,000 cost per therapy team within the SCMH model not currently covered. This important systems change will allow teams like ours—already providing traditional SBMH—to expand this all-inclusive reach to neighborhoods throughout Milwaukee County—and ultimately—the state.

Traditional SBMH Model

At school therapies for students

- Therapist * (may include consultation with teachers)

LSS SCMH Model

At school and in home therapies for students, families and the community

- Therapist *
- Trained Family Coaches
- Community Health Nurse
- Behavior Interventionist
- Teacher/Parent Skills Development Trainers
- Multi System Level Research

* Therapists provide clinical symptoms assessment and mental health support for individuals and groups



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For more information, visit lsswis.org