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## Tri County Community Connections

From the Desk of...

### Mollie Greene, Assistant Commissioner for the Children's System of Care

When Commissioner Beyer asked me to take on the role of Assistant Commissioner for the Children's System of Care, I was honored to be entrusted with the responsibility; in the four months that I have been here, my appreciation for the opportunity to serve in this capacity only increases, daily. As is the case for so many of us who come to work in the field of behavioral health, I have witnessed the effects of mental illness, substance use, and trauma among family and friends. I have also seen the healing that happens when people have access to quality care provided by compassionate and caring service providers. It is deeply rewarding to be a member of the dedicated and talented team at the Department of Children and Families who are charged with stewardship of the Children's System of Care (CSOC).

CSOC was created to restore hope and promote healing, recovery and well-being. Over the past twenty years, the system has not only achieved its early goals to eliminate the need for youth to seek residential treatment out of state - by creating a comprehensive system dedicated to keeping children at home, in school, and in the community - it has evolved to become a national model for children's behavioral health services. With this strong and stable foundation, we are now poised to identify opportunities for service innovation, to build capacity for the delivery of quality services, and to ensure equitable access to all of the resources CSOC has to offer.

In collaboration with other members of the Department of Children and Families' leadership team, I have articulated three priorities for CSOC to guide our work over the next several years. The first priority is a commitment to building our capacity for integrated health. This will entail strengthening collaboration with our partners in primary health and early childhood services to provide seamless coordination of identification and intervention with children that are experiencing developmental delays, or who are at-risk because of adverse childhood experiences and the effects of other social determinants of health. This approach will encourage the development of new and innovative services within the system of care, such as infant mental health interventions, as well as an increased focus on comprehensive care plans that include goals for physical health and well-being for all children and youth.

Our second priority is to increase the availability of evidence-based treatment across our continuum of services. We have an obligation to the children and families we serve to offer treatment models that have been demonstrated to be effective. At the same time, we must be mindful of the importance of engaging in our work with cultural awareness, recognizing that even the most scientifically rigorous methods will fail if they are not useful to the people they are intended to help. We know that any approach we take will not be effective if it does not engage individual children and their families in the treatment and recovery

process. Healing happens in relationships, and there is no substitute for the empathy and compassion our treatment providers, care managers, and youth and family support providers manifest in their work every day.

Our third priority is to improve access to the services and supports available through CSOC. While we know that our level of service has increased in many areas, including care management, mobile response and stabilization, and family service peer supports, we are also aware of areas in need of attention related to geographic, linguistic, and cultural differences with particular service lines. We know that there are youth and families that potentially can benefit from what the CSOC has to offer, but not familiar with what is available, or reluctant to reach out as a result of stigma or fear of engaging in the public behavioral health system. Additionally, many families - particularly with children that have intellectual and developmental challenges - may be overwhelmed by navigating across the education, health, and social service systems to obtain eligibility and coordinate services and supports for their children. We have a responsibility to ensure equitable access to services for all children and families, to structure peer and family supports to make this possible, and to realign services to target the most pressing needs of children and families.

While I am deeply grateful for the opportunity to share my vision for our future, I appreciate that listening is more important than talking. Just as we honor youth and family voice in the child and family team process, so we must elevate the voice of youth and families in planning for the future direction of the system of care as a whole. To that end, I am excited that the Department of Children and Families has identified "family voice" as one of our core approaches in our new strategic plan. In a comprehensive review of needs assessments conducted over the last several years, we have found that parents and youth consistently identify child mental health as a frequently identified concern. Over the next few years, as we work towards our goal of improving the availability, accessibility, acceptability, and quality of services, we will employ quantitative and qualitative data to evaluate our success. While objective and measurable criteria are essential to this endeavor, we cannot accurately assess our work without the participation and input of the people we serve. I look forward to engaging with all of our partners to create a future in which all children, youth, and families in New Jersey are safe, healthy, and connected.

## **Community Corner: Tri County CMO Honors Suicide Prevention and Bullying Prevention**

September was Suicide Prevention Awareness Month and October is National Bullying Prevention Month. As we recognize that the mental health of our youth and the extended community is impacted by both suicide and bullying, we held "Warren County Light in the Dark" in partnership with local youth and family-serving agencies to highlight preventative methods that can help mitigate a potential crisis. The workshop was presented by Annette Smith, the Director of Crisis Intervention Unit Services at Family Guidance Center and the Traumatic Loss Coordinator for Warren County. The presentation was well received, and attendees left equipped with strategies for recognizing the traits of a victim or perpetrator of bullying and how to start a conversation when you believe a youth may be experiencing symptoms related to being bullied or having thoughts of suicidal ideation.

## **Tri County CMO Shout Out!**

The Tri County CMO Wellness Committee successfully put together a Fall wellness initiative at Duke Island Park in Bridgewater. Over 20 people participated in the 5k to help raise mental health awareness and support a local clinic – Family and Community Services of Somerset County.



## Pride in Partnership

### The Family Support Organization of Hunterdon, Somerset, and Warren Counties and Tri County CMO



The Family Support Organization (FSO) has been helping families of Hunterdon, Somerset and Warren Counties since 2006 and is a very important partner of Tri County CMO. Family support partners are parents/grandparents/guardians that have had children in the NJ Children's System of Care and have experienced the process and resources that are offered through CMO services. The role of a family support partner is important because they are there to support the family, be a listening ear, supply resources and help parents/guardians to advocate for their children's needs. Family support partners support parents at meetings, assisting with applying for Social Services, court hearings, support groups, and many more. This support also acts as a way of helping parents realize that they can advocate for themselves and for the needs of their children, which gives them the confidence and reassurance that they are capable and qualified to care for their children's needs. Tri County CMO is proud of their partnership with FSO and will continue to offer these services to all our families for years to come. FSO is also always encouraging parents/guardians to consider becoming a family support partner once the family's services have transitioned and feel as though they would be able to support other parents/families through their own challenging journeys.

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## United Way Tools for School Program



For ALICE® (Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed) and poverty-level families already struggling to afford the basics, providing necessary school supplies can be a financial hardship. United Way Tools for School is an annual school supplies drive that helps ensure students receive the tools needed for academic success. Each year, more than 70,000 items are collected by participating organizations and volunteers and distributed to more than 80 schools and community organizations serving children.

Our eligible Tri County CMO-enrolled youth were extended the opportunity to participate in United Way of Northern New Jersey's Tools for School program over the last few back-to-school seasons. With the donations received from United Way, we've been able to help our income-limited families provide their children with the supplies needed to have a successful school year and ease some of the angst attached to returning to school. Not only were supplies donated, but many of the backpacks came with a card filled with hopeful words. One card read "Wishing you a wonderful school year. Always remember you are destined for great things." Thank you, United Way, for your partnership and dedication to serving the youth and families in our community.

For information regarding next summer's United Way Tools for School Program for Hunterdon County, contact Amy Andersen, Volunteer Engagement Manager, at [amy@uwhunterdon.org](mailto:amy@uwhunterdon.org), 908-237-1689; for Somerset and Warren Counties, contact Lisa Galonardo, Manager, Regional Volunteer Engagement, at [Lisa.Galonardo@unitedwaynj.org](mailto:Lisa.Galonardo@unitedwaynj.org), 908-253-6503.

## Save the Date! Tri County CMO & FSO Open House

**Come See Special Guests** Woodie and Jessie from the popular Disney movie, "Toy Story" who will be in attendance at the annual Holiday Open House on Friday, December 6<sup>th</sup>; hosted by Tri County Care Management Organization and the Family Support Organization. The event will be held at Flemington Elks Lodge, located at 165 Rt 31, Flemington, NJ 08822. The hours will be 5:00PM – 7:00PM. This will be a time for our enrolled families and community partners to come together in the holiday spirit and socialize. Refreshments and activities will be provided. Please RSVP by December 1<sup>st</sup> to Penelope Griffin ( [pgriffin@fso-hsw.org](mailto:pgriffin@fso-hsw.org) ) or Sonia Ron ( [sron@fso-hsw.org](mailto:sron@fso-hsw.org) ). Telephone# 908-223-1191 ext. 12 or 16.

## Photo Contest

Are you a photographer looking to put your art on display? We have an opportunity for you! Tri County CMO is seeking iconic or picturesque photographs to exhibit in our offices. The photographs must have been taken by a TCCMO enrolled family, be of a location in Hunterdon, Somerset or Warren counties and not include any people in the photograph. Photos taken with SLR/digital cameras are preferred. We will be selecting one winner in each county to have their artwork memorialized and receive a prize. Photos can be submitted to your care manager or to [info@tricountycmo.org](mailto:info@tricountycmo.org) (please be sure to include the name of the photographer and location of the photograph with entry).



## For Your Information

November is National Family Caregivers Month! Tri County CMO would like to take time to appreciate the people who lovingly provide in-home support and care to their loved ones. Typically, when thinking of a Caregiver, one imagines a paid individual that cares for an elderly or ill person, and then leaves to go home at the end of the day. However, Caregivers are not all paid help that leave at the end of the day;

many Caregivers are actually family members or friends that willingly spend their days giving baths, cooking, cleaning, and providing much-needed comfort to someone they love. If you are a Caregiver or know a Caregiver, it is important to be reminded to find time to take care of yourself as well. For more information about the importance of Family Caregivers and some ways to self-care, check out <https://nationaltoday.com/national-family-caregivers-month/>.

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Dana Goodman- Vice Chair  
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## How to Get Referred to Tri County CMO

PerformCare can help a parent or guardian connect their child to Children’s System of Care services. PerformCare staff are available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week to provide assessment and guidance to families facing challenges to their functioning and well-being.

PerformCare / Contracted Systems Administrator (CSA)

1-877-652-7624

<http://www.performcarenj.org/>



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