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Tri County Community Connections

Youth Success Story

Austin is a young man that has been receiving supports from Tri County CMO since 2016. Austin's biological family was not involved in his life and because of this his legal guardian was the Department of Child Protection & Permanency (DCP&P). Despite not having his biological family, Austin had many supports to help him succeed. Austin experienced traumatic events that led him to requiring more intensive treatment. Austin received this treatment in out-of-home (OOH) facilities. While living at one of these facilities, he met a woman named Stephanie. Stephanie took interest in Austin and knew that he had potential to succeed. Stephanie later opened her own home as a treatment home for youth and Austin was the first to live with her! Stephanie and Austin bonded and finally, within the past few months, Stephanie has adopted Austin as her own! Austin is now thriving, has made honor roll in school and has joined a martial arts program. He has also moved onto high school and is very happy to be finally able to play on a football team this fall. Austin successfully graduated from CMO in July 2021. Austin's Care Manager, Nicole Russo, is so proud and happy for Austin. We at Tri County CMO wish Austin and Stephanie the best as they continue to support and love each other!



***From the Desk of...
James Parauda,
CEO***



Public Health & Safety as an Employer

The pandemic has created some challenging decisions on many levels, including in our personal lives as well as professionally. The world has struggled with determining the balance between public health and safety versus economic, social, and mental health decline. We have had to adjust to consciously determining how to best protect ourselves and others from COVID-19, while at the same time considering when to prioritize activities

or events that bring us together and allow us to enjoy spending time with one another. In the beginning, it seemed understandable to stay at home and allow essential workers to care for others as needed. However, it became increasingly difficult to see where the line was between staying home for safety and allowing for social activities that would bring us joy.

After eighteen months of living in a primarily virtual world, society has decided to move towards regular activities and events. The backbone of this decision is the creation of effective vaccines. Vaccines have made us feel like we can live again, we can work again, and we can socialize again. Here at TCCMO, we believe it is also time to be out there with our families, our partners and servicing our communities. Therefore, TCCMO has made the decision to move forward with requiring its staff to be vaccinated. This decision was made with a lot of discussion and thought of the impact on our community. I am writing about it to let our community members including families, system partners, providers and others know that we are committed to their safety and our role in relation to public safety. Although this has become a controversial topic, we always felt it to be appropriate to protect the health and safety of others.

During the pandemic, we have been forced to meet virtually as it had not been safe for all involved to be in direct contact. Utilizing updated technology made it possible to do our work virtually and families and staff were grateful for that opportunity to maintain their relationships and be safe at the same time. It was important to have this option prior to having knowledge of safety measures, protective equipment and now the vaccines; however, we always realized it would never have the same impact of meeting face to face with our families and community members. We now feel fully prepared to be back out in the community. The strength of our work has always been the rapport and trust that we build with families to allow us into their lives and homes on such critical issues of mental and behavioral health and intellectual and developmental disabilities.



James Parauda, LSW
Chief Executive Officer

Pride in Partnership



Somerset County's Children's Inter Agency Coordinating Council (CIACC)

The CIACC is a planning body that develops and maintains a responsive and accessible system of care for youth between 0-21 years old who are experiencing emotional or behavioral health challenges, intellectual or developmental disabilities, or substance use challenges. There is a CIACC in every county in New Jersey. Members include youth/families, service providers, advocates, government agencies, community organizations, and schools.

The Somerset County CIACC meets regularly to discuss what is working and what needs improvement in our county. When there is an identified need, gap, or barrier, the Somerset County CIACC brainstorms with our members to address these needs on a local level. The CIACC informs the State Department of Children & Families, Children's System of Care of these needs and advocates for additional resources and assistance. Below is one example of the how the CIACC has addressed a current need in Somerset County.

During a CIACC meeting, Robert Wood Johnson Hospital reported an unusually high number of youth being taken to the emergency room for emotional/behavioral health challenges. It was determined that many of these youth had no prior behavioral health treatment. The CIACC worked to identify the referral sources for these families and we found they were unaware of any other behavioral health services for youth.

Since that time, the CIACC identified the need to educate the community about the variety of behavioral health services available for youth and families. The CIACC continues to work on spreading knowledge and awareness to youth, families, schools, community providers, and law enforcement about different resources families can access instead of going straight to the emergency room. The CIACC created a series of social media ads, trainings for school staff, and recorded a webinar which is on YouTube about accessing community resources. This is just one example of how the CIACC uses the information that is presented during meetings, brainstorms ways to address needs, and advocates for change in our community.

The CIACC values the opinions and feedback from Somerset County youth and families! The Somerset County CIACC is looking to increase youth and family involvement and voice, to be better informed about the challenges families are facing and hear your feedback about the effectiveness of current behavioral health, intellectual/developmental disability, and substance use services.

The Somerset County CIACC meets on the 4th Tuesday of every month except July, August, and December, from 1:30pm-2:30pm. Meetings are open to the public and are currently being held virtually via Zoom. If interested in learning more about the Somerset County CIACC or attending a meeting, please contact Kristy Soriano at ksoriano@co.somerset.nj.us or at 908-704-6356.

This article was contributed by Kristy Soriano, Coordinator of the Children's Inter Agency Coordinating Council (CIACC) for Somerset County.

Our TCCMO/FSO Annual Family Picnic 2021



Tri-County CMO & Family Support Organization hosted their annual community picnic on September 1st. The event was filled with many fun

activities including friendly competitions of cornhole, volleyball and car racing. Youth and families also enjoyed great food and a place to socialize as a joined community. Even though the weather was overcast, the energy and excitement could not be contained. In a year where many uncertainties still exist, this day was filled with smiles and laughter!

Getting to know TCCMO Human Resource Department & Our Annual Staff Appreciation Day

TCCMO celebrated their staff during Staff Appreciation Day in October, and the theme of the day was superheroes. This theme was chosen because of the great things TCCMO staff do for the youth and families in Somerset, Hunterdon, and Warren counties. Each department within the agency and each member of that department bring their own superpower to the team. During the event, staff enjoyed food truck and catering, a photo booth, yard games, mini golf and each other's company. This day would not have been possible without the Staff Appreciation Day Committee, which is run by the one-of-a-kind Human Resources Department. The HR department is led by Kimberly Camuso, who is a skilled listener and an expert at pulling different pieces together in order to come up with solutions. Kimberly is determined to fine-tune processes within the agency to ensure TCCMO is reaching its full potential. Staff have described Kimberly as Captain Marvel because "she is the only one who can carry the infinity stones." Kimberly's second-in-command is one of the agency's newer employees, Prithvi Chari. Prithvi brought his very own superpowers to TCCMO. Staff have reported Prithvi to be TCCMO's Iron Man with his technology skills and ability to bring TCCMO to the next level. Throughout the pandemic, every member of the TCCMO family has shined and continued to serve our youth and families despite new obstacles. No matter the challenge, the staff at TCCMO finds a way to tap into each other's strengths and find a solution. TCCMO assemble!



Our DYNAMIC DUO in HR!!



Our SUPER Executive Management Team



The INCREDIBLE Office Support Team



Our MARVELOUS Supervisors

Tri County CMO

Tri County ResourceNet

How To Submit A Resource To The Tri County ResourceNet

Sign Up For Future Newsletters

Regístrese para futuros boletines

TCCMO's Growing Greatness

Developing Resiliency with Engaging Approaches to Maximize Success

Tri County CMO (TCCMO) and FSO have been invited to take part in the DREAMS Initiative, the Children's System of Care's newest partnership with the New Jersey Department of Education. Through this partnership, 50 public

schools will have the opportunity to receive training and mentoring from Certified Nurtured Heart Approach® trainers. Mentors will support local school districts in training and implementing the approach that has been infused into the Children's System of Care. Along with providing Nurtured Heart Approach® trainings and assisting with the implementation, all schools and mentors will attend a series of trauma informed trainings. Schools were invited to participate in the program after a variety of factors were considered (high number of reported incidents of violence, police involvement, student suspensions and suicide attempts). Throughout the 2021-2022 school year, mentors will assist the schools in implementing the approach through regular monthly meetings. At the end of the initiative, two staff members per school will become Certified Nurtured Heart Approach® trainers and they will work closely with the mentors on sustainability planning. The Certified Nurtured Heart Approach® trainers at TCCMO are looking forward to spreading the knowledge of the approach and continuing to build our strong relationships with local school districts.

Register for Our Next NHA Parent/Caregiver Training

**THE NURTURED HEART APPROACH™
AN INTERACTIVE WORKSHOP FOR PARENTS,
CAREGIVERS & PROFESSIONALS**

THE NURTURED HEART APPROACH™ (NHA) IS A CURRICULUM FOR RELATIONSHIP. IT SUPPORTS ADULTS IN RELATING TO CHILDREN IN WAYS THAT GUIDE THEM TO USE THEIR INTENSITY SUCCESSFULLY AND POSITIVELY. THROUGH NHA, CHILDREN COME TO SEE THEIR INTENSITY AS FUEL FOR GREATNESS, NOT AS A DEFICIT OR A HANDICAP. ORIGINALLY DEVELOPED FOR WORKING WITH THE MOST CHALLENGING CHILDREN, NHA WORKS TO AWAKEN THE GREATNESS INHERENT IN ALL CHILDREN. RATHER THAN ACTING OUT NEGATIVELY, CHILDREN BEGIN TO ACT OUT THEIR GREATNESS--AND ADULTS GET TO EXPERIENCE THE JOY OF BEING A HIGHLY EFFECTIVE AGENT OF CHANGE IN THE LIVES OF CHILDREN.

JOIN CERTIFIED NHA TRAINERS TINA O'SULLIVAN AND JANET HREHOWESIK FOR TWO EVENING SESSIONS (MUST ATTEND BOTH) AND EXPLORE WAYS TO BUILD CONNECTED COMMUNITIES AND CREATE INNER WEALTH™

**DECEMBER 1ST AND 8TH
6PM TO 9PM
MICROSOFT TEAMS**

**TO REGISTER OR FOR MORE INFORMATION,
CONTACT STEPHANIE SURIANI AT
SSURIANI@TRICOUNTYCMO.ORG OR 908-255-5595**



ADVOCACY UPDATE

TCCMO Hosts DD/ID Town Hall Meeting

In the last issue of this newsletter, we highlighted TCCMO's Advocacy Committee and its efforts to advocate for legislation and policies that positively impact our youth and families. On September 28th, the Advocacy committee organized and hosted a Town Hall forum with legislators and families of DD/ID youth to bring to the forefront the challenges and barriers that these families face every day. TCCMO partnered with staff from Mercer, Morris/Sussex and Union CMOs to plan and orchestrate the webinar. More than 60 people were in attendance for this discussion.

Earlier this year, the NJ Legislative Disability Caucus was formed as a bipartisan forum for lawmakers and their staff to consider the impact on the disability community when shaping all public policies in the state through increased awareness and a greater understanding of the complexities of the disabilities service system and issues affecting individuals with disabilities and their families. People with disabilities, their families, and organizations that serve, support and advocate for people with disabilities in New Jersey serve as a resource to the Caucus, providing education and programming as needed. Legislators who are members of the caucus serve as champions for individuals with disabilities in New Jersey by meeting with them in their district offices; participating in quarterly education forums; and above all, promoting policies to improve the lives of people with disabilities and considering the impact on the disability community in shaping all public policies in New Jersey.

Tri County CMO is a supporting agency of the Disability Caucus, and has been striving to bring the youth services system barriers and challenges to the forefront, as Caucus meetings have thus far focused on the adult system. The Town Hall discussion included four legislators who are on the Caucus: Senator Tom Kean (District 21), Assemblywoman Aura Dunn (District 25), Assemblyman Anthony Verrelli (District 15), Assemblyman Andrew Zwicker (District 16). Families volunteered via a survey in advance of the Town Hall what topics of concern were, and if they wanted to directly ask a question or express a concern to the legislators. Through this format, several CMO families were able to tell their stories about raising youth with cognitive disabilities, and discuss challenged to acquiring services, transition to adulthood, caregiver stress and time lost from jobs, as well as needed school and socio-emotional supports.

If you would like to become involved or attend meetings of the NJ Disability Caucus, see <https://njcdd.org/legislative-disability-caucus/>.

The next Caucus meeting is 10/26 regarding transportation for those with disabilities. And stay tuned for more information about the advocacy efforts of Tri County CMO.

Click on image below for our video recording.

CARING PARTNERS OF MORRIS AND SUSSEX,
FAMILIES AND COMMUNITY TOGETHER &
TRI COUNTY CMO PRESENT:

**DD/ID
Town
Hall
Meeting**

WITH OUR LEGISLATORS OF THE NJ
LEGISLATIVE DISABILITY CAUCUS

1 Hour
Discussion

Free &
Open to
the Public

NJ State Assembly Committees

NJ State Senate Committees

For Your Information...



October

October is National Bullying Prevention Month. Bullying is an issue that we as care managers see on a regular basis and try to address when working with our children. About one in five children between the ages of 12 and 18 have reported experiencing bullying during the school year. Bullying comes in many forms, including verbal harassment, physical harassment, or cyberbullying, and can lead to challenges such as poor academic performance, school refusal and poor self-esteem. Bullying can also impact mental health by leading to depression, anxiety, disordered eating and even suicidal thoughts and actions. Those with physical disabilities and members of the LGBTQ+ community tend to be the most likely to experience bullying, but anyone can become a target. Given the prevalence of bullying and the significance of its impact, it is up to all of us to step up and intervene however we can when we know someone is being bullied. Most schools have a Harassment, Intimidation and Bullying, or HIB, counselor on staff to address bullying incidents that take place in school or between students. If you are or know someone who is being bullied, please don't be afraid to tell an adult about it. More likely than not, the person doing the bullying has struggles of their own and may also benefit from a caring adult intervening. Resources Identified include:

<https://opa.hhs.gov/adolescent-health?resources-and-publications/publications/healthy-relationships.html>

<https://www.stopbullying.gov/>

<https://www.pacer.org/bullying/nbpm/>

This dedicated website has many ways you can show your support – be it as an individual, school or community, as well as offering ideas for activities for all school ages, a really useful toolkit advising of lesson plans and details of special events planned across the nation.

For more information check out

<https://nationaltoday.com/national-bullying-prevention-month/>



November

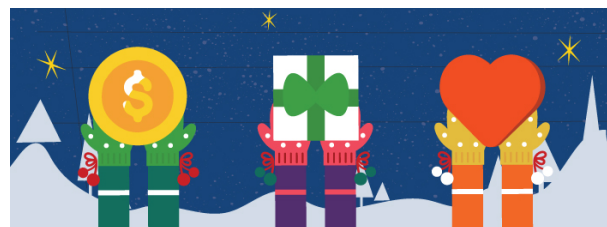
It is estimated that 400,000 children are currently in the foster care system in the United States. The NJ Child Welfare Data Hub, maintained by Rutgers University, shows that 4,463 children were in foster care in our state in 2020. Not all of these children are available for adoption, but in some cases, reunification between a child and their family just isn't feasible. That is where adoptive parents step in. These parents provide the safety and stability that are crucial to a child's wellbeing. Many parents foster to adopt, meaning that they care for children while working towards a plan for adoption. At CMO, many of us have had the honor of working with these exceptional individuals. It takes a very special kind of person to navigate the complexities of the system and open their home and their heart to a child in need. In honor of National Adoption Month, we celebrate those adoptive parents and encourage anyone looking to provide a child with a safe home to explore their options at <https://www.nj.gov/njfofosteradopt/>.

December

Is it the winter blues, or something more? About 1 in 20 adults experience seasonal affective disorder, more commonly referred to as SAD. SAD is a specific type of depression that may be caused by the reduced exposure to daylight associated with the colder months. These changes can prompt a biochemical shift in the brain that leads to feelings of depression, hopelessness, sleep issues, and social withdrawal. SAD is not a unique diagnosis; it falls under the umbrella of depressive disorders, which should be an indication that it is not a condition to be taken lightly. If you experience any of the symptoms listed above or in the link below, consider seeking treatment. Treatment for SAD includes talk therapy, light therapy, and the use of supplements like vitamin D. Your doctor should be able to work with you to develop a plan that fits your needs.

<https://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/publications/seasonal-affective-disorder>

Resources and Upcoming Events



<https://www.tricountyresourcenet.org/news-events/events/>



Visit our website

Our Board Members

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Gloria Parker



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/>

<http://www.performcarenj.org/families/index.aspx> (video guide)

PerformCARE®



Tri County CMO

Tri County ResourceNet

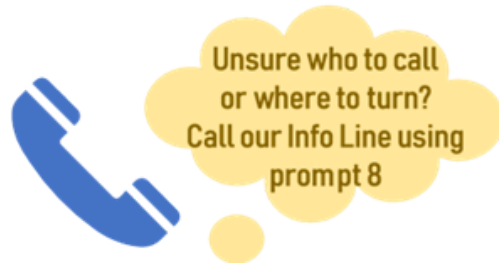
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