

YOUTH AND FAMILY SERVICES COMMISSION

Youth and Family Services is a resource embedded in the community for over 40 years. The community and town government continues to see the value in consistent prevention education, positive youth development, and clinical counseling support for residents and family members. There are programs and services available to provide education and support for every developmental phase. Here are some examples:

- OS Early Childhood Council provides preschool readiness programming and assessments,
- Socialization groups for pre-K-3rd grade
- After-school clubs provide creative and physical outlets in supervised settings for grades 4-8
- High school transitional program at Camp Hazen
- Parenting resources in English and Spanish
- Youth Action Council for grades 9-12

Youth and Family Services has grown and changed over time, accommodating changes in the community and its needs. When reviewing our statistics for this year, it is easy to see that the need for counseling services and social services support has grown and, in some areas, more than doubled. How and where YFS offers services is inherently flexible to accommodate the competing demands experienced by our student body and adult population. Responding to feedback from several “Community Needs” surveys, groups/services have been developed and offered for support around parenting, relationship building, anger management/conflict resolution, and substance abuse prevention and education. In response to the increased need for supportive services, YFS has diligently developed counseling practices for a broad range of therapeutic services as well as continuing to work to increase access to services and connect families with other therapeutic resources. Working collaboratively with the Old Saybrook Public Schools enables earlier detection and intervention for behavioral health issues with students. YFS is able to offer support to the entire family system, whether through parenting resources or by offering scholarship opportunities for students/youth to become involved in our “Positive Youth Development” programming.

An area of continuing development is the Intern Training Program. YFS has Master's degree-level interns across disciplines of clinical mental health counseling, social work, and marriage and family therapy. The interns offer additional support for our Positive Youth Development coordinators, thereby allowing us to offer extended programs that are able to accommodate more students. YFS has agreed to provide training and supervision for students this past year from CCSU, UCONN, St. Josephs, SCSU, and Seton Hall. Their involvement allows YFS to provide more comprehensive coverage for in-school collaboration, and allows the agency to offer more varied services to individuals and families. The intern program adds a benefit to YFS at no cost to the taxpayer, and our connection to these schools offers our staff some additional training experiences at no cost.

Volunteerism and community involvement continues to increase steadily as we invite and

encourage people from varying sectors of the community to become involved in our programs. From instructors for OSMS after-school clubs, to students who want to mentor younger students, or business partners who help sponsor and “man the tables” at some of our many community functions, i.e., The Hidden Treasures Community Variety Show and Family Day, we would like to thank all who have contributed to our efforts over the past years.

The focus of our youth programming has been the intentional building of “assets”, qualities and characteristics that have been determined through research to support positive growth and development of youth. It has been evidenced that youth with a higher percentage of developed “assets” are also less likely to be involved in high-risk behaviors. Some of these “assets” are: community values youth, positive peer influences, social competence, and adult role models. The language and philosophy of the Healthy Community Healthy Youth initiative, centered on the 40 Asset Developmental Model, is woven through everything YFS is involved in. We continue to seek opportunities within the community to develop meaningful roles for our youth, such as interning in businesses or serving on town boards and commissions. To learn more about the 40 Asset Model, visit www.search-institute.org. We have implemented the Youth Action Council with students to provide opportunities for skill development in areas of leadership, community service, and mentoring relationships.

In the fall of 2014, students in grades 6-12 were given a survey called ‘Profiles in Student Life’. Students who live in Old Saybrook and attend out of district schools were included in this group. The data shows that there has been substantive improvement in how youth feel they are viewed in the community, increase in student involvement in community advocacy and overall increase in thriving indicators. YFS and HCHY will host a Community Conversation with OS youth in October 2015 to discuss more in detail what we ‘hear’ the data telling us. Stay tuned!

In response to the increased need for supportive services, YFS has diligently developed counseling practices for a broad range of therapeutic services, and continues to work to increase access to all services. Working collaboratively with other town departments, organizations, and schools, Youth and Family Services has strengthened many of the community partnerships that have long been the foundation for programs and initiatives designed to promote relationship building and positive role-modeling for youth.

The staff of YFS have demonstrated their commitment to providing quality, compassionate care for the residents of Old Saybrook by the level of their involvement, by receiving additional training, by developing and facilitating many programs targeted to meet specific needs in the community, and more. We continue to focus on Positive Youth Development Programming and the development of the Youth Action Council “Assets in Action” to provide opportunities for leadership, community service, and mentoring relationships.

Positive Youth Development

Through these programs young people learn new life skills, take leadership roles and build self-esteem:

- Youth Summer Stock Theater
- Summer Community Services
- Wilderness Challenge Program
- Youth Action Council
- Middle School ‘Enrichments for All’ After School Programming
- Youth Art Booth at Chamber Art Festival

Family Programming

Opportunities were developed to provide topical information and affordable, social events for families.

- *'Can we Talk?'* education/informational series provided speakers and panel discussions on topical issues of interest to parents, teachers, youth, and other community members.

- *Family Events* included Family Bingo Night, Family Day, and Community Variety Show.

- *Ladies Night* provided a special learning experience and fun night out for girls entering puberty and their female caregivers. Twelve girls and their caregivers participated in this year's programming facilitated by a guest RN/Educator.

- *Toddler Tunes* children and caregivers participate in this fun, interactive music and movement program with their peers.

- *Movies on the Beach*, a collaboration with the OS Department of Police Services, and OSPR included games and other activities prior to the free, family friendly films.

Support Groups and Therapeutic Groups at the Agency

- *Grandparents Raising Grandchildren* met monthly.

- *Stress Reduction/Mindfulness for teens*

- *Asperger's Parents/Grandparents Support Group* met monthly.

Community Collaboration

Youth and Family Services works closely with the schools, police, agencies, businesses, and organizations to assess community needs, develop strategies, and implement effective programs.

- Healthy Communities–Healthy Youth

- After-school clubs at middle school

- Early Childhood Council

- Girl to Girl High School Empowerment Program

- Local Drug and Alcohol Prevention Council

- Community Conversations and Community Leaders' Youth Summits

- Freshman Retreat

- Movies on the Beach

- Community Treasures Variety Show

- Family Day

- Historical Society Junior Docent Program

- Student wellness programs at the middle school and high school

Social Services

Social Services assists many Old Saybrook residents in a variety of ways, including emergency food; prescriptions and medical care; dental care; help with transportation; energy assistance; budget counseling; help applying for federal, state, and local programs; employment workshops and networking; children's clothing, footwear, and back-to-school needs; etc.

To meet the continued increase in need we have been running Social Service Help Day once a month with CT Food Bank to help provide for emergency food requests, which have risen this past year. Almost 19 percent of our school-aged children qualify for food assistance and over 770 residents are using the local food pantry and need additional help. We encouraged backyard gardening and provided healthy eating on food stamp budgets. We are also holding dental clinics,

hosting the DSS mobile bus and End Hunger SNAP outreach and have helped with over 200 SNAP applications for food assistance at these events. In addition to the numbers that follow we are regularly seeing up to 100 families at these events monthly.

We also hosted weekly job workshops bringing in CT Works in partnership with Acton Library to help over 100 unemployed residents find or train for new employment. New this year was the implementation of the Affordable Care Act and we helped process, through a grant from Access Health, over 700 applications for health care insurance. The majority of these were for state HUSKY insurance which 25 percent, or one in every four of our children that you see heading off for school in your neighborhood, are currently on.

This year we provided and coordinated the following to meet basic needs and emergency requests:

Provided financial aid for 380 Old Saybrook household

Provided emergency food for 920 individuals

Processed Energy Assistance applications for 207 households

Provided emergency heat deliveries to 60 households

Coordinated Holiday Giving Program for 271 children

Coordinated Warm the Children assistance for 120 children

Municipal Agent for the Elderly

Our Municipal Agent for the Elderly is an officially appointed town representative responsible for providing the elderly and their families with information and assistance on programs, services, and benefits. Senior citizens continue to face numerous challenges, especially as changes occur in their physical health, the economy, etc. Requests from the elderly have increased this year from elderly residents who are struggling on only Social Security incomes. Food needs have risen this year with more requests for SNAP food assistance applications and 25.6 percent of our seniors qualifying for this assistance. Seniors also are in need of emergency fuel assistance with over 35 percent qualifying for state low-income energy assistance programs. Disabled individuals also on Social Security incomes raise this percentage to account for over half of all our energy assistance applications.

Issues of particular concern this year included:

- Heat and utility expenses
- Food needs
- Unavailability of enough affordable senior housing
- Health costs and issues

Detective Samuel B. Barnes, *YFS Commission Chair*

Heather McNeil LMFT, LADC, *Director OSYFS*

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YOUTH AND FAMILY SERVICES STAFF 2014/2015

Director	Heather McNeil, LMFT, LADC
Administrative Assistant	Linda McCall
Clinical Consultant	Kathleen Laundy, Psy.D.
Counselor	Jackie Boudinot, MS, MFT
Counselor	Salvatore Bruzzese, MS, LPC, CAGS
Counselor	Chelsea Graham, MSW
Counselor	Tyler Massie, MS, MFT
Counselor/Wilderness	
Coordinator	Brenda Partyka, MSW
Counselor/Early Childhood	
Specialist (<i>part of year</i>)	Melinda Tyler, LMFT
Group Facilitators	Joanne Deal, MA
	Linda Knightly, MS, LPC
Program Coordinators	Jodi Kelly
	Wendy Mill
Social Services Coordinator/ Municipal Agent for Elderly	Susan Consoli, MA, LPC
Assistants to SS Coordinator	Elaine Seaforth
	Kelsey Christensen