

YOUTH AND FAMILY SERVICES COMMISSION

Youth and Family Services is a valued community resource heading into its' 42 year. Last Fall, the department was relocated for 5 months while some renovation projects took place. The staff of the agency is to be commended on how they consistently and efficiently met their work responsibilities in providing support and resources to the community during this time.

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 teacher support
- 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 8-12

Youth and Family Services has grown over time, adapting to changes in the community and its' needs. The need for counseling and social services support has remained consistent over the last 5 years, and in particular areas, has 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, family therapy, 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, and SCSU. 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 Rotary Club, OS/W Exchange Club, the Public Health Nursing Board, the Masonic Lodge and the Estuary Council of Senior Citizens are some of our consistent civic organization partners.

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. 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.

This past year, over 110 high school students were consistently involved in Youth Action Council (YAC) activities and community programs at bi-monthly meetings. Over 30 8th graders were involved in Junior YAC. Two 12th grade students organized and facilitated the ‘Cardboard Community’ in October 2015, a project to raise awareness and funds for people in our community facing housing insecurity. The 40 students involved in the outdoors, overnight event, were tasked with collecting cardboard and building their overnight shelters as a team. They hosted a pasta dinner fundraiser just prior to the event, and overall raised almost \$2000.

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
Freshman Transitional Program at Camp Hazen
LEAD summer program with Shoreline Collaborative

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 Vicki's Videos, 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

- *Summertime groups for Teens: Spectrum/LGBTQ discussion and support*
- *Stress Reduction/Mindfulness for teens*
- *Asperger's Parents/Grandparents Support Group* meets 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 Old Saybrook residents in need with emergency food, prescriptions, medical care, dental care, help with transportation to needed services, energy assistance, budget counseling, help applying for federal, state, and local programs, employment workshops, children's clothing, footwear, and back-to-school needs.

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. Over 918 residents are using the local food pantry which is up from 770 the previous year and need additional help for food and other programs from Social Services.

We encouraged backyard gardening, raising chickens for eggs and provided nutritionists to help educate and promote healthy eating on food stamp budgets. We are also held free dental clinics, hosted the DSS mobile bus and 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 job workshops bringing in CT Works in partnership with Acton Library to help over 100 unemployed residents find or train for employment. We have partnered with Access Health certified assisters to help our residents sign up for health care. The majority of these applications were for state HUSKY insurance. Approximately 25 percent, or one in every four of our children that you see heading off for school in your neighborhood, are currently on HUSKY state insurance and are from the families in need that we help with this and other programs.

This year to meet basic needs and emergency requests we:

- Provided emergency and basic need aid for 1001 Old Saybrook households
- Processed Energy Assistance applications for 181 households
- Provided emergency heat deliveries to 52 households
- Coordinated Holiday Giving Program for 238 children
- Coordinated Warm the Children assistance for 122 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 health and costs continue to rise while their income is fixed and does not. Requests from the elderly have increased this year from residents who are struggling on only Social Security incomes. Food needs have risen this year with more requests for SNAP food assistance applications and more seniors using our food pantry and mobile truck pantry. Seniors also are in need of emergency fuel assistance and over 47 percent of our applications were from seniors in need. 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:

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

YOUTH AND FAMILY SERVICES COMMISSION 2015/2016

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Vice Chairman Jennifer Welsh, At-Large Member

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