

YOUTH AND FAMILY SERVICES COMMISSION

Youth and Family Services is a treasured community resource heading into its' 43rd. year. For 38 of those years, Sal Bruzzese has been a valuable part of this agency. Sal was hired to develop the Peer Advocate program for Youth and Family Services and the schools. In this program, high school students were trained to be advocates in support of their fellow students.

A Licensed Professional Counselor, Sal has provided individual and family counseling for hundreds of Old Saybrook residents including adolescents and adults over the succeeding years. In addition, he has, for many years, provided clinical supervision for other counselors at OSYFS. Sal also facilitated Stress Management classes at OSYFS for adults.

His experience as a School Psychologist, first in Old Saybrook and currently at ACES in Hamden, has proven to be a valuable resource for the families with whom he works as well.

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, and St. Josephs. 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 these initiatives, 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 140 high school students were consistently involved in Youth Action Council (YAC) activities and community programs at bi-monthly meetings. Approximately 40 8th graders were involved in Junior YAC. Youth Action Council, along with OSHS senior Phil Ledwith, organized and facilitated the ‘Cardboard Community’ in April 2017. This project is designed to raise awareness and funds for people in our community and region facing housing insecurity. The 50 students involved in the outdoors, overnight event, were tasked with collecting cardboard and building their overnight shelters as a team. They reached their goal of raising \$2500 through donations from individuals and businesses, and were able to make a donation to shelters in Middletown and Hartford, as well as to local need.

The Old Saybrook Youth Action Council was invited to present at a National Positive Youth Development Institute in June, and 4 OSHS students developed an engaging presentation that was very well received by attendees for 28 states across the country! These students, Annea Thaci, Xavier Rios, Michaela Burke and Breydan Medbury, have been a part of YAC since its’ inception 3 years ago, and look forward to being student leaders within the group this year.

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. An annual Shoreline Clinical Networking event invites primary care and behavioral health providers to come together to increase patient’s access to care.

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 grades 9-12
- Jr. YAC grade 8
- 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
- Governor’s Prevention Partnership E3 program
- Leading with Kindness with Yale Center for Emotional Development

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.
- *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.

- After-school “Enrichments for All” 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 1,000 residents are using the local food pantry 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 hosted job training and resources in partnership with American Job Center/Workforce Alliance to help unemployed residents find or train for employment. We 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 1,348 Old Saybrook households
- Processed Energy Assistance applications for 156 households
- Provided emergency heat deliveries to 45 households
- Coordinated Holiday Giving Program for 277 children
- Coordinated Warm the Children assistance for 108 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 55 percent of our applications were from seniors in need. Issues of particular concern continue to be:

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

YOUTH AND FAMILY SERVICES COMMISSION 2016/2017

Chairman	Samuel B. Barnes, O.S.P.D. Representative
Vice Chairman	Jennifer Welsh, At-Large Member
Secretary	Jonathan Paradis, Parks & Recreation Dept. Representative
	Catherine Kane / Lisa Castro, School System Rep.
	Christi Staples, At-Large Member
	Mary Kennedy, Public Health Nursing Board Rep.
	Peggy Viggiano / Sharon Tiezzi, At-Large Member
	Philip Max Ledwith, Student Representative
	Kiwon-Paul Dionne Jee, Student Representative
	Sophie Alden, Student Representative
	Sarah Anderson, Student Representative

YOUTH AND FAMILY SERVICES STAFF 2016/2017

Director	Heather McNeil, LMFT, LADC
Admin. Asst.	Linda McCall
Clinical	
Consultant	Kathleen Laundry, Psy.D.
Counselor	Jackie Boudinot, MS, LMFT
Counselor	Salvatore Bruzzese, MS, LPC, CAGS
Counselor	Chelsea Graham, LCSW
Counselor	Tyler Massie, MS, LMFT
Counselor	Samantha Steinmacher, MFT
Counselor/Wilderness	
Coordinator	Brenda Partyka, MSW
Group	
Facilitator	Joanne Deal, LPC
Program	
Coordinators	Jodi Kelly
	Wendy Mill
Social Services Coordinator/	
Municipal Agent for Elderly	Susan Consoli, MA, LPC
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