

Mid-Grant Report

Illinois Children's Healthcare Foundation Children's Mental Health Initiative 2.0



2019-2022



A WORD FROM OUR DIRECTOR!

Greetings -

It is my pleasure to present this Mid-Grant Report to you to share how far we have come since a small group of community members came together in late fall of 2017 and gave birth to something called “Project SUN - a Strong and Unified Network.” It truly was a figment of their imaginations.

A needs assessment was completed that fall by senior social work students at Olivet Nazarene University to inform the group and add to the existing data about the need for improved mental health services for youth and adolescents in Kankakee County. The group grew in numbers and by January 2018, the Community Foundation of Kankakee River Valley agreed to serve as the lead organization to submit a planning grant application to the Illinois Children’s Healthcare Foundation (ILCHF) to participate in their Children’s Mental Health Initiative 2.0. The Community Foundation of Kankakee River Valley was selected by the partners to lead the project because of their neutral role within the community. ILCHF received 29 applications. Kankakee County was one of five communities selected by ILCHF to receive a one-year planning grant.

In the fall of 2018, I was excited to be given the opportunity to lead the year-long planning process to produce a six-year strategic plan. This plan had to take us from dreaming about our ideal children’s mental health system of care to putting words into action, while building on what was already in place. More than 100 community members and organization representatives participated in the focus groups and planning sessions. A team of eight individuals (Dr. Scott Goselin, Jackie Haas, Dr. Stonewall McCruiston, Theresa Mitchell, Grace Seggebruch, Nicole Smolkovich, Rev. Ellen Steward, and me) traveled to Chicago to present Kankakee County’s plan to the ILCHF Grants Review Committee in August of 2019. ILCHF accepted the plan and awarded us a \$2.1 million grant to implement it, beginning November 1, 2019.

The plan addresses seven strategic focus areas:

- Family and Youth Engagement
- Prevention and Early Identification
- System of Care Navigation Assistance Services
- Cultural Competency and Equity
- Mental Health Workforce Development
- Continuous Quality Improvement
- Sustainability

It is with much gratitude to our many partners, that we offer this midway report to demonstrate the progress that has been made during the past three years.

Most sincerely,

Dr. Debra Mayconich Baron

PROJECT DIRECTOR



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INTRODUCTION

Project **SUN** is a strong and unified network that is family-driven and youth-guided. It is dedicated to strengthening the children's behavioral health system of care in Kankakee County through a coordinated network of services and supports that address the needs of the whole child.

The Network aims to connect all the parties involved with helping children flourish. The goal is to develop a family-driven system of care (SOC) that promotes wellness and offers all youth (0-21) and their families multiple avenues to access a comprehensive, integrated mental health care system that meets the needs of the whole child. This SOC model involves services provided in several Kankakee County community-based systems, including mental health, primary healthcare, early childhood, schools, courts, faith-based, and civic organizations. Project SUN takes advantage of the best components each system has to offer: referring, serving, and supporting families as individual situations dictate.



CORE VALUES

- Project SUN will partner with children and their families using strengths-based and collaborative approaches.
- Project SUN will support and strengthen the collaboration among care providers so that care is delivered in seamless, clear, and efficient ways.
- Project SUN will actively look for ways to bring children, families, agencies, and the community together to ensure optimal behavioral health and well-being for children in Kankakee County.

An initiative of:



Funded by:



EXECUTIVE TEAM & PARTNERS

PROJECT SUN EXECUTIVE TEAM MEMBERS, 2019-2022

Co-Conveners

Jackie Haas
Nicole Smolkovich
.....

Team Members

Cynthia Brown
Nina Epstein*
Dr. Scott Goselin
Anne King
Sandra Knight
Amy LaFine

Dr. Stonewall McCuiston
Theresa Mitchell
Dr. Amber Residori*
Kerstin Rust
Rhonda Showers
Ellen Steward*
Laura Sztuba*
Dr. Cynthia Taylor
Lynne Utter*
Chase Zajc*

*Charter members no longer part of the team

FAMILY ADVOCATES

Cynthia Brown
Jen Corke-Kafer
Anne King
Preston King
Karen McMillan
Charlene Phillips
Toryn Provost
Alex Quezada
Rhonda Showers
Ethene Thomas
Lynne Utter
Samantha Woodmaster



PROJECT SUN STAFF MEMBERS

Dr. Debra Baron, Project Director
Sarah Winkel, Program Manager
Karla Duran Fragoso, Administrative Assistant
Shemara Fontes, Communication Coordinator
Rhonda Showers, Family Liaison
Cynthia Brown, Peer Caregiver Mentor
Rosalinda Chavez, Outreach Intern

PROJECT CONSULTANTS

Rebecca Parks, Mental Health
Rev. Robert Bushey, Equity
Mary Self, Theraplay
Rosemary Pistorious, Theraplay



Community Planning Team and Partnering Organizations

Human Services



Mental Health

- Ann Marie Brzeszkiewiz
- Collective Balance Counseling
- Hernan Cortes
- Family Cares Associates of Bourbonnais
- Helen Wheeler Center for Community Mental Health
- Matthew Hedding-Hess
- Helping Hands of Hope Counseling
- Holly Loving
- Insight Wellness
- Melanie McCummiskey
- Nexus-Indian Oaks Family Healing
- Heather Oosterhoff
- Riverside Behavioral Healthcare



Early Childhood

- Birth to Five Illinois
- Child & Family Connections #15
- Childcare Resource and Referral
- Exploration Station.. a Children's Museum
- Little Me Studio
- Success by 6
- YWCA Kankakee



Schools

- Bishop McNamara Catholic School
- Bradley-Bourbonnais Community High School District #307
- Bradley Elementary School District #61
- Bourbonnais Elementary School District #53
- Grant Park Community Unit District #6
- Herscher Community Unit School District #2
- I-KAN Schools (RAAC & SALT Programs)
- Kankakee Area Special Education Cooperative
- Kankakee Community College
- Kankakee School District #111
- Manteno Community Unit District #5
- Momence Community School District #1
- Olivet Nazarene University
- Pembroke Community Consolidated School District #259
- St. Anne Grade School District #256
- St. Anne Community High School #302
- St. George Community Consolidated School District #258



Additional Human Services

- Banyan Treatment Centers
- Clove Alliance (KC-CASA)
- Easterseals
- Garden of Prayer Youth Center
- Harbor House
- Rincon Family Services Welcoming Center
- UpliftedCare



Primary Healthcare

- Ascension Saint Mary
- Debra Ann Caise, BSN, RN
- Hippocrates Medical Clinic
- Riverside Healthcare



Courts & Law Enforcement

- 21st Judicial Circuit Family Violence Coordinating Council
- Kankakee County Juvenile Probation
- Kankakee County State's Attorney



Additional Government Agencies

- I-KAN Regional Office of Education
- Kankakee County Health Department
- Kankakee Public Library



Civic Organizations

- American Foundation for Suicide Prevention
- Community Foundation of Kankakee River Valley
- Family Bridges
- Illinois Coalition for Community Services
- Kankakee Area LGBTQ Network
- Mental Health Network of Kankakee County
- Kankakee County Mental Health Council
- Lazos de Familia Kankakee
- Pledge for Life Partnership
- Partnership for a Healthy Community
- The Samuel R. Myers Foundation for Suicide & Mental Health Awareness
- The Grow Center
- United Way of Kankakee and Iroquois Counties



Faith-Based Communities

- Peoples Church
- St. John United Church of Christ

Government Agencies

Informal Supports

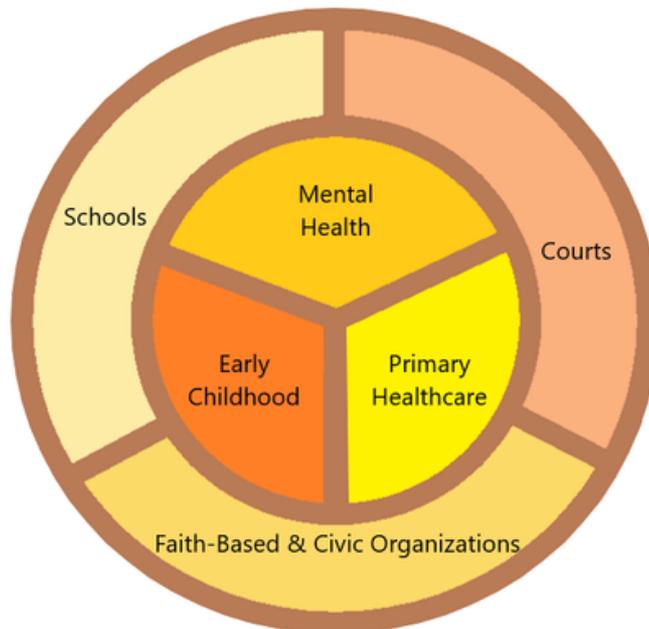
- Pilot Sites -

- Bradley Elementary School District #61
- Garden of Prayer Youth Center
- Helen Wheeler Center for Community Mental Health
- Kankakee County Juvenile Probation
- Kankakee School District #111
- Riverside Healthcare
- YWCA Kankakee

WHERE WE STARTED

During the initial planning phase, a strategic plan was developed to be implemented over the next six years (2019 -2025) to address the following priorities that were identified. We said we would:

- Build the **infrastructure** required to support a youth and family-driven integrated behavioral health system of care aimed at helping children flourish.
- Facilitate **multiple points of access** to the behavioral health system of care and **provide information** about available community resources by enhancing the KAN-I HELP Information Network website.
- Provide training and information to both **formal and informal** information givers, such as school and law enforcement personnel, faith and civic group leaders, and other human service providers to facilitate **referrals**.
- Provide professional development and training opportunities **for existing personnel** to better implement a youth and family-driven integrated behavioral health system of care.



- Promote workforce development efforts to meet the behavioral health needs of youth, adolescents, and families in the community, including efforts to encourage **youth of color and Spanish-speaking youth** to pursue careers in social-emotional learning and behavioral health related fields.
- Develop and disseminate public education materials to **promote wellness**, as well as inform youth and families about how they can **access** the system of care when needed.
- Put policies and mechanisms in place to sustain the youth and family-driven integrated behavioral health system of care after the ILCHF **funding** ends.
- Assist service providers with efforts to maximize their ability to secure **third-party payments** from public and private insurance programs for services provided to youth and their families.

FAMILY & YOUTH ENGAGEMENT

One of the core components of the Project SUN umbrella is the focus on youth and family engagement. Each category touches on a specific area of needs. Through the past three years there have been many improvements in this area with the most notable being our youth advisory council partnership, our monthly caregiver events, and the parent informational programs.



KEY NUMBERS

35 Students

attending our monthly meetings from

7 County High Schools

20 Parent Café Events

reached a total of

280 participants

11 Craft Classes for

caregivers averaging

7 participants

GOALS

Project SUN will remain intentional in engaging youth and their families. The Project SUN team will continue to:

- Build the infrastructure required to support a family-driven and youth-guided, integrated mental health system of care aimed at helping children.
- Develop and disseminate public education materials to promote wellness and inform youth and families about how they can access the system of care when needed.
- Host and support youth engagement activities, such as the Youth Mental Health and Wellness Fest.
- Grow the number of parents and other caregivers participating in Project SUN leadership activities.



We've accomplished critical steps toward re-establishing a NAMI chapter in Kankakee County. NAMI (National Alliance on Mental Illness) is a 100% peer-driven organization that provides support groups, educational workshops, and advocacy channels for individuals living with mental illness and their families. This year, we have recruited more than 20 partners to assist us in bringing NAMI programs to our community.

"Project SUN reminds me of the many ways I can be of service to others. Regardless of where you find yourself in life there is always something good to do."

SHEMARA FONTES
PROJECT SUN

PREVENTION & EARLY IDENTIFICATION

One of the first activities Project SUN undertook in 2019 was to partner with Pledge for Life Partnership and the Life Education Center (LEC) to update a series of age-specific brochures entitled, "Snapshots of Your Child's Social and Emotional Well-Being." Since then, Project SUN has provided the funding to reprint these brochures, which the LEC educators deliver to classroom teachers. The classroom teachers send the brochures home to the students' parents in conjunction with when the LEC lessons are taught, reaching approximately 9,500 students in kindergarten - eighth grade every year.



**14 editions
sent**

The process of building a System of Care in Kankakee County includes the continued work of forming **local partnerships**. To stay connected with the individuals invested in this vision, the Project SUN **monthly newsletter** was launched in January of 2020, offering resources and information about events for local caregivers, as well as professionals.

During 2022, Project SUN assumed the role of convener for a local coalition promoting use of **Theraplay®** inspired practices. These activities help to build healthy, trusting relationships between children and their parents, teachers, and other caregivers.

Busy families sometimes need to be reminded that it is necessary for families to take time to do fun things together. In November 2022, the **"Just for the Fun of It!"** campaign was launched. The purpose is to encourage parents to play with their children - in intentional ways.



**Play to
connect**

The campaign introduces examples of simple, inexpensive fun (and sometimes silly) activities families can try that will foster healthy communication skills, while building trusting relationships! One of the main components of the **"Just for the Fun of It!"** campaign is to offer **"Play to Connect"** programs at various locations in our community.

This is a playful interactive four-part program where parents and children create a nurturing, joyful, and safe relationship. This program utilizes the four pillars of Theraplay - **Structure, Engagement, Nurturing, and Challenge**. Focused play techniques are also covered to support child's healthy brain development and positively impact growth.

*"Reflecting back through the years with Project SUN, I have seen myself being **professionally challenged** in so many ways. I have been pulled out of my comfort zone. I participated in trainings, Parent Cafes, and Let's Talk workshops.*

I am excited to see what the next years will bring."

Theresa Mitchell, CFPP
Project SUN



SYSTEM OF CARE NAVIGATION ASSISTANCE

This strategic area represents the merger of two initial areas - Wraparound Care Planning and Access to a Broad Array of Services and Supports. Project SUN worked with seven pilot sites for a year to inform and implement the referral and case management process proposed in the initial strategic plan. During that period, we learned that Project SUN staff were not going to be able to provide the high-fidelity wraparound care that had been proposed due to several reasons. However, all was not lost.

What we also learned was that there was still a great need to help families connect to services, even if we were not going to provide high-fidelity wraparound service. There are times when families need the assistance of a peer mentor, or a neutral third-party to serve as an advocate or a mediator, depending on the situation. These lessons led to the development of Referral Scenarios which we now share with service providers to guide them to Project SUN and with families enabling them to make self-referrals.

When should I call Project SUN for help?

- 1 Will services be for a child under the age of 21?
- 2 Is the child a Kankakee County resident?
- 3 Does the child have a perceived or diagnosed mental, emotional, or behavioral (MEB) health concern?

Do you need help finding MEB health services, including screenings and assessments?

Are you experiencing complications with the child's current service provider?

Are you searching for activities that may help strengthen the child's MEB health?

Is there a lack of coordination among your child's service providers? (Ex: Providers not communicating with and/or supporting each other.)

Is an unmet family need preventing the child from receiving MEB health service(s) OR interfering with the MEB treatment plan, including a 504 Plan or an IEP?

The Pilot Phase concluded in November 2020 when Project SUN moved to full implementation of Navigation Assistance as a vital part of the Kankakee County children's mental health system of care,

Another successful outcome of the pilot period was the development of the System of Care Community Navigator Training. The pilot sites were the first organizations to participate in the training after it was first previewed at the Community Planning Team meeting in January of 2020. Several trainings were held throughout 2020 and 2021. Agencies were given the opportunity to have custom training just for their staff. And so far **57** individuals have completed training.

Monthly sessions were offered at different times and days of the week to make the training as accessible as possible. Due to staff changes, the training was discontinued during 2022 when efforts were made to develop an on demand online program. The online program was completed in December 2022 and is now being tested.

Community Navigator Training participants and pilot sites were the first to receive the newly developed Project SUN and Kan-I Help informational cards for distribution. These materials are provided in English and Spanish and have become Project SUN's signature information piece.

An online version of the Navigator trainings is available. Upon taking the course there will be a short test.

If you pass you will become a Certified Community Navigator.



FLEX FUNDS

Flexible funding is intended to fill gaps in our system of care by assisting with the purchase of goods or services that would not otherwise be available to children and families. Service providers can request flexible funding to build on family strengths and improve treatment outcomes. Flex funds allow us to provide individualized, team based, family-driven, and youth-guided solutions.

KAN-I-HELP

Project SUN continued to invest in the development of the **Kan-I Help** online resource database. Mental health services and other resources listed on the site are used to assist with navigation services for families who contacted Project SUN seeking guidance. Kan-I-HELP has become the premier source for resource information throughout the community.

The updated Kan-I Help website was launched on January 12, 2020 with the newly simplified domain name, kanihelp.org.

The Kan-I Help Ad-Hoc Committee met in May of that year to begin a conversation about Kan-I Help's long-term sustainability. The discussion included the potential of transferring Kan-I Help's stewardship from the Pledge for Life Partnership to the **Community Foundation of Kankakee River Valley** (CFKRV).

This option was approved by the Pledge for Life (PFL) Board of Directors during their August 27 meeting and by the CFKRV Board of Directors at their September 17 meeting. PFL used Kan-I Help's fund balance of \$40,876.37 to establish an Endowment Fund at the CFKRV, finalizing the transfer.

KEY STATS

6,000+ users viewed over **37,000** pages through the online database

141 new listings added to the site's total of over **750** resource profiles

118 events posted on the new **Events** calendar

33 volunteer listings posted on the new **Get Involved** page

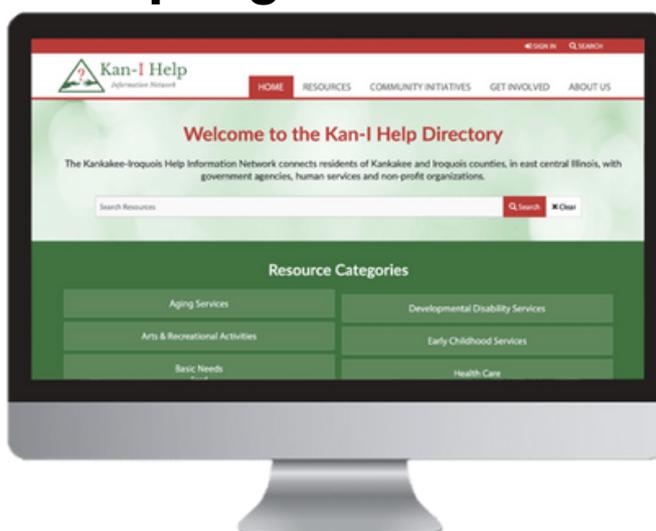
Most popular resource category:
Mental Health Services

Most commonly searched keyword:
Counseling

New service categories added:
Day Care, Dental Services & Youth Development Opportunities

All services updated
January & July

Explore local resources on kanihelp.org!



Cultural Competency & Equity

Cultural Competence: Accepting and respecting diversity and difference in a continuous process of self assessment and reflection on one's personal (and organizational) perceptions of the dynamics of culture.

(Pires, 2010, Building System of Care: A Primer)

- 2020 -

Community Conversations

4 events

- 2021 -

My Piece in the Puzzle

30 participants



- 2022 -

Open Houses

5 locations

My Piece in the Puzzle 2.0

26 participants

Project SUN designed conversation-focused events to encourage participants to talk about personal and societal changes. These discussions helped participants better understand racism's toll on the mental health and well-being of not only children of color, but all people.

My Piece in the Puzzle

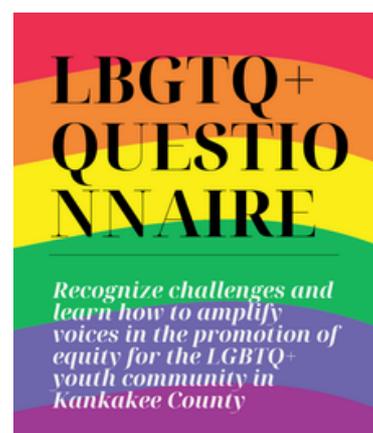
Our most ambitious programming is called My Piece in the Puzzle. With support of our Cultural Competency Workgroup it has been successfully offered two times .

My Piece in the Puzzle program consisted of four weekly 2-hour sessions to prepare individuals who are willing to make a long-term commitment to navigating difficult conversations aimed at racial healing. This program is intended to create shared language, knowledge, and experiences related to systemic racism through the lens of three affinity groups: Black/African American, Hispanic/Latinx, and White/Caucasian.

Participants have the opportunity to build a shared understanding of what the terms racial construction, racial identity development, diversity, equity, and inclusion mean. There are also opportunity for individuals of similar racial/ethnic backgrounds to share their lived experiences in a safe environment.

Supporting our LGBTQ+ Youth

Addressing equity is paramount to establishing a children's mental health system of care that meets the needs of all youth and their families. Project SUN undertook an initiative to understand our different experiences and promote action towards Gender Identity Equity. The first step was to conduct a survey of Kankakee County residents about experiences with gender identity and sexual orientation discrimination. This has led to multiple new partnerships with organizations and groups focused on equality.



MENTAL HEALTH

WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

In addition to the difficulties posed by the COVID pandemic with youth and family engagement, establishing relationships with the mental health service providers in Kankakee County was also hindered. Our first gathering of mental health service providers was not held until September 2022. More than 30 social workers, therapists, and counselors from schools, agencies, and private practices participated.



From the gathering, the Mental Health Workforce Development Workgroup was formed this fall. Comprised of mental health professionals, about a dozen representatives, from solo private practitioners to the largest mental health care provider in the county, meet monthly to collaborate on ways to grow mental health services in light of the provider shortages in Kankakee County.

They have been charged to assist with the determining policies and guidelines for:

- Project SUN to contract with area mental health professionals to provide group counseling/therapy services and to serve as program facilitators.
- Providing support to individuals completing degree and/or licensure requirements.
- Using Project SUN funds to provide tuition support to individuals seeking careers in the mental health field and/or upgrading their credentials.

CONTINUOUS QUALITY IMPROVEMENT

It has been inevitable that changes are needed as we move from theory to practice, and situations evolve, and partners come and go. The Data Collection and Evaluation Workgroup spent considerable time in the first two years with Community Planning Team to identify measures to track progress. This proved to be no easy task. Yet, there are a few resources that have been very helpful:

- Annual Stakeholder Survey done by the Children and Family Research Center at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign (UIC).
- Illinois Youth Survey (IYS)
- Partnership for Healthy Community's MAPP activities.

These efforts have proven to be very helpful in demonstrating the need for increased mental health services for youth and adolescents.

One of our greatest challenges has been to get mental health service providers to participate in the required ILCHF evaluation activities. During 2022, progress has been made to involve providers, including private practices to agree to participate in the UIC evaluation. ILCHF requires that its grantees participate in this program evaluation to provide important data about the success of the treatment and the system of care. However, to date, very little data has been collected in Kankakee County.

SUSTAINABILITY

From the inception of this initiative, how to sustain it has not been far from mind. Every year, the Community Foundation and the United Way reaffirm their commitment to help sustain the leadership of the system of care.

The strategic plan calls for a referendum to establish a "708" Board and levy a tax for mental health purposes. In 2019, the Illinois legislature made it possible to seek a sales tax as opposed to a property tax. Local consensus is that the sales tax is a more viable option to local voters. So, leadership from CFKRV, the Mental Health Roundtable, and Project SUN approached the Kankakee County Board to put this question before the voters:

- To pay for mental health purposes, shall Kankakee County be authorized to impose an increase on its share of local sales taxes by .25%?

On January 10, 2023, the County Board voted to give the voters a voice on this important question.



COMMUNITY OUTREACH

Community Events

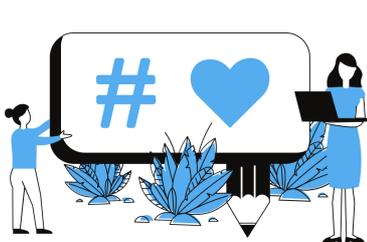
we attended were:

- Strong Neighborhoods Block Party
- Juneteenth Parade and Festival
- "Back to School Bash" (Various)
- Out of the Darkness Walk
- Bike Against Violence
- Stand Against Racism
- Break the Stigma
- Riverside Mental Health Awareness Fair
- Youth Mental Health Wellness Festival
- Kanakee Area LGBTQ Network Pride Picnic
- Health Fairs (Various)
- Kankakee County Health Fair
- Teen Mental Health Conference
- Open House (various)

Community Presentations

were made to the following:

- Bradley School District #61
- Kankakee School District #111
- Child & Family Connections
- St. Anne Grade School
- United Way's Women United Event
- Aunt Martha's
- Delta Kappa Gamma
- Uplifted Care
- Illinois Coalition for Community Services
- Familias Unidas
- Olivet Nazarene University
- "Relatives Raising Relatives" for Catholic Charities.
- Mental Health Network Monthly RoundTable



Newsletter Subscribers

160 | 2,496

Instagram Followers | Total Post Reach



Facebook Followers | Total Post Reach



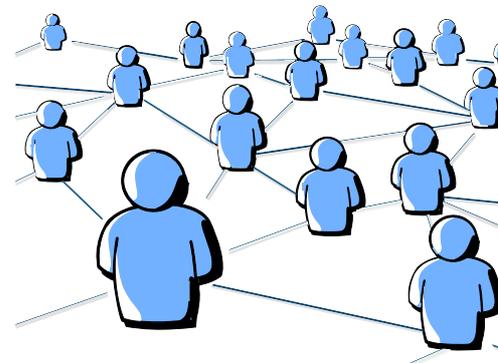
UPCOMING PROJECTS

We are thrilled to launch a **PARENT ADVISORY COUNCIL** where parents/caregivers, the experts on their child's mental, behavioral, and emotional health, will be put in the driver seat of their child's care. Participation will provide caregivers with access to peer relationships, mental health education, and leadership training.



As a member of the **PARENT ADVISORY COUNCIL**, caregivers will have a full menu of ways to be involved:

- Serve as a Peer Mentor to other caregivers who need help accessing services or advocating for their child.
- Develop and implement parent engagement activities such as the Parent Café. Select topics of interest and help plan events where parents can learn more about mental health issues.
- Drive the re-establishment of a NAMI chapter in Kankakee County. NAMI, the National Alliance on Mental Illness, is a 100% peer-led organization that offers mental health education and support groups. Join the team that is designing what NAMI Kankakee will offer to our community.
- Participate in Project SUN's Community Planning Team meetings. Many of our county's service providers collaborate with parents to innovate solutions to barriers families face.
- Volunteer to represent Project SUN at outreach events in the community.



WEB DEVELOPMENT

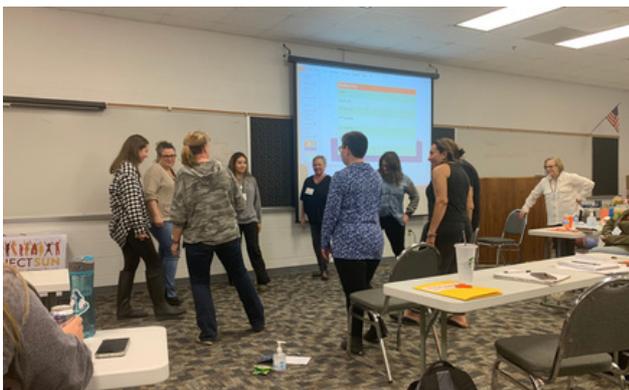
Project SUN is working with Familyworks to create a goal tracking and coaching app. It will serve as a "healthy-path" to help individuals with their mental health journey.

The app does not function as a substitution for seeing a mental health professional. It will work as a resource to support one's self-care, by serving as a tool to develop healthy habits providing useful tips. It can be used anytime, while waiting for therapy services to begin, and to augment treatment. The app will also be a resource for those who are curious about seeking mental health assistance, as well as learning more about self-care strategies. Those who have a child receiving behavioral or mental health services may also find resources on the app useful for reinforcing the work they are doing with a therapist or counselor.



THANK YOU!

All of our work could have not been accomplished without the support and help of staff, volunteers, and partners. Thank you for believing in our mission and supporting the system of care in Kankakee County.



PROJECTSUN

Helping children flourish

Visit our website and social media pages to explore,
learn more and get connected.

Contact Us At:

projectsun@cfkrv.org | 815.304.5933

 [ProjectSUNKankakee](#)

 [Projectsun.k3](#)

 projectsunkankakee.org