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2022 - A Pivotal Year

This was a year that brought change and progress to Project SUN.

The year began with lesser mask restrictions, a round of booster shots, and excitement for the staff at Project SUN to return to in person events. Plans were made and implemented, and new events were created. This year we witnessed the second round of our My Piece in the Puzzle initiative, hosted a very successful Youth Mental Health and Wellness Fest at the Kankakee Farmers' Market, and participated in a greater number of community events.

We continued our efforts to establish a parent advisory group and a mental health workforce development group, as well as to provide support to the LGBTQ+ youth in our community. Our craft classes remained constant, with more families joining in for fun nights of relaxation and creativity. We displayed billboards around the county and continued to work hard to provide families in our community with the help needed.

2022 marks the halfway point of our mission. Although there is still so much more to do, we want to celebrate with you. All of our partners are invited to join in recognizing what we have accomplished so far in building this **Strong United Network**. We also want you to help us chart where we are going. On January 19 and 20, we will be hosting two days of Celebration and Reflection. During this time, we will celebrate what Project SUN has accomplished over the past three years and set our priorities for the next three. Mark these dates on your calendar and plan to join us for one or both of these events.

Thursday, January 19 - 5:30-8:00 PM

Dinner & celebration recognizing what our founding partners started

Friday, January 20 - 8:30 AM-12:30 PM
Reflection & setting priorities for moving forward, ending with lunch

[Register Here](#)



Families are encouraged to slow down and spend time together this holiday season having fun and building stronger and healthier relationships. Here are just a few of the exciting low cost activities you can do in Kankakee County that will be fun for everyone in your family.

1. Stop by the Herscher Christmas parade on Friday, December 9, at 6 PM. Meet Santa and enjoy pizza and treats at the Herscher Legion Community Center
2. Visit the *"Winter Wander"* in Downtown Kankakee on Saturday, December 10, from 10 AM to 2 PM. An event hosted by the Kankakee Public Library where you can shop for many handmade items at their winter market and see what local downtown businesses have to offer.
3. Participate in the *"City of Kankakee Christmas Parade"* on Saturday, December 10, starting at 4:30 pm. The parade will begin at 202 N. Schuyler Ave, and it will end at the Kankakee Depot.
4. Drive around Bourbonnais to see the third annual Bourbonnais *"Holiday Homes & Holly Jolly Lightning Contest."* Pick your favorite and vote for the house with the best Christmas lights.
5. Take your family out for a fun ice skating time at the Ice Valley Centre in Kankakee during their December public skate hours.
6. Bring everyone to the Manteno *"Christmas Tree Lane,"* where you stroll through the Christmas tree lane on Second Avenue to view around 40 different Christmas trees decorated by local businesses and organizations.
7. Watch the dancing light display at the Kankakee Depot and turn your radio to 97.3 to listen to the accompanying music.
8. Vote for your favorite tree at the Kankakee County Museum *44th Annual Gallery of Trees* representing the different *"Holiday Traditions"* during their Christmas Open Hours.



November 19 Open House Recap

To kickstart our *Just for the Fun of It* campaign, we hosted an eventful day at the Exploration Station... a children's museum. On early Saturday morning, November 19, the museum opened its doors to over 100 families to enjoy free play time at the museum and experience activities that are part of our Play to Connect program. Families were invited to explore each one of the Play to Connect stations at the museum, including the newest addition, "The Feelings Room." Our friends from the Birth to Five Initiative and the Life Education Center, including Harold, the giraffe, joined in welcoming our guests.

Created out of a partnership between Project SUN and the Exploration Station...a children's museum, the Feelings Room displays various activities intended to help children explore their emotions and feelings. Volunteers encouraged parents and their children to participate in some Theraplay-based activities and Sunshine Circle groups during the event to practice intentional play activities that they can do at home. The activities were many, and the fun was endless.





Progress on NAMI Kankakee

Three individuals have been trained as Family Support Group Facilitators! This is just the beginning. We hope to send many more to the next scheduled training, as well as individuals living with mental illness who are interested in facilitating Connection Support Groups. Send us an email message at projectsun@cfkvr.org if you would like to be included.

This fall, we submitted our Affiliate Application to NAMI IL. We are officially on our way! As we continue to recruit and train volunteers, we aim to begin support groups in early 2023. Interest is growing, particularly in Kankakee, Bourbonnais, and Pembroke. We'll also look to establish a NAMI Kankakee Board of Directors. This will be crucial to ensuring a lasting NAMI presence for years to come.

To round out the year, two of our support group facilitators and a member of our planning team attended the annual NAMI IL conference in Palos Hills, IL. They attended workshops on Peer Mentoring, 988 Crisis Response, and the value of a Mental Health Board for communities. Much of what they learned is being discussed in by the Project SUN Executive Team and in our workgroups as part of our future planning.

For more information on NAMI and to register for online support groups, visit www.namiillinois.org.



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. If you would like to be added to the NAMI Kankakee email list, contact Rhonda Showers at Rhonda@cfkvr.org.

Cyndi's Caregiver Craft Classes

Loop yarn hat, ear warmer, or fingerless gloves



Register via Eventbrite



January, 23rd
6:00 - 8:00 PM

701 S. Harrison Ave
Kankakee, IL

For all parents and caregivers with children in the
behavioral health system in Kankakee County

PROJECTSUN
Helping children flourish



Register Here



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Project SUN monthly newsletters are intended to inform family members and those working with families. You are all valuable members of the **Strong Unified Network (SUN)** being built to support the children's mental, emotional, and behavioral health system of care in Kankakee County. You are encouraged to invite others to become involved in these efforts to help children flourish. Please share this newsletter with those who may find this information useful. Suggest they visit projectsunkankakee.org and sign-up to receive their own copy and become a member of the Network.

