

When Students Have an Emergency, the Brookline Resilient Youth Team Steps In

Preventing relapse, school failure, and out-of-home placement among high-risk adolescents

SUMMARY

In 2004, the Brookline (Mass.) Community Mental Health Center and Brookline High School established the Brookline Resilient Youth Team. The team provides counseling and academic assistance to high school students who are re-entering school after experiencing a personal emergency, such as:

- Emotional disorders, including psychiatric hospital admissions
- Serious medical issues
- Substance abuse treatment
- Incarceration

The team consists of two school-based social workers who serve as clinical coordinators and a classroom aide. They work closely with students and their families, typically for 14 to 18 weeks after the student returns to school. The team operates out of a dedicated classroom that serves as a "home base" where returning students can check in during the school day as needed.

The project was part of the *Robert Wood Johnson Foundation Local Funding Partnerships*.

Key services include:

- Clinical support for returning students and their families: The clinical coordinators
 meet with the students and their families before re-entry to help them set short-term
 goals for their return to school. They continue meeting with the students and have
 contact with parents, typically daily, to provide emotional support as the student
 readjusts to school.
- *Case management:* The clinical coordinators help students and families navigate the mental health and school systems. They facilitate communication with health care

personnel and therapists and assist families in locating health resources in the school and community.

Academic assistance: The classroom aide provides tutoring and serves as an advocate
for the adolescent, negotiating workloads with teachers and helping students organize
and complete assignments on time.

Key Results

Brookline Community Health Center reported the following results to RWJF:

- The Brookline Resilient Youth Team served 267 students between the 2004–2005 and 2008–2009 school years. Some 90 percent of those students remained in school and completed their education successfully.
- The cost of serving a student in school was substantially lower than the cost of an out-of-school placement. Project costs were about \$2,000 per student, compared to an estimated \$45,000 for an out-of-school program and out-of-school system placement.

The following results were reported in a profile of the project produced by the federal Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality:

- The relapse rate for students with substance abuse problems who were served by the team was substantially lower than for a comparison group. From 2004–2007, the relapse rate for students served was approximately 11 percent. The community average, based on a representative sample of similar adolescents from the broader community, was 20 to 25 percent.
- Students demonstrated improvement in their day-to-day functioning while receiving help from the team. Participants' scores on the Child and Adolescent Functional Assessment Scale fell from 89 at admission to 64 at three-month follow-up. The scale measures a youth's degree of impairment in functioning due to emotional or psychological problems, including substance abuse.

Communications

Project staff published an article on the project, "A School-Based Transition Program for High-Risk Adolescents" *in Psychiatric Services*, available online. See the Bibliography for details.

The federal Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality profiled the project as part of its Innovations Exchange. The profile is available online.

Lessons Learned

1. Engage in a planning process before initiating the delivery of services. The Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts Foundation provided funding for planning in

2003, allowing the school and mental health officials to form a working group and design an effective intervention. The group conducted focus groups with parents, students and teachers to help identify their most pressing needs and concerns. (Project Director)

- 2. Start thinking about sustainability early, no matter how long the initial grant period. Use the time to develop relationships and perform the groundwork that will make continued funding a priority for key policy-makers. Identify outcome measures—such as direct feedback from families and students—that will help make the case. Moving incrementally can be more effective than waiting until the initial grant ends to secure new funding. (Project Director)
- 3. Involve family members in all aspects of the project. Families helped with design and implementation, and some became champions of the program, helping it to secure continued support and funding. (Project Director)

Funding

RWJF provided a \$300,000 grant for the project from July 2004 to June 2009 as part of its Local Funding Partnerships program. The Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts Foundation provided funding for the 2003–2004 planning project. For a list of other funders during the RWJF grant period, see Appendix 1. For more information on the program, see Program Results.

Afterward

Brookline Resilient Youth Team continued to operate after the RWJF grant period, with a combination of public and private funding. The Brookline Mental Health Center is looking to secure funding for a full evaluation of the project's effectiveness.

In 2006, the Wellesley, Mass., school district became the first district to replicate the Brookline Resilient Youth Team model. By 2010, nine districts in Massachusetts and one in Ohio had established similar programs. See Appendix 2 for a complete list.

Report prepared by: Barbara Matacera Barr

Reviewed by: Robert Narus and Molly McKaughan

Program Officer: Kristin B. Schubert RWJF Team: Vulnerable Populations

APPENDIX 1

Other funders of the Brookline Resilient Youth Team, 2004–2009

- Bay State Federal Savings Charitable Foundation (\$20,000)
- BHS 21st Century Fund (\$36,000)
- Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts Foundation (\$85,500)
- Brookline Bank (\$15,000)
- Brookline Community Fund (\$55,000)
- Brookline Housing Authority (\$20,000)
- Brookline Public Schools (\$10,000)
- Brookline Tuberculosis and Health Society (\$20,000)
- Friends of Brookline Public Health (\$2,000)
- Klarman Family Foundation (\$15,000)
- Sidney and Ester Rabb Charitable Foundation (\$15,000)
- Sovereign Bank (\$15,000)

APPENDIX 2

School districts that have replicated the Brookline Resilient Youth Team

- Burlington, Mass.
- Wellesley, Mass.
- Needham, Mass.
- Sharon, Mass.
- Wayland and Arlington, Mass.
- Natick, Mass.
- Lexington, Mass.
- Concord-Carlisle, Mass.
- Mentor, Ohio

BIBLIOGRAPHY

(Current as of date of this report; as provided by the grantee organization; not verified by RWJF; items not available from RWJF.)

Articles

Journal Article

White H, Langman N and Henderson S. "A School-Based Transition Program for High-Risk Adolescents." *Psychiatric Services*, 57(8): 1211, 2006. Available online.