YES Open Access decreases wait times for young people in crisis

To address the increase in mental health and substance use issues, Youth Eastside Services (YES) has been working to reduce barriers to accessing immediate care. In 2016, YES’ average time to assessment for new clients was eight business days, and Master’s-level therapists were often too busy to take assessment appointments. To reduce these wait times, YES launched a pilot project called Open Access in August of 2017.

Open Access offers walk-in, same-day assessments conducted by Master’s-level therapists, who are also dually-certified as Chemical Dependency Professionals. YES clients now receive a mental health and/or substance use assessment, are assigned to a clinician, and schedule their first counseling appointment, all in the same day.

The success of Open Access is apparent every afternoon, as our lobby fills with youth and parents requesting appointments. We consistently assess four to five new clients per day, four days a week. Largely due to this new intake model, in 2017 YES experienced a 33% increase in clients accessing behavioral health services.

“We heard from parents and the community that they wanted quicker access to behavioral health services,” says Patti Skelton-McGougan, YES’ Chief Executive Officer. “We’re excited to be able to better meet the needs of the families we serve.”

The new intake model has been funded in part by a generous $75,000 grant from Premera Blue Cross’ Social Impact Grant Program.
HELPING SCHOOLS HELP STUDENTS

Behavioral health screenings in local middle schools

This fall, YES is partnering with the Lake Washington and Bellevue School Districts to introduce a universal mental health and substance use screening in local middle schools. The research-based program, Screening, Brief Intervention, and Referral to Treatment (SBIRT), is an innovative model that helps schools intervene early when substance use or mental health challenges interfere with a student’s ability to succeed. It was launched in response to the increasing number of Eastside youth who attempted to take their own lives.

The initial launch of the screening will be conducted throughout the seventh grade in Washington and Bellevue School Districts. It is a research-based, teen-friendly, web-based survey called “Check Yourself” that helps YES and school counseling staff identify students who might be at risk for, or currently experiencing, a behavioral health concern.

The goal is not only to identify those who are in critical need, but also those students who typically “look fine.” The screening will assess the severity of behavioral health issues and identify the appropriate level of treatment, whether it’s in-school programs, or for those needing more extensive treatment, referrals to outside counseling services.

Funding for the service comes from a three-year grant from King County’s Best Start for Kids Initiative and other local mental health levies. YES is working to secure additional federal funding through a SAMHSA grant to expand the service into other grades and at more schools.

You can read more about SBIRT and the most recent media coverage on our website, http://www.youtheastsideservices.org/sbirt/

OVERCOMING OBSTACLES

Jazmine overcomes depression and anxiety thanks to YES

When Jazmine returned to YES in the summer of 2016, she was feeling depressed, and thinking about suicide and self-harm. She had already started experimenting with drugs to cope with a difficult family life. When school started in the fall, she struggled with motivation and started skipping regularly. For the first time, she straight-A GPA was flagging. Then she was in a car accident and developed a severe phobia related to cars, to the extent that she struggled with panic attacks just walking through the school parking lot.

But Jazmine’s motivation to work through her issues was strong, and she began to regularly attend therapy knowing there had to be a solution. Working with her YES counselor Noble, she learned to monitor her anxiety, and to manage the symptoms with both cognitive and movement techniques. Her counselor helped her learn about healthy boundaries. She coached her on how to set those boundaries in ways that helped her deal with stress at home without damaging her family relationships.

After some time, Jazmine was able to stop using drugs, and regained her love for school and learning. With education about mental health and careful coaching, she was able to work through her car-related phobia, to the point where she even took a couple of driving lessons with friends.

Jazmine graduated high school this past June. She was accepted at the University of Portland where she will attend this fall on a partial scholarship to pursue her passion in environmental science.

“I’ve always imagined living a dream life, but I never thought I’d actually get to. It’s scary but also really exciting, and I feel unstoppable,” said Jazmine.

Her counselor Noble has been honored to work with Jazmine over the past couple of years. “She’s inspired me with how much work she’s put in to ‘getting better.’ When her depression and anxiety tried to overwhelm her and make her feel powerless, she pushed through, worked her skills, and reminded me of the importance of the work we do at YES.”