

Here4YOUth Progress Report
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Background and Context

The Here4YOUth initiative was launched in 2018 by Charles & Margery Barancik Foundation and Gulf Coast Community Foundation with a commissioned research scan conducted by the University of South Florida, followed by a stakeholder planning process. An outreach and engagement strategy was used to broaden community input and respond to changing needs. This process resulted in a number of recommended strategic investments to strengthen the overall system of mental healthcare, addressing three basic characteristics of a system – capacity, structure, and effectiveness.

Based on input from the stakeholder group, a [comprehensive public health framework](#) was adopted. This framework is designed to illustrate that addressing behavioral health requires a balanced and integrated array of services from prevention to crisis intervention. The Here4YOUth [website](#) was developed to increase public visibility, keep donors and the media informed, and a Facebook group was created to encourage continued communication among stakeholders.

In the past two months, the COVID-19 pandemic has disrupted all aspects of daily life, placed additional stress on providers, and intensified the behavioral health needs of the community. It has also sped up innovation, most notably the use of technology to deliver services and provide supports to youth, families, and staff. Here4YOUth is adapting to these changes while continuing to move forward. Current progress towards the implementation of priority recommendations is summarized below.

Capacity

Any system of care is limited by available funds and by the capacity to deploy resources efficiently and effectively. These factors are even more critical in a low-resource environment like Florida’s behavioral health system. Priority recommendations:

Financial analysis and governance structure. Here4YOUth is currently talking with several consulting firms about 1) conducting a county-wide financial analysis, and 2) exploring mechanisms for effective decision-making across multiple discrete funding sources.

Dedicated funding source. Behavioral health funding is more needed than ever. Here4YOUth will continue to advocate with the Board of County Commissioners and local leaders for the development of a dedicated county funding source.

Structure

The architecture of a system, including mechanisms for flow between components, has a direct impact on accessibility, service coordination, and ease of navigation for service users. Priority recommendations:

Family navigator. A new position for a family navigator has been designed to 1) help families of high need youth connect with needed services and supports, and 2) bring systemic barriers to the attention of decision-makers. An evaluator will help develop data tracking systems, measure the impact on youth and family outcomes, and document cost savings from more efficient service utilization. Recruitment is

underway for an individual with direct experience as a family member navigating the behavioral health system; interested applications should go to the NAMI-Sarasota website, <https://namisarasotacounty.org/>.

Reducing the barrier of stigma. *Seize the Awkward* is a video campaign of the [JED Foundation](#) which encourages teens and young adults to embrace awkward moments by reaching out to friends who may be struggling with mental health issues. Here4YOUth is developing a communications strategy to roll out this campaign locally to reduce stigma and encourage earlier access to behavioral health services.

Strengthening prevention. *Inner Explorer*, an app designed to teach emotional regulation and coping skills to students of all ages, is currently used in 10 Sarasota schools. It has been made available to all Sarasota students and their families during the school closures resulting from the pandemic. Here4YOUth is exploring its potential use as a widespread intervention in schools once they reopen.

Integrated and coordinated service delivery. Integrating and coordinating services with other child-serving systems is convenient for families, expands the reach of behavioral health to additional providers, and makes a more holistic treatment approach possible. Here4YOUth is working closely with the school system, law enforcement, and others to respond to the statewide increase in youth Baker Acts that has occurred over the past 6 months. Here4YOUth is also working with a group of local pediatricians to determine the best way to support the behavioral health needs of their patients.

Effectiveness

Effective services depend on valued, experienced, and motivated staff. Particularly in the current environment, staff supports are key to a strong system of care.

Shine a Spotlight. Here4Youth has started a program to “shine a spotlight” on innovative programs and services that make a difference in the lives of youth and families. A selection committee including both youth and family members has reviewed 4 nominations and made recommendations for the first two “spotlights.” Plans are underway to highlight the programs using media and social media.

Clinical support. Here4YOUth is exploring the possibility of hiring a system-wide, trauma-informed clinician to provide clinical support across the service system. The position would provide 1) clinical consultation and supervision, and 2) direct telehealth clinical services in settings that serve youth who may have behavioral health challenges, but that lack experienced clinicians on site.

Staff wellness. Here4YOUth is working with the school district, the Department of Health, and the provider system to identify and amplify creative ways to support staff self-care and wellness activities, using existing wellness plans and infrastructure.