

Grant will help youth in Stark at risk of harming themselves, others

By Laurie HuffmanThe Review Published: July 23, 2013 3:00AM

A major step forward in helping Stark County children who teeter on the brink of self-harm, aggression and even violence get the care and treatment support they need to manage their behavioral issues was made through the receipt of a grant from the state, according to John Aller, executive director of the Mental Health Recovery Services Board of Stark County.

The most ill of the ill and their families will get the help they need on the heels of a \$497,000 grant recently awarded to Stark County and four other collaborating counties. The money will implement the Strong Families, Safe Communities project, designed to provide care and crisis intervention for youth at risk of harming themselves or others due to a mental illness coupled with a developmental disability.

"The program is for young people who, for example, are bipolar, schizophrenic or suffering from depression and also have developmental disabilities. This kind of dual diagnosis beats the families up pretty badly," explained Paula Mastroianni, director of marketing, communications and community relations for the MHR SB. She further explained when a person is having a psychotic break, they can get help right away through the program. This is important because, while the county did have a crisis intervention center on 13th Street in Canton, Mastroianni said it's pretty unrealistic to think the family can get a person having a psychotic break who is also mentally retarded into a car to get them to the center. "So, this program is about the system coming to the client, rather than the client coming to the system. That is so important, especially when families are at the end of their rope. And, these families are desperate to get help," she added.

Strong Families, Safe Communities is funded by Governor Kasich's initiative to commit money from Ohio's Children's Health Insurance Program Reauthorization Act awards to develop targeted strategies to stabilize youth ages 8-24 years in crisis and develop long-term treatment plans that help children and their families live happy and healthy lives. It is one of many awarded through the Office of Health Transformation Innovation Fund.

Mastroianni reported the main reason she believes the county was able to receive the grant was because it collaborated with Columbiana, Wayne, Holmes and Portage counties on the Strong Families, Safe Communities project. "In a day when taxpayers are asking for collaboration so the most can be achieved with their tax money, this is just good government," Mastroianni said. "We, at the MHR SB, led the effort with Stark DD as a partner. All five counties will receive a portion of the funding, but Stark County received the most money, because it is the largest."

The funding will be received over a two-year period, and Stark's share of the \$497,000 is \$179,274. The program will bring the following components to Stark County:

24-hour access to wrap-around crisis stabilization and service support coordination while responding to the needs of youth, young adults, adults, and their families in their home and community environment.

Supporting families in navigating the system of care and accessing the services and their needs.

Providing regional access to respite services.

Providing additional access to psychiatric case consultation with the goal of increasing the overall availability of psychiatric services to the client.

Developing a regional learning collaborative focusing on youth with dual developmental disabilities and mental illness diagnosis.

"We are so pleased to have been awarded this funding, not only to help those most fragile among us, but to equip family members and caregivers with the tools and the respite they need to care for this challenging population," said Bill Green, superintendent of Stark County Board of Developmental Disabilities.

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