

THE CONNECTIONS STAR

Connections at Project Harmony Newsletter

2020-2021 Year End Review

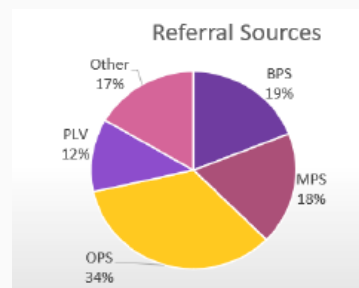
BY JORDAN GRIESER, PROGRAM DIRECTOR

A BIG "Thank you!" to all our therapists at Connections!

The 2020-2021 school year posed unique challenges for the Connections program. During this academic year, the program also had to work hard to reduce barriers and increase access to the program itself. All of the school districts Connections serves had their academic calendar interrupted by the pandemic and our largest referral source, the Omaha Public School District, did not return to full in-person classes until February.

Because of this, Connections pivoted to find new ways to be available and responsive to families in need, while remaining a support for schools. These adjustments include establishing a "referral line" and targeted outreach to child-serving community organizations; working with the Douglas County Community Response to distribute CARES Act dollars to Connections families in need of concrete assistance; assisting therapists with the move to teletherapy and helping families access this service through the distribution of tablets; using Docusign and Zoom to quickly and safely obtain the information needed to connect families to therapists; and expanding the type of groups offered and working with community organizations to offer group therapy at their sites. We could not have done this work without the help of our therapists.

Connections received 1,225 referrals during the 2020-2021 school year, 71% of the referrals received during the 2019-2020 school year. In previous school years, Omaha Public Schools would account for roughly half of the referrals received by Connections in a school year.



This year, OPS referrals only made up 34% of the overall referrals received by Connections. Bellevue, Papillion La Vista, and Millard referral ratios continued to hover between 12% and 19% of the referrals received by Connections as they had in previous years.



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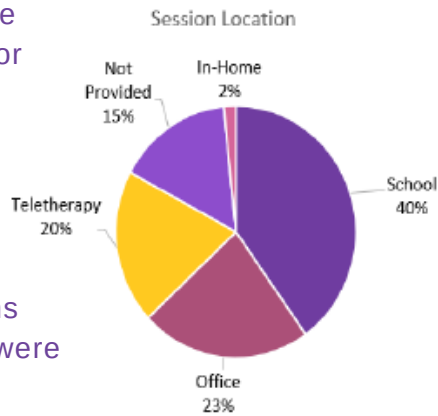
Connections
at Project Harmony





While much changed for Connections due to the pandemic, what did not change was the need for students and families to have access to quality mental health services. 68% of the students referred to Connections were matched to a therapist. This was an increase from 65% matched in the two previous school years.

Also notable is the fact that 87% of the sessions Connections clients scheduled with therapists were kept by the family.



- GROUP SNAPSHOT
- 17 BOUNCE BACK GROUPS
 - 10 EXPRESSIVE ARTS
 - 9 CBITS GROUPS
 - 6 CIRCLE OF SECURITY
 - 8 COPING SKILLS GROUPS
 - 1 DIALECTICAL BEHAVIOR THERAPY SKILLS GROUP

51 Groups were held during this school year (20 in the fall semester, 29 in the spring semester, and 2 in the summer). This is up from 37 groups held during the 2019-2020 school year and something that the Connections team had to work hard to achieve given the limited access to students, school space, and interruptions in in-person learning.

The incredible strain caused by the pandemic also provided our community with opportunity. One of the long- term goals of the Connections Program is to reduce the stigma around accessing mental health treatment. As we emerge from this world-wide trauma, people are talking more than ever about the importance of mental wellness and ways to foster that, especially in our children. We want to thank you for your continued partnership to ensure children and families are receiving quality mental health services.

Connections Employee Spotlights: Alyssa Travis, Elizabeth Chavez and Jessica Trinidad

BY JACKIE LORENSEN

Meet Alyssa Travis! Alyssa has been promoted from Match Mental Health Coordinator to Program Manager. Alyssa will be primarily working with Omaha Public Schools and Ralston.

In her free time, Alyssa enjoys fitness related activities such as weightlifting and conditioning. She also enjoys doing anything outdoors, taking her Boxer, English Bulldog and French Mastiff for walks, going to movies (pre-covid), drinking coffee, and trying new and interesting foods.



Backpack Distribution
Weekend
August 13-14, 2021

Below is a list of three backpack distribution locations for 2021.

Proof of school enrollment required for each child. While supplies last.

The Salvation Army North Corps (2424 Pratt St.)

9AM - 12PM & 1PM - 3PM

Walk up distribution

The Salvation Army Kroc Center (2825 Y. St.)

9AM - 12PM & 1PM - 3PM

Drive Thru distribution

Westroads Mall (10000 California St.)

8/14 only 10AM - 1PM

Drive Thru distribution



Introduction: Elizabeth Chavez



We are excited to announce and introduce a new member of the Connections team, Elizabeth "Eli" Chavez. Eli will hold the role of individual Mental Health Coordinator. Eli's most recent role was with Central High School as a bilingual liaison.

In her free time, Eli enjoys reading new books, creating playlists full of different genres, hiking, going to the gym, and taking pictures. Whatever it is, she always enjoys the company of being with friends and family. She "lives for the adventure of trying new things from foods to traveling to new places." Welcome, Eli!

Transition: Jessica Trinidad

Meet Jessica Trinidad. Jessica currently has held the role of individual Mental Health Coordinator for approximately 2.5 years at Connections. Starting the 2021-2022 school year, Jess will be transitioning her role to Group Mental Health Coordinator. Jess enjoys 80's music, walking her dog, hiking, crafting, reading and spending time with friends and family.

Community Garden at Project Harmony

BY ERIKA RODRIGUEZ

Laurel Withee, Mental Health Coordinator at Connections, was inspired by other non-profit organizations in the area who have community gardens. "I think more and more people are seeing the benefits of investing in community space and people around to give others access to healthy food," said Laurel. Benefits of a community garden can include reducing stress and anxiety, learning valuable gardening skills, as well as develop a sense of community and achievement. It is also an amazing coping skill for kids to use while healing from a stressful life experience because it uses different senses.

Currently growing in the beds are tomatoes, zucchini, red and yellow peppers, broccoli, kale and snap pea. For the future, Laurel hopes that this project will expand and for other departments to use the space to grow vegetables so that we can share fresh food with the families we work with or do plant sharing events. Special thanks to Mulhall's and Canopy Gardens for their donations.



Upcoming Trainings

BY PATRICE GARRETT

TRAINING: READY SET LEARN!!

Connections will be exercising our provider's brain muscles by offering some very exciting and educational trainings in the upcoming months.

We will be offering CBITS, Cognitive Behavioral Intervention for Trauma in schools and BB, Bounce Back which is a modified version of CBITS created to target younger children. CBITS is a group therapy model that enlists cognitive techniques and trauma-focused work to teach children skills to help them work through anxiety, depression, or PTSD they may have due to their exposure to trauma.

Bounce Back is a similar group model that has been modified to include age appropriate activities to allow children ages 5 to 11 to gain the same skill set to work through their trauma exposure.

Project Harmony will also be offering trainings to the community to include Child Abuse and Neglect 101, Trauma and Resiliency and Dealing with Discord to name a few. Check out the website listed below for more information.

We can't wait for the opportunity to educate and engage with you all through the various trainings we have planned!!!

Additional Project Harmony Trainings that may interest you can be found here:

<https://projectharmony.com/training/calendar/>