

Press Clippings 6/4/2018

---Daily Herald--- 6/4/18

Student health agency looks to expand

Group helps kids with classroom intervention can't

BY MADHU KRISHNAMURTHY



The Family Service Association of Greater Elgin provides school-based mental health services within Elgin Area School District U-46 and Community Unit District 300. Its team of therapists are: back row, Jennette Siebens, Nicole Eschenbach, Alexa Collingbourne, Jenny Garcia, Amanda Hinthorne, Yesenia Martinez; front row, Amanda Wilhite, Nicole Francen, and Rosa Salazar, and Roxana Mendez (not pictured). *Courtesy of FSA of Greater Elgin*

An Elgin agency providing in-school counseling and home-based support to students struggling with mental health needs, poor attendance and grades is seeking to expand its services to more schools.

When classroom interventions aren't enough, therapists from the [Family Service Association of Greater Elgin](#) are called in to help students and stabilize their home environments.

Schools aren't equipped to provide mental health services and their social workers often are overwhelmed dealing with so many students needing support, said Jennette Siebens, director of FSA's School-Based Mental Health Program.

The program was designed in 2005 by Lisa LaForge, the agency's late executive director. It spawned from another crisis support program helping students transition from hospitalization.

It was piloted in 2010 at four Elgin Area School District U-46 schools. Two more schools were added from Algonquin-based Community Unit District 300 in 2014, and a \$600,000 grant from the Illinois Children's Healthcare Foundation helped expand the program to 19 schools in those districts this school year. It serves students from kindergarten through 12th grades.

Students referred by schools typically are struggling with anxiety, depression and other mental health issues as a result of family hardship or personal trauma.

"They may have special education needs," Siebens said. "They may be trying so hard to help support the family they can't get to school in the morning. Sometimes we have kids

that have very significant mental health struggles because of their trauma histories. Whenever something becomes clinical, it is impeding the functions of the person."

FSA employs nine therapists and a wraparound coordinator who provide year-round services at these schools. Its wraparound model works to engage families "so things run a little bit smoother at home" while ensuring students stay in school, Siebens said.

That could include paying for a family member to attend driving school or classes for students to pursue certain hobbies or sports; providing household necessities, such as a bed and clean towels; and teaching emotional management skills to improve familial relationships.

In 2017, 250 families received basic counseling services through the program. Depending on each student's needs, a support team of between three and 10 people is formed comprising a therapist, the student, and a teacher or mentor chosen by the family or student.

"We give additional support to students, try to help meet the needs ... future goals they want to accomplish," Siebens said. "We are actually helping families now on a much deeper level."

Officials hope to continue offering school-based mental health services beyond the scope of the two-year grant and eventually in more schools within U-46 and District 300, as well as other school districts in Cook and Kane counties. The agency also might start taking referrals from the juvenile probation departments in those counties, Siebens said.

"We do know that we're sustainable ... we are going to be around for sure," Siebens said. "We can be a model program for other mental health agencies also partnering with schools."