



RIVER FOREST TOWNSHIP

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April 7, 2021

To: River Forest Township Board of Trustees

On behalf of the River Forest Township Mental Health Committee (MHC), Avis Rudner and I are pleased to present you with our Fiscal Year 2021 Annual Report of activities and services funded by River Forest Township for persons experiencing mental health issues, intellectual/developmental disabilities (I/DD), and substance use issues. This includes the period April 1, 2020 through March 31, 2021.

Grant Structure and the Pandemic

The MHC typically recommends a combination of fee-for-service and flat grants to the agencies which we fund. Fee-for-service grants reimburse agencies for specific services provided to River Forest residents; this effort ensures that River Forest tax dollars are directed most effectively to River Forest residents. Flat grants typically fund smaller agencies and support more general outreach, education and prevention efforts which include River Forest.

FY2021 was a highly unusual year due to the COVID-19 pandemic, which began just as the fiscal year started. The mental health and I/DD agencies were forced to quickly “pivot” and deliver services in completely new and virtual ways, while shutting down many in-person programs altogether. Agencies had to obtain and provide significant amounts of PPE equipment to protect clients and staff. Their goals were to keep clients and staff safe, keep agencies open, keep staff employed, and safely continue as many services as possible.

As such, to help the agencies during the pandemic, we converted all grants to flat grants for the fiscal year, to maximize cash flow to the agencies and to minimize their administrative tasks associated with fee-for-service grants. Agencies continued to submit River Forest usage data. As the pandemic wanes, we will likely return to our previous grant structure.

We would like to acknowledge the incredible efforts of our agencies during the last year to remain strong, creative, and viable, and to continue to provide vital services to their clients in a meaningful and safe manner.

Major Collaborative Partnerships and Programs

In addition to our funding efforts, the Township participated in local collaborative partnerships such as the Behavioral Health Consortium, the Intellectual/Development Disabilities Consortium, and the Opioid Prevention Task Force, all of which met virtually. In addition, we were part of the D200 Mental Wellness Collaboration, along with the OP Community Mental Health Board (OP CMHB), D200 staff, National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI), Riveredge Hospital, and Positive Youth Development (PYD). The D200 Collaboration held two virtual events for OPRF High School parents, “Connecting through Laughter” and Parent University; Parent University had excellent attendance.

The Township also continued to support and participate in two major collaborative initiatives, Support4U and the HUB (www.healthconnectionhub.org). Support4U is a program whereby middle school and high school students can text a licensed clinician 24/7 with mental health questions or issues (such as bullying, eating disorders, anxiety or substance use). Because students were not in school to receive information and materials about Support4U, NAMI spearheaded an effort to redesign the program to better reach students through social media. We believe that Support4U continues to be a valuable resource for students, particularly during the challenging times of the pandemic.

The HUB is an online resource and closed-loop referral system for our agencies and for the general public, powered by the Aunt Bertha software system. The HUB partnership includes the OP CMHB, Health Communities Foundation and Community Memorial Foundation. The goal of the HUB is to help agencies better connect clients with services like mental health, housing, food, and senior, legal and other resources. Overall, the largest request from agencies on the HUB has been for housing; in River Forest, the most frequent search by residents is for mental health services.

Significant strides were made in the HUB’s marketing and usage with the hiring of Lynda Murphy as the dedicated HUB project manager. Online trainings of agency users were well-attended, even more so than previous in-person trainings.

Priority Areas

- ***Suicide Prevention***

The MHC remains committed to prioritizing suicide prevention efforts by funding suicide prevention programs like QPR training from Thrive, the “Ending the Silence” program from NAMI, and Support4U. The Township continues to promote Catholic Charities’ LOSS program which provides support to those who have lost loved ones to suicide; the LOSS group has been meeting virtually but will hopefully soon resume in-person meetings at the Township.

- ***Sibling Support***

The MHC also continues to fund and support the Sibshops program delivered by Thrive Counseling Center, offering Saturday sessions on a year-round basis. Sibshops is a program specially designed for brothers and sisters of kids with special needs, physical illness, or mental health challenges.

- ***Parent Support***

A new initiative this year was to fund the development of the website for FRED, a parent support group in Oak Park and River Forest for parents of children and adult children with mental illness. This group provides vital support and resource information for parents but was really limited without a website. Since its launch in January, the website has already had many “hits” from local parents and from around the world; the FRED group has grown as a result as well.

- ***Older Adults***

Older adults have unique mental health needs, as they experience many life changes which come with aging: loss of family and friends, job retirement, relocation or change in home, physical health changes or decline. To address the special needs of this group, the Township has worked with the Concordia University counseling center. The counseling center, as part of its graduate program practicum experience, held a series of Meaningful Wellness groups for seniors. The Township promotes the groups to River Forest residents. These groups continued to meet on a virtual basis this year and will hopefully reconvene in-person as we recover from the pandemic.

The Mental Health Committee

Mental Health Committee members hold vast experience and education related to mental health and/or disabilities. Volunteer members include mental health activists, several social workers, school counselors, an attorney, a journalist and writer, professors, teachers, and those with affected family members. All are passionately committed to the mental health/disabilities field.

The MHC takes great pride in the accomplishments and quality of services provided to the residents of the community. The MHC looks forward to another year of success and remains committed to providing leadership and assistance with the provision of high-quality services for the citizens of River Forest. We are extremely grateful for their time and contributions.

MHC Funding Priorities

The priorities of the Mental Health Committee are driven by the current needs of the mental health and I/DD consumers living in our geographical area and the ability of agencies to provide these services. The MHC does not duplicate funding already provided by state and federal agencies to those with developmental disabilities and mental health needs. However, provision is made to these populations for community education and family support. The current priority services for which the committee contracts are:

- Outpatient therapy – individual, group and family
- Family support
- Adolescent case management
- Prevention, outreach and education programs
- Adult care management services
- Community emergency psychiatric services
- Education and programming for drop-in center
- Sibshop programming
- Mental health screenings for children
- Development disabilities programming – early intervention, respite, in-home services, case management and day programming

Overview of Accomplishments and Initiatives

The River Forest Township Mental Health Committee, through local property tax revenue levied by the Township, was able to support **almost 16,000** hours of services in FY2021 to River Forest residents. This included:

13,701 hours in supportive services

2074 in treatment services

88 in prevention/education services

Hours of service dropped 29% vs. FY2020, which is expected during the COVID-19 pandemic. Treatment could not be delivered in-person and was delivered virtually. Education and prevention could not take place in the schools since schools were closed. Supportive services dropped the least, 13%, and appear to have been the least impacted by the pandemic.

Services were contracted with **11 agencies** and supported **19 programs**. This included:

9 programs in supportive services

7 programs in treatment services

3 programs in prevention/education services

These services and programs constitute the core of mental health and I/DD services available and accessible to River Forest Township residents. In FY2021, services were purchased with **\$157,392 in funding**. Through the prudent allocation of public funds, the Mental Health Committee supports services that are accessible and affordable.

Sincerely,

Avis S. Rudner
Administrator of Mental Health Services

Carla Sloan
River Forest Township Supervisor