

The Voice of Families and Youth is Critical in Educating Rhode Island about Children's Mental Health in 2008

Families and Youth are potentially the most powerful and effective voice with policy makers and legislators. Your powerful stories and experiences can educate others to our cause and ensure that families of children at risk for or who have serious emotional, behavioral and mental health challenges receive the necessary services and supports to be successful in their homes and communities. It is urgent that families and youth equip themselves with information and voice their concerns now in order to educate policy makers and legislators.

In this brief, Parent Support Network (PSN) will provide you with information and ways to share your stories.

Featured information in this Brief:

- Children's Intensive Services (CIS) proposed to take an additional 43% budget reduction, impacting access and quality of services.
- Need for increased funding to support home and community based services and supports to decrease the need to place children and youth in high cost, out of home and out of state residential programs.
- Youth Corrections-Need for more community alternatives

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HELP PROTECT THE CHILDREN'S INTENSIVE SERVICES PROGRAM— SAVE A CHILD FROM PSYCHIATRIC HOSPITALIZATION

There are over 2000 children and youth receiving Children's Intensive Services in Rhode Island. Parent Support Network of Rhode Island has been working with families, youth and state partners to build the comprehensive Children's Intensive Services (CIS) Program for over 15 years. This program provides intensive home and community-based clinical services and support for families with children who have serious emotional, behavioral and mental health challenges and are at-risk for out-of-home placement. This program is geared toward preventing psychiatric or other residential placement. Families and youth worked in partnership with the state departments to develop and implement standards for this program. We are invested in keeping this program intact and want to continue to raise standards and the quality of service. ***The Governor's 2009 Budget proposes to eliminate another 11 million dollars, over 43% of the funding for Children's Intensive Services.***

This proposed budget cut comes at a time when the program is already under great stress because the budget for this program was removed from the Department of Children, Youth and Families last year and moved to the Department of Human Services budget. The goal is that CIS become an in-plan service under the RIte Care Program in order to save \$42 million dollars. This change has not been easy and families and providers are already beginning to see the quality and access of services shifting. With the proposed 2009 budget cuts to reduce this program and other children's psychiatric services even more, families are concerned about the impact on providers being able to adhere to established standards and that the quality of services will continue to improve. In addition, this program is proposed to be within the RIte Care public health insurance program and families are concerned with access due to the serious budget cuts proposed to the overall RIte Care program.

Now is the time for families, youth and community partners to contact the Department of Human Services and their local legislators to let them know how important this service is to them. Please share your experience in regards to how this program has supported your child from going into a psychiatric hospital or out of home placement. Below are some of the key points that families and youth shared in a CIS listening session last summer:

- Keep family counseling
- Keep treatment visits in the home
- Keep the case management- help getting the other things we need (food, clothing, shelter, etc.)
- Keep bi-lingual capacity and raise cultural sensitivity within the program
- Continue to be role models and teach us how to cope and learn what works
- Prevent ongoing changes in counselors
- Ensure access to the services whether a family has private insurance, RIte Care, or is un-insured (sliding scale)

How Can I Use My Voice and Share Stories and Important Information?

Find out who your local legislators are.

There are a few ways you can learn this if you do not already know. You can visit the legislative home page at <http://www.rilin.state.ri.us/> or <http://www.sec.state.ri.us/vic/> to learn about how to contact your local legislators by phone, mail and/or email. It will be important to know who the Senate and House Leaders and Committee Chairs are. This site provides information about all legislative activities, including who all the legislators are and their contact information. You may also call Parent Support Network and we will be happy to support you in connecting with your legislators, at 467-6855 or 1-800-483-8844.

Think about the message you want your legislators to hear.

Keep it simple and support your message in writing if you are able to, but no longer than one page. Let your legislator know who you are, where you live and please share that you are affiliated with the Parent Support Network if you are member. It is also important to provide your phone number or a way to contact you if your legislators would like to follow up with you. Share your story and/or knowledge around specific service and support needs that you want to ensure continue. Important to share successes and challenges, be polite and proactive, but present the realities. Always follow-up with a thank you.

Ways to contact your legislators.

You can write to your legislators (see sample letter) and now is a critical time. You can call your legislators by contacting their direct offices. You can also email. Setting up appointments to meet with your legislators can have a huge impact. Staying informed to when certain bills and budget issues are being heard and discussed is important, so that you can testify. The Parent Support Network can support you with all of this.

HELP ENSURE THE AVAILABILITY OF HOME AND COMMUNITY BASED SERVICES AND SUPPORTS TO PREVENT CHILDREN WITH MENTAL HEALTH NEEDS FROM BEING PLACED INTO HIGH COST, OUT OF HOME & OUT OF STATE RESIDENTIAL TREATMENT PROGRAMS

Last year the state did a Medicaid transfer of over \$42 million in psychiatric service funding from the Department of Children, Youth and Families (DCYF) to the Department of Human Services (DHS). The two departments have been working closely since this change to examine the costs and treatment approaches for preventing and returning children from psychiatric hospitalization or out of home residential treatment. During fiscal year 2008 all providers were required to reduce their budgets by 10% and continue to serve our children with extremely complex needs and their families. *The Governor's budget for 2009 proposes additional budget reductions that seriously impact the further development of home and community based services.*

PSN agrees that there is a need to examine the children's behavioral health service delivery system and that new and improved approaches are needed that will help to produce cost savings and improve outcomes for children, youth and their families. It is important to ensure that children still have access to the quality services and supports they need while our state re-designs the system. *The 2009 budget proposes reducing residential placement by 300 youth, which 60 of these youth are in out of state placements.* The challenge is to expand home and community based services in a time when funding for mental health services is decreasing. The concern is that more children will become at risk for out of home placement.

PSN is working with DCYF, DHS and partners to restructure children's behavioral health services to deliver more children's services in the home and community settings, giving the children, guardians, and community the benefit of inclusion in the rehabilitative process, and to allow the development of natural supports.

Families have the most important role in caring for their children and youth. When parents and caregivers are supported to be more involved in their child's and family's treatment there are improved outcomes. Residential treatment centers across the country and in Rhode Island are implementing processes and practices that are more inclusive of families in the care planning for their child. Redefining roles for residential providers in our system of care is challenging when providers are asked to shift from focusing on the child/youth in the context of a controlled setting to treating the child/youth in the context of the family and community. This becomes even more complex when the child and family is involved in Child Welfare.

Evidence Based Practice

All research to date supports the need to focus on home and community based services and supports for children with serious mental health challenges. Research has proven that residential treatment is not as effective as home and community based services and supports. Evidence now shows that intensive case management, in home services, cognitive behavioral therapy, multi-systemic therapy, and therapeutic foster care to be effective. Researchers are learning that services that are becoming most important to children, youth and families include respite care, mentoring and family support and education.

High Fidelity Wraparound

Wraparound is a care planning and care coordination process using a team approach that has growing evidence to be effective. Wraparound provides individualized, coordinated, and family driven care planning to meet the complex needs of children and youth with mental health challenges who are involved with several child serving systems (e.g. mental health, child welfare, special education, juvenile justice) and who are at risk of placement in institutional settings.

PSN continues to educate our state partners, legislators agencies, families and youth about the importance of continuing to build the continuum of home and community based services. Our families and youth have learned first hand that residential treatment programs do not always yield the most positive results. PSN supports many families who at times have had to turn to DCYF in order to financially meet their child's mental health needs.

Please call and educate legislators and state policy makers about the importance of home and community based services and how they have made a difference in your life. Share experiences about having to turn to hospitalization and or out of home residential treatment programs when you could not find the services and supports you needed.

Help spread the following points as it relate to your experience with children's mental health:

- Need for increased funding for home and community based services and supports.
- Compare the cost of hospitalization and treatment to home and community based services from a personal and financial perspective.
- Promote positive experiences with the wraparound process and how it has made a difference in the life of a child and family.

Date
Legislator
Committee/Position
State House or Legislator Mailing Address
(Found on <http://www.rilin.state.ri.us/Email/>)

Dear Senator or Representative:

Share who you are and if you are a youth or a family member; describe your own or child's needs; and share where you live in relationship to your legislative voting district.

Share your story or key concerns. Refer to specific agenda areas or bills you are concerned with.

Tell your legislator what you want him/her to do and ask for a response. Request a meeting with your legislator or a return phone call.

Sincerely,
Name
Address
Phone number and/or Email

NEED FOR INCREASED FUNDING TO SUPPORT COMMUNITY BASED ALTERNATIVES WHILE REDUCING FUNDING TO SUPPORT THE RHODE ISLAND TRAINING SCHOOL

Currently there are approximately 175 youth who are in the Rhode Island Training School. With the funding cuts to children's mental health treatment overall and the proposed youth correction budget savings, there is a need to ensure that funding is re-invested back into home and community based alternatives. ***The Governor's 2009 budget proposes to cap the Rhode Island Training School to 146 incarcerated youth and proposes to save millions of dollars by shortening the length of stay.***

The Rhode Island Kids Count 2007 report, shares that only a small fraction of youth are violent and dangerous. Most are incarcerated for drug or personal property offenses that could be addressed through diversion programs. Research indicates that community alternatives for incarcerated youth are more successful in reducing recidivism, are more cost effective, and can reduce racial disparities that exist for youth of color in Rhode Island and throughout the country. Rhode Island Training School data shares that there is a large percentage of youth who have had past DCYF involvement previous to incarceration and had a history of abuse and neglect. Over half of the youth in the Rhode Island Training School have serious psychiatric diagnoses, substance abuse, and are eligible for Special Education services. RI data indicates that 18% of boys and 25% of girls said at admission that they had previously attempted suicide.

Community Based Alternatives

There is a need for greater access to community based mental health assessment and treatment, greater and stronger connections with families, schools and community supports. This includes creating a continuum of care including temporary community placements; outreach and tracking; restorative justice programs; youth and family behavioral health treatment; and educational and vocational services.

Project Hope

Rhode Island has been operating the Project Hope program for over 8 years. Project Hope services youth with serious mental health challenges returning to their homes and communities from the RI Training School. Project Hope uses the wraparound process to develop a care plan that incorporates youth service needs; community safety issues; and family support. This community program has proven to reduce recidivism and produce positive youth and family outcomes.

UPCOMING HEARINGS & MEETINGS

MARCH 17: HOUSE FINANCE COMMITTEE

On March 17th at 12 PM in room 35 at the State House the House Finance Committee will discuss the Children's Intensive Services Program (CIS). Please help save this program from cuts and express the need for continued investment in home and community based services.

MARCH 18: HOUSE FINANCE COMMITTEE

On March 18th at 12 PM in room 35 at the State House the Department of Children, Youth and Families budget will be reviewed. Raise your concerns in regards for the need for increased investment and expansion of home and community based alternatives to residential treatment and the RI training School.

For legislative calendar of additional upcoming Legislative hearings go to: www.rilin.state.ri.us

STATEWIDE BUDGET CUT INFORMATION WORKSHOPS: ONE RHODE ISLAND

Northern: March 17th 5:30 PM to 7:30 PM
St. James Community Baptist Church

Blackstone Valley: March 25th 5:30 PM to 7:30 PM
Blackstone Valley Visitor Center

Providence: April 3rd 5:30 PM to 7:30 PM
John Hope Settlement House

South County: March 26th 5:30 PM to 7:30 PM
Christ the King Church in Kingston

Aquidneck Island: April 16th 5:30 PM to 7:30 PM
Middletown Public Library

SYSTEM RE-DESIGN FAMILY FOCUS GROUPS

PSN will work in partnership with DCYF to sponsor family focus groups on March 26th and April 3rd from 6:00 to 8:00 pm at Parent Support Network in Johnston RI. These focus groups will be an opportunity for families and youth to discuss their experiences with out of home and out of state residential treatment programs, and to identify what is needed to ensure home and community based services and supports. If you are a family or youth interested in attending please call PSN at 467-6855 or toll free at 1- 800-483-8844. All participants will receive support for their participation. Thank you for your leadership!

For more information or support about any of these key concerns and messages please feel free to contact PSN at

467-6855 or 1- 800-483-8844.

Or

email b.alejo@psnri.org