

School-Community Liaison Program
Ashland County, Ohio

Program Evaluation
Executives and Administrators version

Submitted by
Center for Community Research & Evaluation Services (CCRES)
Ashland University

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INTRODUCTION

The School/Community Liaison Program (SCLP) began in 1999 and is a collaboration between the Mental Health and Recovery Board of Ashland County, Appleseed Community Mental Health Center, and the Ashland County Public School Districts. The program is funded primarily by Ashland County citizens through the passage of the Mental Health and Recovery Board Levy, with additional funds dedicated by some individual school districts. The levy last passed in 2010 and is up for renewal in 2020.

The SCLP is administered by the Mental Health and Recovery Board (MHRB), under the leadership of Mr. Steven Stone who serves as its Executive Director and David Ross, Associate Director. The program is implemented by Appleseed Community Mental Health Center (CMHC), under the leadership of Jerry Strausbaugh (Executive Director) and Stacy Merryweather (Clinical Director). Stacy Merryweather coordinates and manages all school liaisons.

SCLP liaisons work in six districts including Ashland City, Ashland County Community Academy (ACCA), Hillsdale, Loudonville-Perrysville, Ashland County – West Holmes Career Center (JVSD), and Mapleton. Liaisons serve as knowledgeable resource contact persons that build relationships with youth and families, schools, and community resources. In essence, liaisons assist youth and their families in securing local services and work to provide solutions for concrete needs (e.g. food, hygiene), therapeutic needs (e.g. counseling), and academic issues (e.g. tutoring, truancy). Because of the unique funding structure of the program, youth and families receive these services at no cost and without the need to access the Medicaid system.

In the past twenty years, the SCLP has assisted thousands of youth and their families. Descriptive data are collected on a selected sample of students, and on occasion from a subset of program stakeholders, by Appleseed and the liaisons through the use of satisfaction surveys (i.e. school staff/administrators), a referral and follow-up form, and an outcome form completed by liaisons. Based on these preliminary data, in the period January through March 2018, liaisons made 571 referrals on behalf of 1,062 students, to 27 different agencies and organizations (Appleseed CMHC, 2018). This information indicates that follow-through rates for referrals are high (95%) with 70% of referrals result in completed service and 25% of referrals providing ongoing service. Further, based on the liaisons' assessments, the data show that

84% of students improved academically, 83% of students increased attendance, and 88% of students evidenced decreased problem behaviors (MHRB, 2018-1).

The Mental Health and Recovery Board of Ashland County has contracted with the Center for Community Research and Evaluation Services (CCRES) at Ashland University (AU) to conduct a program evaluation of the SCLP. The CCRES Directors, Dr. Allyson Drinkard and Dr. Michael Vimont, are the Principal Investigators for the program evaluation, with research assistance provided by two advanced AU undergraduates with research methods training.

This report presents the results of the program evaluation conducted over the period February, 2019 to July, 2020. An Executive Summary of the results of the program evaluation is presented first, followed by our Recommendations.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Evaluation synopsis

A program evaluation of the School-Community Liaison Program (SCLP) was conducted over the period February, 2019 to July, 2020. The research design for the evaluation consisted primarily of an analysis of background information and existing data and documentation, semi-structured interviews and focus groups (i.e. qualitative), and survey research (i.e. quantitative).

Key findings

- The SCLP serves thousands of students and families, addressing concrete, therapeutic, and academic needs
 - All grades, pre-k through 12th
 - Age range 4 to 19, average age 13-14 years old
 - About half of students and their families have received SCLP services in the past
- School community liaisons have a variety of educational backgrounds and professional perspectives, but are experienced in their field, comfortable with independence and decision-making, eclectic in skills used in responding to student needs, and “inventive strategists”
 - Liaisons perform a multitude of varying roles: advocate, broker, enabler, facilitator, mandated reporter, mediator, planner, outreach worker, resource provider
- Students come to the attention of liaisons primarily as a self-referral, or a referral from principals, teachers, guidance counselors, and parents/caregivers
- Students accessing SCLP services present with a broad range of issues and varying complexity
 - About half of students sampled presented with educational, family, behavioral, or emotional/mental health issues
 - About a quarter of students sampled were struggling with academic performance, attendance, single parent household, coping skills, poverty, or peer issues
 - Almost half of all youth sampled had issues with anxiety/depression

- Over 1/3 of students presented with resource deprivation issues
 - About 1 in 6 students sampled presented with child maltreatment issues
 - On average, students presented with five different issues overall
 - Students in high school are more likely to present with educational issues than students in elementary/middle school
 - Younger students are more likely to present with child maltreatment and legal system involvement issues than older students
 - The number of presenting issues students need help with is significantly correlated with the presence (or lack) of three developmental asset measures
- Liaisons make a range of contacts and referrals to address students' presenting issues
 - Most commonly, liaisons contact principals, parents/caregivers, teachers, and/or guidance counselors
 - Most commonly, liaisons refer students to a school program/resource, a community organization, a mental health agency, or utilize a SCLP resource in the course of responding to students' presenting needs
- Interviewees state the greatest benefits of the program are the liaisons' connections to community resources, students, family, and school/staff, a reduction in workload for school staff, confidentiality and emotional accessibility of liaisons, home visits, and the reduction of stigma related to help-seeking
- The SCLP is a critical resource for students and families during the Covid-19 pandemic and quarantine; there are increased and ongoing needs for SCLP services attributed to the pandemic

RECOMMENDTIONS

- Given the broad agreement that the SCLP is a significant benefit to the schools, students, families, and the surrounding community, we suggest that expanded funding is considered for additional liaison time/positions where they are requested, via school districts or whatever means are deemed appropriate.
- Liaison workers should begin strategies on the development of effective methods to communicate to school staff the unique skills possessed by them in working with students and their families. Part of this strategy should include a documentation process that describes for each case the enactment of skilled services, including assessment, strategy development of intervention, and evaluation of services provided.
- SCLP administrators may want to revisit the data collection, management, and analysis/reporting system currently in place at Appleseed. While use of the Data Documentation Guide we developed will improve data entry, we advise that additional improvements in this area will increase the reliability and validity of data available for program monitoring. Further, changes in this area will need to be made to facilitate ongoing program evaluation, if that is desired.
- We suggest that liaisons use a data collection form as they identify students' presenting situations and interact with youth and families, as a means to track student issues and to streamline data collection around contacts and referrals, changes in student needs and behaviors, and the impact of the SCLP.
- We recommend that attendance, grades, and school disciplinary actions be collected for all youth who receive SCLP services in order to better understand the needs of students and the impact of the SCLP. We suggest that this information, collected from school records, should be gathered at the end of the school year, so that all quarterly data is available.
- We recommend that stakeholders consider assessing the developmental assets (Benson, 2006) present in youths' lives, to some degree. Given the interplay of both risk and protective factors in child and adolescent development (Jenson, 2010), stakeholders may also want to consider assessing risk factors using items from a standardized measure, such as the Adverse Childhood Experiences Study survey (ACES; Felitti et al., 1998). Similarly, given the profound influence of family structures and processes on the behaviors and attitudes of school children, we suggest developing a system to track

family units in order to better understand the interplay of family and student issues and the impact of the SCLP.

- Based on the sum of our evaluation findings, we conclude that the School-Community Liaison program qualifies as an “*emerging practice*” with the capacity and suitability for impact and outcome analysis (CHRN, 2013; AMCHP, 2020).

School Community Liaison Program (SCLP) Logic Model

