

"It's a great relief that I can have some answers now. Thank you so, so much for helping facilitate this for me! I have no words." -Caregiver



YOUTH MENTAL HEALTH NAVIGATORS

Improving Mental Health—Together

Youth Mental Health Navigator Program: School Year 2023-2024 Report

By: Patrick Clark, Christine Meeks, Megan Schultz, Beth Winterfeldt, and Kelly Brancamp (MSW Intern)



Greater Mankato Area
United Way



Table of Contents

Letter to Invested Partners.....	Pg. 3
Data Outcomes.....	Pg. 4
School District Data.....	Pg. 5
Demographic Data.....	Pg. 7
Goals.....	Pg. 9
Presentations Given.....	Pg.10
Testimonials.....	Pg.11
Request for Funding.....	Pg.15
Contact Information.....	Pg.15

Dear Invested Partners,

We want to start by expressing deep gratitude for everyone's support in launching, establishing, and expanding the Youth Mental Health Navigator program. Thank you!

This program was established by our local community to proactively serve the increasing mental health needs of our community's youth and their families. The program aims to identify youth with mental health concerns early on to prevent the escalation of such concerns and maximize positive outcomes for our youth.

Due to the success of the pilot program in Mankato Area Public Schools (MAPS) during the 2022-2023 school year, and increased funding, the program expanded in August 2023 with the addition of three more Youth Mental Health Navigators (YMHNs) and one Social of Master Work Intern. One navigator was added to MAPS to serve an additional six school buildings. The other two navigators, and intern, were employed by South Central Service Cooperative (SCSC) to serve twelve more rural school districts. The four navigators now serve all thirteen public school districts in the Southern Minnesota counties of Blue Earth, Le Sueur, Nicollet, and Waseca.

The 2023-2024 school year surpassed expectations. We received over 650 referrals for students and successfully connected over 500 of them to services. While getting to know each school district's policies and operations posed some hurdles, the two Youth Mental Health Navigators working with the twelve school districts outside of MAPS adapted to the unique needs of each school. Overall, the schools have gained a better understanding of the program and are enthusiastic about continuing to strengthen their relationship with the Youth Mental Health Navigators.

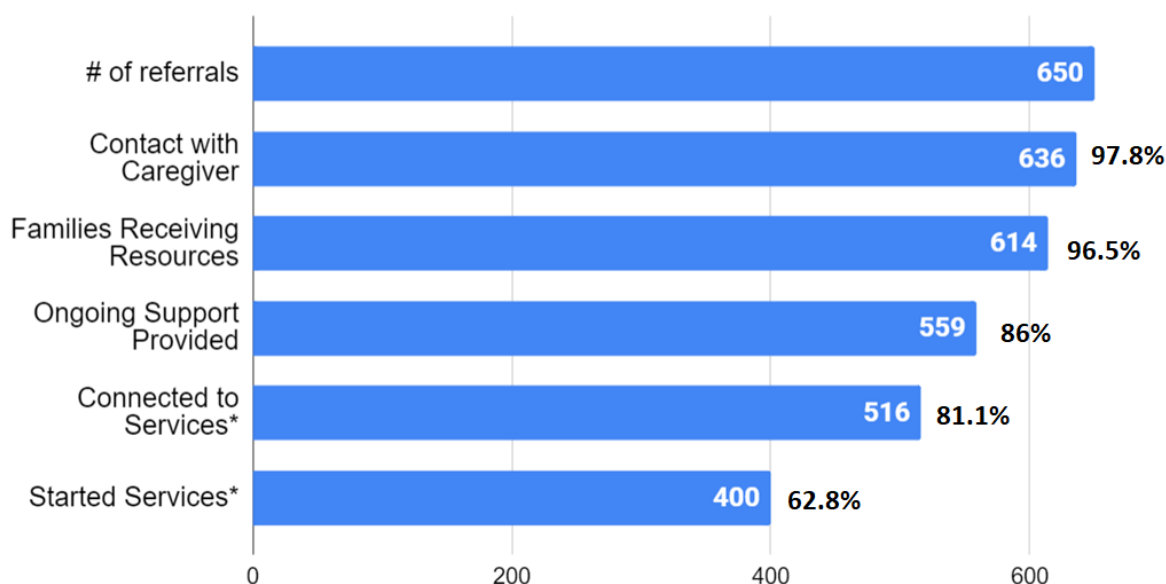
Our program is committed to ensuring a positive impact and we would like to share with you our program's data and outcomes from the 2023-2024 school year. We use this data to inform us on how our program can positively impact youth, families, and school staff. We also like to report this impact to invested and interested partners. The last date data was compiled for this report was 6/6/24.

Sincerely,

Patrick Clark, Christine Meeks, Megan Schultz, Beth Winterfeldt, and Kelly Brancamp

"My child is in a much better place than in fall when we started this journey! She seems to be doing well, managing friends as best as she can, maybe not quite as stressed and her grades are excellent. I cannot say "thank you" enough for your support and guidance. If anything changes I'll keep in touch. Thank you so much!" -Caregiver

Outcomes as of 6/6/24



* 'Connected to Services' and 'Started Services' are **known** to the Youth Mental Health Navigators. Most likely, multiple connections were made without the awareness of the YMHNs.

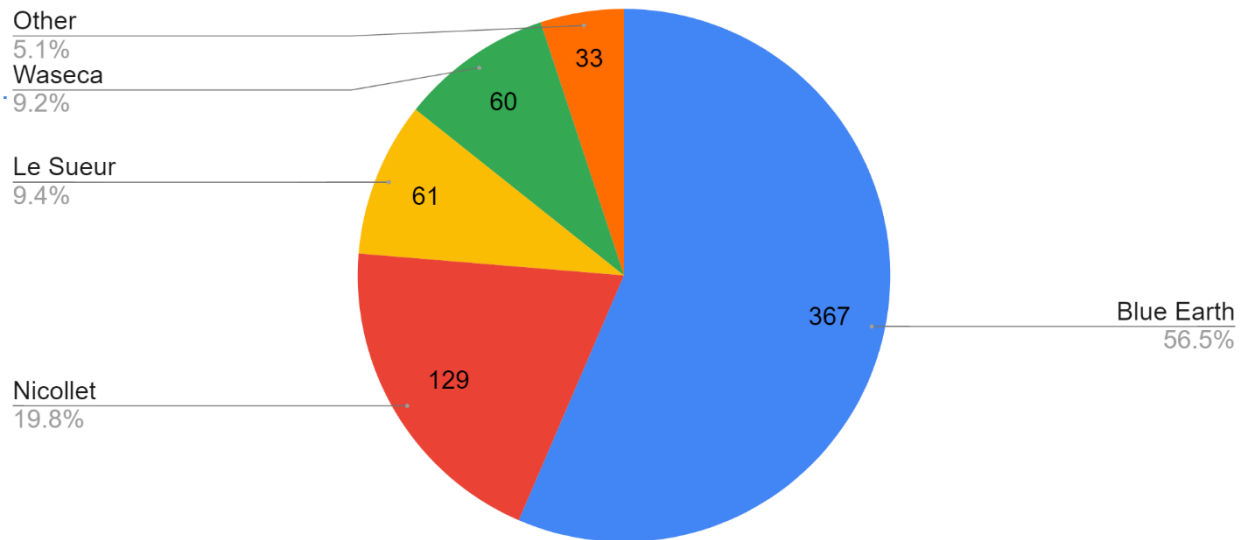
The percentages shown below "Contact with Caregiver" are derived from the total number of caregiver contacts.

Additional Outcomes/Impact

- **Increased Program Awareness:** The program experienced a rise in referrals from school staff, community members, and caregivers via word-of-mouth, leading to more equitable access to mental health services.
- **Expanded Services:** Began serving birth through age five and secondary-aged students, broadening the reach and impact of the program.
- **Enhanced Efficiency:** Implemented new ideas and increased efficiency in service provision, improving the overall referral experience.
- **Community Engagement:** Delivered speeches and updates to numerous businesses and agencies, raising awareness about youth mental health.
- **State-wide Presence:** Presented at multiple state-wide conferences focused on youth mental health, sharing insights and best practices.
- **Increased Capacity:** Added a Master of Social Work intern from MNSU-Mankato for the spring/summer, enhancing the program's service capacity and building a collaborative relationship with the university.
- **Family Connections:** Many families, after receiving one referral from YMHNs, took the initiative to connect other children to services independently. These were not counted as referrals but demonstrate the vital role YMHNs play in educating families and communities about the process. In addition to youth referrals, **57 caregivers** were also referred for services.

School Year 2023-2024 Data

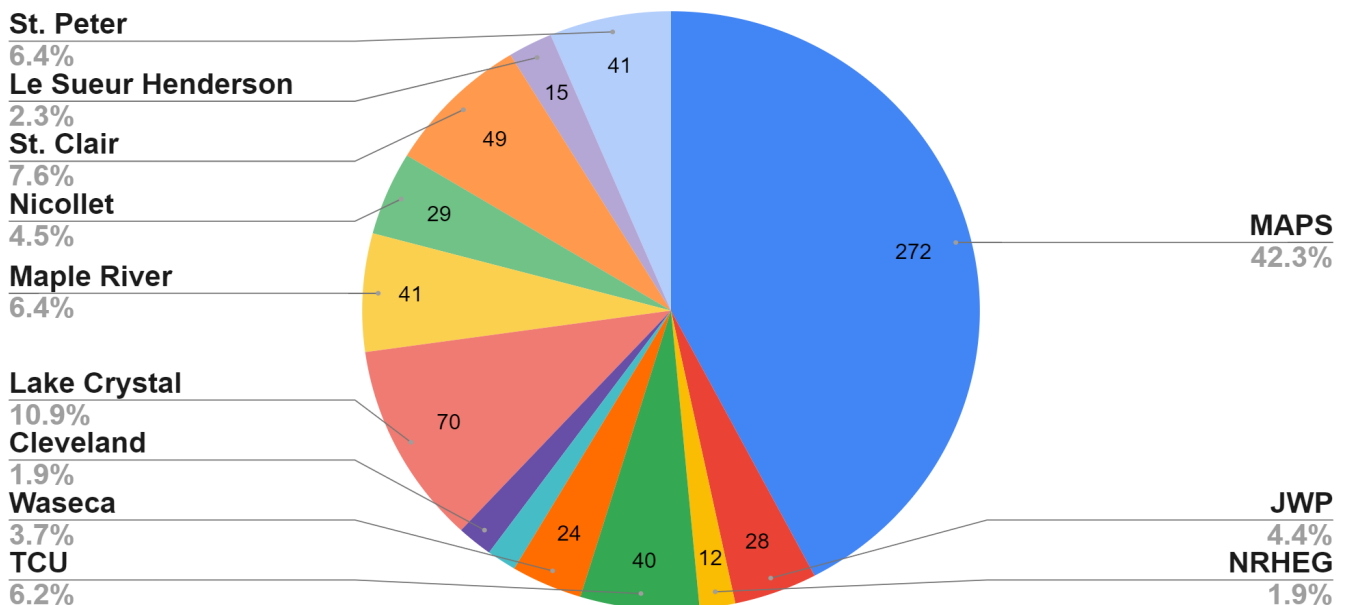
Referrals by Counties



School District Referral Data

When considering this data, it is important to not make assumptions about youth mental needs and school resources specific to each district, and to understand each district has differing numbers of students. According to the most recent Minnesota Student Survey and other resources, mental health needs of students are similar across districts. Instead, Youth Mental Health Navigators noticed that the schools that provided the greatest number of referrals were schools who 1) *best understood the collaborative nature of this program* and 2) *schools who transparently and consistently provided YMHN information to school staff and caregivers, allowing all school staff and caregivers to contact YMHNs directly.*

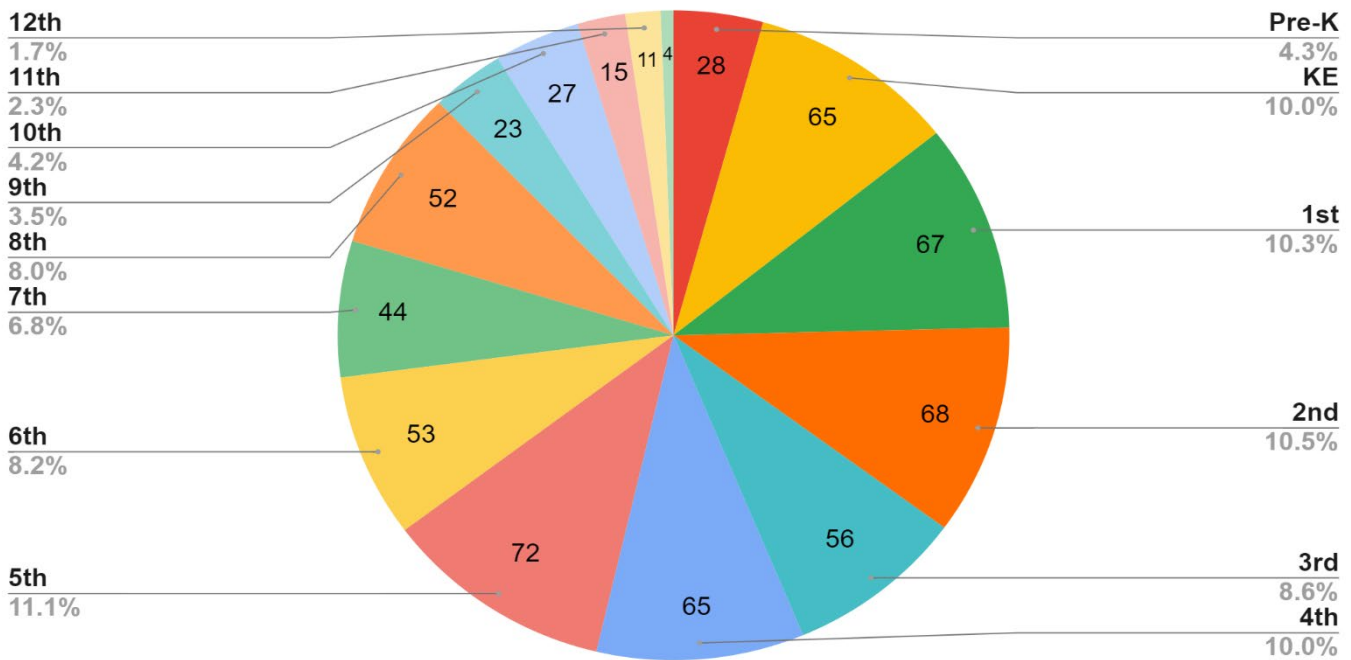
Referrals by School District



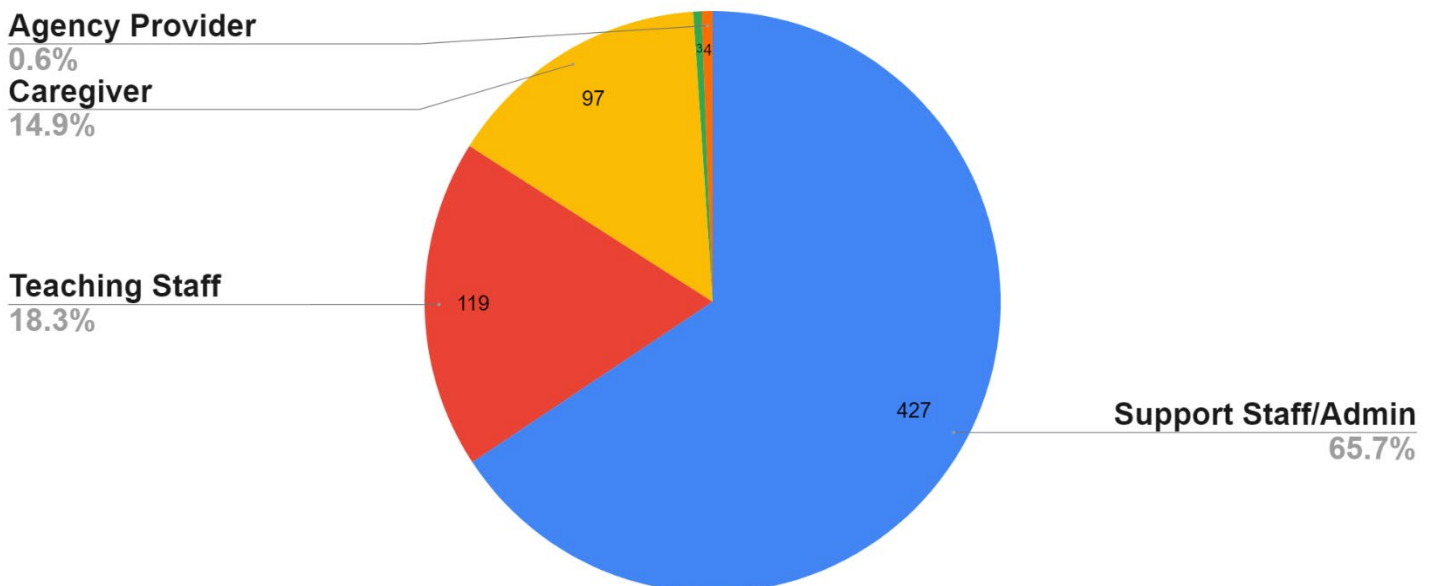
For context, below are the general grade ranges that each school referred to the program.

K-12		Other
Le Sueur Henderson		MAPS: K-8
St. Clair	JWP	St. Peter: K-4
Nicollet	NRHEG	Lake Crystal: K-5
Maple River	WEM	TCU: K-6
Cleveland	Waseca	

Referrals by Grade level



Referral Source



*The green slice represents referrals from Community Members (0.5%).

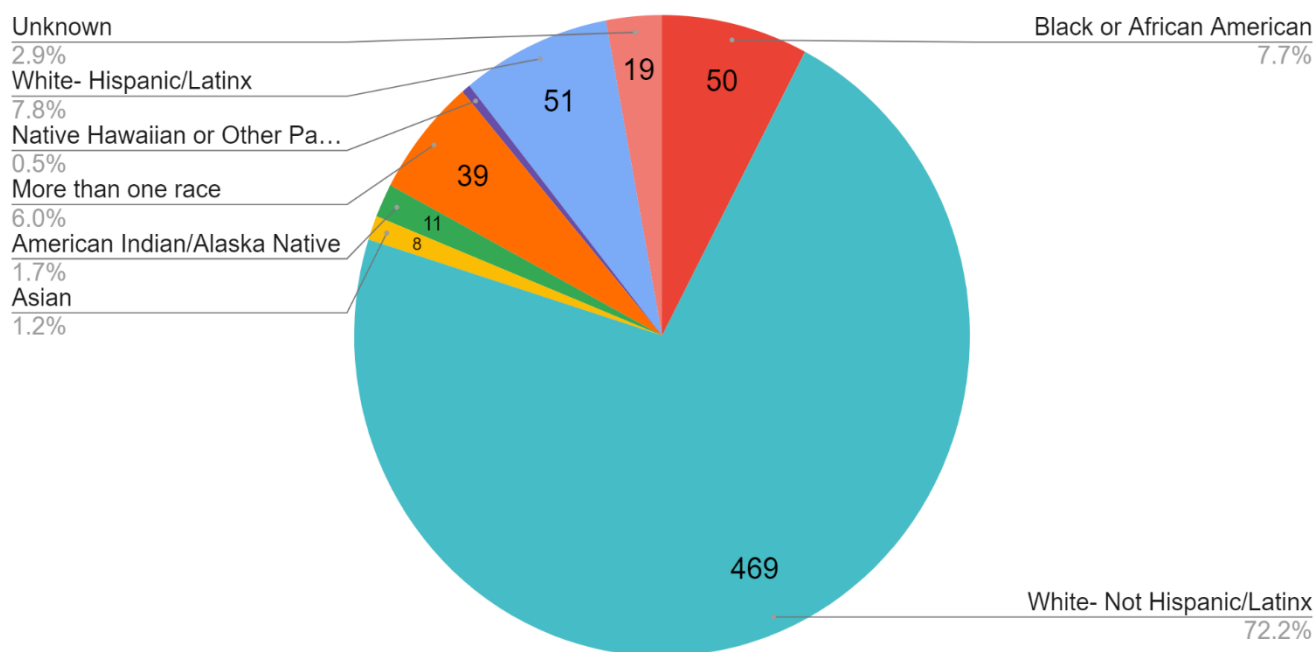
Last year, most referrals came from support staff and administrators. As schools and communities become more familiar with the program, we are seeing an increase in referrals from teachers and caregivers. We hope this trend of diversifying referral sources continues moving forward.

"[The Navigators] have worked tirelessly to narrow the gaps between families, schools, and mental health providers. They work quickly to help schools and families identify needs of youth, support families and schools by referring youth and families for help, and keep a pulse on resources available. They have been wonderful partners to us, always thinking of ways to help improve access to mental health for kids and families. - Caitlin Meyer, Le Sueur County Family Services Coordinator

Demographic Data

Youth Mental Health Navigators have engaged with cultural liaisons and local community partners specializing in cultural-specific issues (e.g., WellShare). They have conducted presentations on trauma for migrant educators and collaborated with healthcare providers experienced in serving minoritized groups. We prioritize equity as a core value of our program.

Referrals by Race



When compared to the demographic makeup of the four counties, Youth Mental Health Navigators are reaching a more diverse range of students and families. We know that some schools are more diverse than the overall demographic composition of the four-county region.

More information about specific school demographics can be found at www.usnews.com/education/k12.

Four County Region

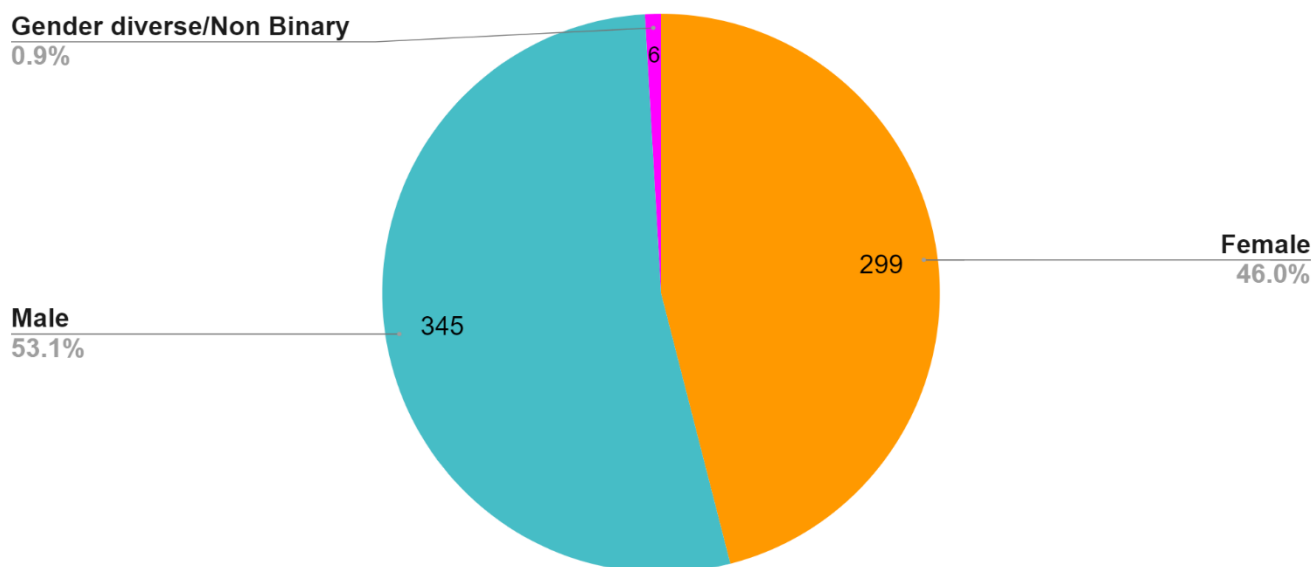
White-Not Hispanic/Latinx_____	87.0%	Asian_____	1.8%
White Hispanic/Latinx_____	5.4%	Black_____	3.9%
American Indian/Alaska Native_____	0.6%	More than one race_____	0.2%
Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific_____	0.1%		

United States Census Bureau, 2023

“There are a lot of obstacles when it comes to families getting set up with counseling services.

When a family doesn’t speak English as their primary language, that only adds to their obstacles. Having a Mental Health Navigator who could help work with our Cultural Liaison and mental health providers was a huge asset to our school and, more importantly, for families. Having someone who could dedicate the time to remove barriers and assist with appropriate services was invaluable to our district and helped our students get the services that they needed. – School Support Staff, Waseca Schools

Referrals by Gender



The gender-diverse population is likely higher, but we only include it in our count if students have disclosed it to YMHNs, staff and/or their caregiver(s). Additionally, due to our focus on younger populations, some students may not yet fully comprehend that part of their identity.

In the program's inaugural year, more elementary-aged males were referred, possibly reflecting a tendency to externalize their mental health symptoms, while elementary-aged females often internalize theirs. For the 2023-2024 school year, we believe we have improved in helping school staff and caregivers better identify across a spectrum of presenting symptoms and gender identities.

Goals

Summer 2024

- Youth/Family Services
 - Work to connect “not yet connected” 2023-2024 student referrals.
 - Connect youth to additional services as needed.
 - Share fun summer extracurricular activities/resources with caregivers for youth.
- Set up an August goal planning meeting with participation from United Way/MAPS/SCSC.
- Explore additional services and new provider relationships.
- Complete the YMHN Policies & Procedures document to help guide best practice moving forward.

School Year 2024-2025

- Program Awareness
 - Increase awareness of services to caregivers and school staff.
 - Reduce demand on school staff for communication between caregivers and school staff; increase efficiency, eliminate redundant communication, and further free up school staff to work directly with students.
 - Order marketing tools to increase program awareness and establish branding.
- Program Functionality
 - Explore technological supports to build more efficiencies in the program's resource/referral processes.
 - Develop relationships with new providers.
- Prevention Services
 - Develop upstream/preventative services to prevent mental health concerns.
 - Provide classroom presentations/activities for students and school staff.
- Equitable and Culturally-Relevant Services
 - Enhance local/regional partnerships to better serve youth and families.
 - Increase knowledge of culturally-appropriate supports.
 - Increase awareness of program services to all caregivers and school staff as districts approve; all families should be able to explore services if desired.
 - Flex navigator work schedules to better accommodate caregiver work schedules.
- Evaluation
 - Distribute provider and caregiver survey/feedback form for navigation services received. Continue surveying school staff. Use feedback to determine how best to adapt the program.
 - Implement streamlined data tracking, prioritizing the most compelling data tracking points.
 - Implement new evaluation tools to assess program effectiveness and the longer-term outcomes for youth.
- Professional Development
 - Engage in navigator-specific professional development and training opportunities.
 - Acquire knowledge to better implement preventative services further upstream.
- Funding
 - Attain more funding to finalize current program financial needs for 5 years.
 - Explore regional, state, and federal funding; apply to relevant opportunities.

Beyond

- Increase navigator capacity/positions to meet unmet needs of youth and families.
 - Increasing community access points beyond public schools (i.e. non-profits, private schools, counties, organizations that provide after school activities, etc).
 - Increase the number of navigators to provide services for unserved Minnesota counties.
 - Expand services to a broader range of ages of youth, working to eventually service youth ages 0 - 24 (federal definition of youth). According to NAMI, 75% of people with mental illness will have initial symptoms during these years. ([NAMI, 2024](#))

Presentations Given

Youth Mental Health Navigators were asked to present at various events to build awareness of this program. Numerous collaborative conversations were held by all YMHNs with agencies, counties, schools, and other entities. Formal presentations given are listed below. Please spread the word in your networks that YMHNs are available to present about this program and any other topic that addresses mental health needs and reduces mental health stigma in our communities.

- Numerous presentations were given within school districts.
- Local Community Presentations:
 - Lion's Club and Rotary- Waseca, MN
 - YMCA
 - Sertoma
 - Blue Earth County Mayors
 - Blue Earth County SHIP Collaborative
 - Blue Earth County
- Regional Presentations:
 - SCSC Counselor Community of Practice
 - SCSC Early Child Special Education Personnel
 - Tri Valley- Migrant Education Presentation
- State-Wide Presentations
 - Minnesota Association of Community Corrections Act Counties
 - Innovations in Mental Health
- National Presentation
 - Association of Education Service Agencies (upcoming on 07/18/24).

Testimonials

Youth Mental Health Navigators received consistently positive feedback from multiple sources this year - from caregivers, providers, and school staff. Testimonials that were captured are listed below. YMHNs did not have a formal process in place for collecting testimonials, and caregivers/school staff were not expected to provide them.

Caregiver Testimonials

"My child is in a much better place than in fall when we started this journey! She seems to be doing well, managing friends as best as she can, maybe not quite as stressed and her grades are excellent. I cannot say "thank you" enough for your support and guidance."

"I just really appreciate your help. I don't think we would have gotten connected otherwise. Your services are so vital".

"Thank you so much for all you did to get my child taken care of. I can't express how grateful I am."

"My daughter is doing really well. She enjoys seeing her therapist each week and her confidence has really improved. She is really excited for her activities this summer too."

"My child has shown lots of improvement both at home and school! We feel like the therapist was just the right fit for his needs. He's gained self awareness and coping strategies to help him regulate his emotions and build back his confidence. As parents, we have gained helpful insights through the sessions as well."

"I love my child's therapist! My child has therapy every week. Thank you so much!" *(After being on a waitlist for multiple months, YMHN connected the child with a therapist in 2 days).*

"It's so nice to have help with this. It's so overwhelming! Thank you so much!"

"For the first time I feel like someone really understands and hears me. I really appreciate the support and help. It's a relief to have someone who has a plan and can see a way through this."

"Thank you for everything and all the help. It's very appreciated."

"I need help, my children need help, and I get so overwhelmed I don't even know where to start. I wouldn't have done this without you."

"It's just so hard figuring it out. I really want my child to have the help she needs. Thank you so much!"

"My child loves therapy, looks forward to going and has been doing much better at school and now we're working on things going better at home and trying to tackle (child's) emotional responses when things don't go (child's) way."

Thanks again - I can't tell you how great it feels to have your guidance and support!!

"I feel like a huge relief is off my shoulders. I've been trying for so long to get help for my child, I can't believe it's so hard."

"My child has been asking when we go back! I think it's going to be super helpful. I really appreciate your help getting it set up and for checking in."

"I finally feel like someone hears me and understands. This is such a relief - I had almost given up."

"Therapy is going great! I can't thank you enough for your help!"

"We really like (child's) therapist! Therapist will also start seeing (child's sibling)!" *(School staff previously spent 'years' trying to encourage this family to get connected.)*

"Therapy is going well! They seem to connect well and my child doesn't fight about going!"

"It's going really well. (Child) really likes her!"

"Therapy is going great! We've already seen a lot of positive break-throughs." *(Child with a high degree of past trauma).*

"Therapy is great! Therapist is a great fit for my child and I think it will really help. Thanks again for helping!" *(Child who's mental health symptoms are making it difficult to go to school).*

"You were so very helpful. I really appreciate the help with figuring out this process. My child already feels much better and validated for the difficulties and anxieties (child) is having. So do we." *(Child at risk for truancy - after neuropsych and therapy - school reports a "complete turnaround" with consistent attendance, dramatically improved grades, and achievement of awards).*

"I can't believe how helpful therapy is. And our therapist is great. She's so great she even fit in my other child and worked to make back to back appointments available. We've never had such great service before and my children love going to see her."

"My (high school) child with disabilities loves (child's) therapist. At first (child) didn't want to go, but now the child adores her. The therapist has helped (child) so much and has been so encouraging. We are so thankful to have her as a therapist. She is just what our child needed, and we didn't even know. Thank you so much for all your help. It has made a huge difference in our lives."

"You have been an amazing light of hope for our family." *(Child and parent started therapy two weeks after referral after experiencing a traumatic event. Eventually additional family members got connected to services).*

"We are all set up and everything is complete and I was happy with the process and all it involved. Thank you!" *(Navigator helped reduce multiple barriers to access neuropsych testing.)*

"Things are going really good. She's (therapist) so good with my child and finds great ways to get on child's level. I'm very happy with her and with the help you provided. I couldn't have done this on my own, so I'm very grateful for your help." "It's going to be a long road, but (child) looks forward to going every week and I've seen a lot of good small improvements."

"Omg, thank you so much. I feel like a weight has been lifted...you have no idea."

"She's been wonderful! Thanks again for helping get that set up!" *(Child had a therapist, and at parent request, YMHN helped transition to a new therapist who could better meet the child's needs.)*

"My child is learning to communicate due to seeking help from the navigator and also they have given me as a parent ideas on how to help them succeed. We owe a huge thanks to the school system for supporting this position"

"I just really appreciate your help. I don't think we would have gotten connected otherwise. Your services are so vital". *(After waiting for services for a long time and being connected by a navigator in a short period of time.)*

"You have helped me so much in figuring this all out--thank you so much!"

"Thank you a million times over for all of your help. You made this so easy for us!" *(YMHN helped family navigate insurance, advocated for affordable options and perfect time of day, with complicated caregiver work schedules.)*

"Thank you so much for all you did to get my child taken care of. I can't express how grateful I am."

"My child really likes her therapist, which is huge for (child)!"

"My daughter is doing really well. She enjoys seeing her therapist each week and her confidence has really improved. She is really excited for her activities this summer too." *(Caregiver referral for a young elementary student with poor self-esteem).*

My child has shown lots of improvement both at home and school! We feel like the therapist was just the right fit for his needs. He's gained self awareness and coping strategies to help him regulate his emotions and build back his confidence. As parents, we have gained helpful insights through the sessions as well. Thanks for all your knowledge and resources this year! We are so lucky to have you here! *(Caregiver who is also school staff).*

"It's a great relief that I can have some answers now. Thank you so so much for helping facilitate this for me! I have no words." *(After YMHN helped this caregiver access neuropsych testing and therapy for herself. She is now more capable and confident in parenting her children, who initially were the referrals for this program).*

School Staff Testimonials

"She is just so much better. She has improved 100%. She is such a joy to be around and talk with." *(Classroom teacher, After YMHN helped access neuropsych testing, meds, and therapy for an elementary student).*

"This program is so helpful. I can see how we can work well as a team and get kids the help they need faster." *(Elementary school counselor)*

"I am grateful for the support for a complex situation in which our navigator was able to be a squeaky wheel for the county, and text and continually check in and support parents through the process." (*School administrator, after having tried to help a family for 2+ years*).

"She loves her therapist and her mom is very happy. She is excited to go to therapy every week and the therapist immediately recommended further testing." (*School counselor*).

"You are a 'godsend' for this family." (*School administrator*)

"He is very happy with his therapist. He tells me all about it and what he is learning." (*School social worker.*)

"I have never seen (this student) so happy, and it's been years." "I'm so glad you were able to help the parent too. The more we help parents, the more we are helping the next generation too." (*YMHN connected with caregiver after an inpatient psychiatric stay following a suicide attempt.*)

"This is by far the best service that has been added to our school in 25 years." (*School counselor*)

"It's like magic how quickly our YMHN can get things to happen." (*School behavioral interventionist*)

"Thanks for all you do to help get families connected. I have never been able to provide this type of assistance. It's a great service". (*School social worker*)

The navigator "will no doubt free up our time to continue directly interacting with students daily and equipping families with necessary supports both inside and outside of school." (*School Social Worker*)

"It used to be that parents would keep coming to me, asking again and again for help, but still not getting connected. Now I put them in touch with our YMHN, and the parents don't come to me again because they are getting the help they need. I have never had so many positive emails from parents, thanking me for putting them in touch with our YMHN." (*School behavioral interventionist*).

Our YMHN has been a very nice resource for us and we are very thankful for all they have done for our school community!" (*School staff.*)

"Our YMHN is never in the way and gets things done behind the scenes. I have heard from staff constantly throughout this year about how much the YMHN is helping and what a relief it is for them, because they can concentrate more on supporting the students while they are in school." (*School admin.*)

Community Partner/Provider Testimonials:

"The Youth Mental Health Navigator Program is a critical part of the continuum to help youth and families in our communities navigate mental health services. It is a creative way to provide services in an academic setting to build trust, rapport and early access to our youth. Evidence tells us the earlier we intervene the better outcomes we will have to help our youth achieve academic success and positive pro-social outcomes." (*Josh Milow, Blue Earth County Deputy Administrator*).

[The Navigators] have worked tirelessly to narrow the gaps between families, schools, and mental health providers. They work quickly to help schools and families identify needs of youth, support families and schools by referring youth and families for help, and keep a pulse on resources available. They have been wonderful partners to us, always thinking of ways to help improve access to mental health for kids and families. *(Caitlin Meyer, Le Sueur County Family Services Coordinator)*

"Simply as a focused liaison and unbiased advocate for mental health services, [this program]] has been a wonderful opportunity for us to connect with the families we may not have had the opportunity to serve without the collaboration. We appreciate you!!!!" *(Jessica Shouler, Clinical Director of Adult, Child, and Family Services in Mankato, MN).*

"We appreciate you-you've made it easier to get these referrals from the school!" *(Intake at Nicollet Co. Health and Human Services)*

Request for Funding

This program exists because of our funding partners; thank you to everyone who has financially supported this program! To ensure its continuation and growth please consider funding/contributing to this unique, local program helping meet the increasing mental health needs of our youth and families.

If you are interested in discussing possible funding/contributions to this program, please contact Barb Kaus at Greater Mankato Area United Way (contact information below).

Contact

- Barb Kaus, CEO, Greater Mankato Area United Way, barbk@mankatounitedway.org, (507) 345-4551
- Holle Spessard, Special Education Director, South Central Service Cooperative, hspessard@mnsccsc.org, (507) 389-1914
- Scott Hare, Director of Student Support Services, Mankato Area Public Schools, SHare1@isd77.org, (507) 387-1818
- Patrick Clark, Mankato Area Public Schools Navigator, PClark1@isd77.org, (507) 740-1360
- Christine Meeks, South Central Service Cooperative Navigator, cmeeks@mnsccsc.org, (507) 593-9794
- Megan Schultz, Mankato Area Public Schools Navigator, MSchul5@isd77.org, (507) 382-9636
- Beth Winterfeldt, South Central Service Cooperative Navigator, bwinterfeldt@mnsccsc.org, (507) 388-3675