

National Council

M A G A Z I N E

A quarterly publication from the National Council for Community Behavioral Healthcare

Cultural Competence in Treating Mental and Addiction Disorders

 NATIONAL COUNCIL
FOR COMMUNITY BEHAVIORAL HEALTHCARE

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CULTURALLY COMPETENT SERVICES



GUIDE and FSAI Provide Culturally Competent Services in Schools

Scott Birdsong, LCSW-C, ACSW, Executive Director; Karla Hoffman, MA, Operations Director; Lawrence Epp, EdD, LCPC, Director of School-Based Mental Health Services—GUIDE Program, Inc., Laurel, Maryland
Contact: larryE@guideprogram.org

The GUIDE Program has found a special recipe to meld a vibrant partnership between the public schools in its service area, the county government, and a sister nonprofit. Through this partnership, it delivers school-based mental health and social services in a program called Linkages to Learning. The name derives from the fact that it “links” students to valuable resources in their community and provides culturally competent services.

program, Linkages to Learning, in the wider Gaithersburg area. A few years later, GUIDE was selected to spearhead the wider partnership. The LTL initiative in the upper county region currently includes GUIDE and the Family Services Agency, Inc., another nonprofit provider of behavioral health services, working in partnership with the Montgomery County Department of Health and Human Services and the public schools to bring mental health

permanent office provided by the school. School-based mental health services include diagnostic assessment, treatment, and psycho-educational groups for at-risk students and their families while school-based social services provide case management as well as prevention, literacy, and recreational programming to families.

Since 2001, 3,500 children and families from all racial, ethnic and cultural groups have received LTL services. Nearly 50% of GUIDE’s LTL staff comprises native Spanish speakers, who can work effectively with the growing Spanish-speaking population in the region. Currently French speakers are also being recruited in order to facilitate serving a growing French-speaking West African population as well. GUIDE makes special efforts to reach out to families that have more difficulty connecting to the school community, such as those new to this country or those for whom English is a second language, as well as to children and families who have lived in the U.S. and the county for many years.

Through the FSAI Mental Health Clinic, LTL families are also able to access psychiatric support and evaluation, medication management when needed, and long-term therapy for families after they are discharged from participating in the school-based programs served by GUIDE staff. FSAI’s clinic also provides clinical consultation and manages administrative aspects of billing the public mental health system.

The LTL partnership is a successful demonstration of how nonprofit community agencies can work together with an active and creative county government and concerned public schools to provide mental health and social services, which are easily accessible, effective, and delivered in a culturally competent manner.



Since the early 1970s, GUIDE has provided mental health and substance abuse intervention services. These Youth services programs operated by GUIDE in Gaithersburg, Germantown, and Olney, MD have adapted their services to meet the needs of a growing population that is increasingly culturally, racially, and economically diverse.

In the mid-1990s, GUIDE was selected to run Montgomery County’s innovative school-based mental health and social services

and social services to children and families with special needs in eight area elementary and middle schools. Through Montgomery County’s leadership and support, the program has been successfully expanded to where more than 500 children are seen annually along with an additional 480 family members.

GUIDE assigns mental health clinicians and case managers to schools where they are able to provide an array of individual, group, and family-based therapy within a