

# Putting Children First

## Rise to the Challenge

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Putting the needs of our children first is a priority that we must all take responsibility for. According to the National Alliance on Mental Illness, 1 in 6 young adults age 12 to 17 experience depression, 3 million have had thoughts of suicide and there has been a 31% increase in mental health-related emergency department visits. The Detroit Wayne Integrated Health Network (DWIHN) is focused on ensuring the healthcare needs of our children are being met by providing quality mental and physical healthcare, housing and educational supports and programs. By working with our provider partners and community stakeholders, it is time that we rise to the challenge of caring for the next generation. Together we can offer the proper healthcare that will provide our young people with the physical and emotional health, professional guidance and development opportunities necessary to reach their full potential as adults.

The pandemic has proven to be a source of anxiety, stress, isolation and depression for everyone. Our children are feeling these same effects tenfold. Separated from their friends, masked away from the unknown; living fearful in a world that has few answers can be unsettling. As I look into my own child's eyes, I am met with hope; knowing that she is often far more resilient and courageous than I often give her credit for. It is this innocence that we must protect.

Through our School Success Initiative Program, DWIHN is investing in our K-12 schools throughout Wayne County and working with students and their families to improve mental health outcomes through education, referrals and early intervention. This has enabled us to reach more students across all grade levels, last year DWIHN served over 8,500 young people through this initiative. By providing psychoeducation training, parent supports, professional development and counseling services to children and their families, we are surrounding them with the tools needed for good mental health to develop the resilience needed to cope with whatever life throws at them and enable them to grow into well-rounded, healthy adults.

There are approximately 5,800 children in the foster care system in Wayne County. This is another prime example of where we must take responsibility and rise to the challenge of caring for the next generation. Children go into the foster program for several reasons, the most common being abuse and neglect. Through our provider network, DWIHN can offer the necessary behavioral health assessments that may be associated with such trauma. By offering consistency in the inconsistent world they know we are giving these young people the strength and supports desired during these formidable years of adolescence. According to Dr. Shama Faheem,

DWIHN Chief Medical Officer and Child Psychiatrist "Young people in the foster care system have complicated and severe medical, mental, oral, and psychosocial health issues; trauma rooted in childhood experiences are common and can be linked to serious impacts in adolescence and adulthood". The ability to be a reliable person in a foster child's life can be rewarding; by providing coping mechanisms, you are offering hope and guidance on how to deal with stressful situations. As these young adults age out of the system they will need these tools to prepare them for the real world. Where will they live, work, go to school?

DWIHN is committed to providing hope for these young children as they age out of the foster care system working with our community partners and offering job training, educational opportunities and housing accommodations so they can focus on their future. They don't have the family or financial support systems that the thousands of other teenagers have to help make their mark on this world. We will continue to offer stability and be the consistent presence in their lives into adulthood. Many of our children are dealing with situations beyond their control; mental illness, abuse and neglect. It is time that we accept the challenge of putting our vulnerable children first. Making quality healthcare and educational services a priority to guarantee their opportunities for success. Through these innovative solutions we will improve access to mental healthcare and protect the emotional wellbeing as well as their physical health.

Behavioral Health integration is one approach that can improve access to care for children and their families. Partnerships between primary healthcare and mental healthcare can make these services more accessible for families. The time is now to accept the challenge for change and do what is right for all people.



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