



Successful Start in Kansas with Youth Universal Mental Health Screening and Coping Strategies

May 28, 2021

May is Mental Health Awareness month and the Kansas Department for Aging and Disabilities Services (KDADS), [mdlogix](#) client, is diligently working with schools to improve the mental health of children and adolescents.

The Kansas Behavioral Health Integration into Schools (BHIS) program uses [bhworks](#), a comprehensive, secure, validated, end-to-end software platform powered by mdlogix, to support the development, implementation and continuous improvement of a school-based plan of strategies that will provide training, education and technology to school districts, mental health providers and community members. The program is funded through a federal grant from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA).

Last week, a local Kansas high school allowed 9th and 10th graders to volunteer, with parental consent, to be confidentially screened for such issues as significant stress, anxiety, body image, depression and suicidal thoughts. More than 30 percent of the students participated, and three clinicians were on hand to discuss the screening results, coping mechanisms and continuing treatment if warranted. The bhworks software platform, accessible from any web-enabled device, is compliant with all federal security standards (The Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) and The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA).

Staff at Mirror, Inc a not-for-profit private corporation providing behavioral health care, alcohol and drug use prevention services in Kansas, created and disseminated [a video](#) to obtain parental consent a month ahead of the day when services were offered in a reserved school room.

“We want to normalize checking on a student’s mental health,” said Cody Beaton, LSCSW, LCAC, South Central Kansas regional director for Mirror, Inc. “Parents don’t question the need to consent for a physical for their child to play school sports. A mental

health checkup should be the same. Kids are under stress with parental expectations and school demands along with a year of COVID upending life as they knew it.”

“Parents were grateful for the service, and the kids openly talked about their mental health,” Beaton said. “The smoothest part was the technology, bhworks. Each student had a computer, so we sent them a link to complete the questions. They breezed right through it, and we could read the results in real time. That’s when the counselors could privately speak with them about coping mechanisms if their anxiety rated high, for example.”

Parents who declined their child’s participation cited privacy concerns.

“I cannot stress enough that a student’s medical information is confidential and will not be shared,” said Linda Buchheister, KDADS System of Care project director. “In fact, it would be a violation of the law for the school and its counselors to do so.”

The BHIS program is run by an interdisciplinary project team that includes faculty and staff from Drexel University’s Center for Family Intervention Science, Mental Health America (MHA) of the Heartland and the Mental Health Association (MHA) of South Central Kansas. Go to BHLCoFks.org for information about conducting this assessment resource in your school.

Youth are the most effective agent of change when it comes to impacting other youth. KDADS is also working with Mirror to expand [Youth Leadership in Kansas \(YLINK\)](#). This model is rooted in prevention science and builds in protective factors that buffer kids from risk and promotes resilience. Through YLINK, teens are empowered to impact their school and community in a positive way by reducing substance use, promoting mental health and building hope and connection. Peer leaders connect through YLINK with like-minded peers in their hometown and beyond. For more information about YLINK, please contact Douglas.Bowman2@ks.gov.

Are you a Kansas K-12 school, student, local education agency, community mental health center (CMHC) or a school-based mental health service provider that wants to participate in either of these programs? Contact Linda Buchheister, KDADS Behavioral Health Services, at Linda.Buchheister1@ks.gov or 785-296-4744.