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Mental-health aid spreads in Monterey County

Report finds Monterey County services for youth improve

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These days, more and more Monterey County children and young adults are getting the help they need in addressing mental health needs.

On Wednesday, the Behavioral Health Division of the county's Health Department released a study, "Monterey County System of Care: La Familia Sana/The Healthy Family," which reflects significant progress in helping connect more families, children and youth with the mental health services they need.

The progress is a collaborative effort between the department's Children Behavioral Health Division, the county Probation Department/Juvenile Justice, the Department of Social and Employment Services and the county Office of Education.

According to the evaluation study, these collaborative efforts have led to vast improvements in the quality of life for children and youth with serious mental health issues, such as anxiety, anger, depression and drug abuse.

The data were unveiled to the county Governance Council, which is composed of representatives from the above agencies and community members at the Department of Social and Employment Services conference room at 1000 S. Main St. in Salinas.

According to the report, about 2,238 children and youth, ranging from birth to age 25, received mental health services in the federal fiscal year 2007, from Oct. 1, 2006, through Sept. 30, 2007. The numbers indicated an 11 percent increase of those being served from fiscal 2006, and a 37 percent increase over fiscal 2005.

Sid Smith, a psychologist and deputy director of the county's Department of Behavioral Health Division, said the improved outreach efforts by county agencies are due to their increased presence within traditionally underserved communities. North county and south county showed an increase of nearly 40 percent and 30 percent, respectively, in people served in fiscal 2007. Smith said the establishment of two new behavioral health offices in King City and Castroville led to the improvements.

Mike Robles said he joined the Governance Council about three years ago to provide input from a family member - hoping to help families facing the same troubles he had. In September 2007, he said, he began working for the Family Partnership Program under the county's Children's Behavioral Health division.

His job involves assisting families in finding the right services, asking the right questions, and educating them about the importance of mental health.

"That's why I'm happy to do my job," he said. "It's important because a lot of families don't know

where to go and some of them feel they don't have a voice."

Another goal improved upon was increasing services to Mexican Americans. In fiscal 2007, 1,274 of that underserved population received services, compared with 880 people in 2005.

The study also indicated that steering youth into the right programs and treating their disorders are crucial in preventing them from reoffending if they are in the juvenile justice system.

For example, in 2007, 85 percent of girls 14 to 18 who were on probation because of substance abuse or mental health problems and who were out at least a year from the Santa Lucia residential program had no new criminal charges on their records.

The Monterey County System of Care evaluation team, which wrote the report, was established in 2004 from funds the county has obtained, including a \$6 million federal grant.

Additional Facts

ONLINE

View the report, "Monterey County System of Care: La Familia Sana/The Healthy Family," at www.mcssystemofcare.org.
