



Champions for Inclusive Communities

Star Community

Dubuque, IA

Dubuque, Iowa is a community located in the tri-state area along the banks of the Mississippi River near the Wisconsin and Illinois borders. Over four years ago, families in the area spoke up and said they were not happy with the way services were organized, and that they wanted a “single point of contact,” or a one-stop-shop to access services to meet their children’s needs. This concept of a single point of contact, or “lighthouse,” was gradually turned into a reality by the Community Circle of Care, northeast Iowa’s gateway into providing coordinated services to families.

The Community Circle of Care, a partnership of the Iowa Child Health Specialty Clinics, the University of Iowa’s Center for Disabilities and Development and the Iowa Department of Humans Services, is funded through a Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) grant, which is now in its third year. It provides community-based wraparound services to families of children and youth with serious emotional and behavioral challenges. This wraparound plan is coordinated by a team of professionals, community supports, and, of course, the family. The plan also addresses other health needs, including physical health, in order to fully address the needs of children with multiple diagnoses and their families.

Families: The Center of the Circle

Families are at the center of the Community Circle of Care in many ways. They serve on the planning council and local advisory boards, and contribute significantly to the Circle of Care’s monthly newsletters. Their voices are heard through surveys and phone calls asking their opinion. Clinics have a paid family consultant on staff and a social worker to provide care coordination. And, perhaps most helpful of all, they participate in the local parent support groups and family activities.

Parents who attend these support groups share their struggles, learn about what services are available in the community, and learn how to be a good advocate for their child. One parent of a son with epilepsy and a variety of mental health diagnoses tells of feeling slightly out-of-touch upon moving to the Dubuque area. She says, “I had a need to connect with other parents who were going through the same thing as me.” When a staff member from the Community Circle of Care referred this mother to the parent support group, it was a breath of fresh air and “hugely helpful.”

Community Partners

One of Community Circle of Care’s keys to success is its array of community partners. Local businesses have been known to donate space for events like parent support group meetings and provide discounted services to families.

The planning council also partners with non-business entities such as schools, local agencies that serve families and youth, and the juvenile court system. This committee meets quarterly and also involves parents and youth in decision-making.

Communication in the Medical Home

The Community Circle of Care has experienced challenges with the medical home concept simply because their individualized wraparound

services are so comprehensive for the families’ needs that the family often feels no need to return to a medical home. However, the community has recently made large strides to change this.

For the Visiting Nurses Association (VNA), which is one of Community Circle of Care’s community partners, medical homes have been a priority for some time. The VNA encourages medical homes by performing social marketing between primary care providers and Community Circle of Care. Essentially, the VNA works to remind primary care providers that the Community Circle of Care is the “go-to” when it comes to mental health services for their patients who are children and youth.

The VNA also acts as the informant for medical home providers who need someone to fill them in on what is happening in the Dubuque. One way she keeps these providers connected is by forwarding them resources such as the Circle of Care newsletters.

Screening

Communication between the primary care providers, the VNA, and Community Circle of Care is important because in Dubuque, the primary care provider often does much of the screening. Knowing

What makes a Star Community?

ChampionsInC has created the Star Communities program to recognize exceptional communities.

Star Communities will show excellence in 6 Performance Measures:

- Families are partners
- A "Medical Home" provides coordinated care
- Children receive early and continuous screening
- Families have adequate funding/insurance to pay for services
- Services are organized so families can use them easily and are satisfied
- Youth receive necessary services to make the transition to adult life

read about other Star Communities at
www.ChampionsInC.org



where to refer the family when a “red flag” has been identified is vital. These relationships are a sustained piece of the Assuring Better Child Health and Development Program (ABCD II Initiative) awarded by the Commonwealth Fund to Iowa from 2003-2007. The goal of this initiative is to improve the surveillance, screening, and referral efforts of primary care providers.

Community Circle of Care works to promote to other groups the good things they are doing in the Dubuque area through extensive social marketing. This promotion leads to referrals from community partners such as the school system and the Community Health Clinic, which screens families who do not have insurance and refers them to Circle of Care when appropriate. Another avenue for screening and referrals comes from events held through the mental health clinics, which are open to the community. Being able to visit the clinic and ask questions about behavioral and mental health concerns in a safe, fun, non-stigmatizing environment leads to more referrals.

Other types of screening efforts in Dubuque include the State of Iowa’s I-Smile™ Program that provides oral health screening and education in childcare centers and kindergartens. Screening also happens at the local WIC office. The VNA does outreach about mental and dental health with all of its partners.

Reaching Out to All Cultures

Staff tries to reach people of all cultures by providing them with the same services at Community Circle of Care as any other family. The Circle of Care practices cultural brokering, or having a liaison, to communicate with Latino families in the area. One helpful connection they have made is with the local Catholic Church, which has its own set of Spanish interpreters.

The Circle of Care has employed this same approach with an area Jewish synagogue. Staff members were recently asked to educate rabbis from a local Jewish school on signs of mental stress. Part of cultural competence is ensuring that both staff and families are knowledgeable about the culture, so leaders from the Jewish community advised Circle of Care staff about what to wear and how to approach their members. This was done with the hope that families would be at ease talking to people from outside their faith about their child’s mental health needs and feel that their values were being respected.

The Good and the Bad of Insurance

The Community Circle of Care’s wraparound services also provide significant help to families in the way of insurance and financing. The Circle of Care makes it clear to the families it serves that ability to pay is not a barrier. They do, however, help these families find an insurance provider as quickly as possible to encourage the family to be self-sufficient and to ensure the family has the needed support for their child’s health care needs.

One parent described an important lesson learned about Medicaid. Upon moving to the area, this mother searched for and found a physician willing and able to care for her son’s epilepsy and associated needs. After speaking with the secretary at the practice on the phone, however, the mother learned that they did not accept Medicaid. Many more phone calls confirmed that there were very few providers in the community who accepted Medicaid. In the parent’s own words, “it was very frustrating and embarrassing!” This is still a significant access-to-care issue in the community, but there are on-going efforts at both the state and local level to increase the numbers of providers that accept Medicaid. The VNA is one organization that works closely with local providers to help connect families with Medical providers who accept Medicaid clients.

Transition: Serving Newborns through Adulthood

The Community Circle of Care handles transition during all stages of a child and/or youth’s life. Transition services may start with a newborn baby as his or her parents are getting ready to transition from the hospital to home. The VNA is working to educate families, starting with their transition from the hospital to home, on the resources available in the community. One of its goals is to get consistent informational packets sent home to all families with newborns.

Transition services also extend to youth with emotional and behavioral challenges transitioning to adult life. The schools provide much of the support through a school transition coordinator. The Elevate program in Dubuque, funded by Community Circle of Care, the Dubuque Community Foundation, Dubuque Empowerment and the Clinton County CPPC, also guides youth through the process of moving out and finding a job.

The Community Circle of Care also utilizes the supports of its care coordinators and its youth coordinator to assist transitioning youth and their families. A number of youth resources are also provided on its website.

A Lighthouse that Serves ALL Families

The Community Circle of Care works closely with the community of Dubuque to ensure mental and physical health services for children and youth with serious behavioral and emotional challenges are available and families can find them easily. While that focus is required by the SAMHSA funding, they are also working with partners to expand their consumer base to the broader population of children with special health care needs.

According to family coordinator Gloria Klinefelter, “if we are going to be a lighthouse, then we need to serve *all* families by being able to refer those in need to appropriate resources.” Their efforts to coordinate services into “one point of contact” truly make them a beacon of hope for the community.

For more information about the Community Circle of Care:

Vickie Miene, Project Director
vickie-miene@uiowa.edu
888-583-5545, ext. 602

Gloria Klinefelter, Key Family Contact
gloria-klinefelter@uiowa.edu
888-583-5545, ext. 606