

Abstract

The ACCESS Initiative, in full partnership with local youth, families, and community members, will facilitate the development of a sustainable system of care in Champaign County, Illinois, that effectively addresses the multiple needs of youth with severe emotional disturbances at risk for, and involved in, the juvenile justice system, with particular attention to reducing the over-representation of African American youth in the juvenile and child welfare systems.

The Initiative's goals include: a) expanding the community and system capacity to address the needs of youth in effective, culturally competent, and sustainable ways; b) transforming the county's mental health and social service infrastructure to be seamless and follow the child; and c) becoming a replicable model and catalyst for SOC expansion and stigma-reduction, regionally and statewide.

The Initiative targets youth 10-17 with SED, multiple system involvement, and involvement in the juvenile justice system, with African American youth, who are over-represented in child-serving systems, being a priority population. The Initiative will serve 200 targeted youth with SED (and their families) annually, through individualized, comprehensive plans of care, guided by the strengths and needs of the youth and family to help achieve goals across all life domains and systems; referral to prevention services will be provided to another 100 at-risk youth annually.

Having begun in 2002 as a local effort to develop more coordinated mental health services, the visioning and preparation of the proposed Initiative has consistently involved youth, families, and community members representing the targeted population, as well as multiple child serving agencies, juvenile justice leaders, the education system, child welfare system, and the county's Mental Health Board. Family and youth will continue to be active partners in all aspects of the ACCESS Initiative, including governance, treatment decisions, service provision, administration and evaluation. The Initiative has been mentored by McHenry County Family CARE, a currently-funded Children's Mental Health Initiative site, and will in turn support SOC development in neighboring Vermilion County. University of Illinois researchers will conduct the evaluation and coordinate with national evaluation activities.

The implementation plan includes restructuring of the fiscal system, plans to increase the cultural competence of local providers and leaders, the creation of a care coordination process which involves Wraparound and Family Advocacy, social marketing strategies and provision of an accessible office/meeting space in a public health facility, expansion of evidence-based and practice based interventions, and a transformation of "funding to follow the child" rather than "funding to follow the program". These strategies will increase capacity, quality, and access for under-served youth to be effective, efficient, culturally responsive and sustainable.