



DIRECTOR'S NEWSLETTER: Youth Services



Seventy five percent of mental illnesses begin during early adolescence and adulthood. That is why it is crucial to address the social and emotional needs of individuals early on. BHRS provides care to 4500 youth through an expansive set of services that maintain youth ages 0-25 safety, stabilization and well-being. From prevention efforts to parent targeted interventions to crisis support, our programs and services offer well-informed, culturally responsive, trauma-informed support to those in need. I am excited to share some of our current efforts related to serving our youth and their families.

Youth Crisis Services: Upcoming Needs and Services Review

BHRS is committed to meeting the needs of youth in San Mateo County and is particularly concerned with the high prevalence of need for youth crisis services. **Research has shown that one in five youth aged 13-18 experience a mental disorder each year and that suicide is the second leading cause of death nationally for youth aged 10-24, underscoring the urgent need for crisis services to support their mental health and well-being.** For many youth and families in California, accessing crisis services may be the first introduction to mental health services.

Building upon previous work of BHRS to understand the needs for crisis services, most recently the needs for youth mobile crisis services, BHRS has contracted with Ohana Healthcare Partners, a consulting agency specializing in behavioral health, to support our efforts to further identify the gaps and needs in our crisis service continuum of care. This work will analyze both quantitative and qualitative data and will obtain more information and feedback as needed. The current service delivery system is also being reviewed.

A two-day Human Centered Design (HCD) process will also be facilitated by Ohana Healthcare on March 6-7. HCD is a solution-based approach that seeks multiple perspectives by engaging various stakeholders to understand service needs through the lens of those receiving services and to challenge assumptions and identify solutions that might not be instantly apparent. The HCD will build on prior focus groups and will include a cross-section of stakeholders to identify and problem-solve unmet youth crisis needs. Those invited to attend are encouraged to participate.

Ziomara Ochoa-Rodriguez has been the Deputy Director of Child/Youth Services for 4 years and has been with BHRS for 19 years. Questions or thoughts about this process can be directed to Ziomara at zochoa@smcgov.org.

Establishing Roots Through The Parent Project + New Semester Begins

As the Office of Diversity and Equity's (ODE) longest running program, The Parent Project has established its roots deep in the San Mateo community. The free, 12-week course designed for parents and caregivers helps them learn how to respond to children's behaviors in a way that decreases unhealthy or dangerous behaviors while strengthening family relationships in a culturally informed manner. With over 1000 graduates since 2010, the program has provided tools to build healthier families, established an entry point into BHRS services, and led to the creation of additional ODE community programs, such as the Health Ambassador Program.

Parent Project classes meet weekly and are offered in both English and Spanish and in virtual or in-person formats.

Recent data shows that Parent Project delivers useful tools for parents that result in positive behavior change in their children, translating to a reduction in disciplinary problems at school, Child Protective Services and/or police involvement and violence. Another impact of Parent Project is its affinity to generate full circle community engagement, bringing participants and staff from the community into our workforce.



Nicoletta Kelleher, pictured left with Supervisor Canepa and ODE Director Dr. Maria Lorente-Foresti, started with Parent Project as a youth care volunteer in 2014 and now utilizes that unique experience in her current role as Program Coordinator. Although courses are targeted to parents and caregivers, Nicoletta incorporates youth perspectives and struggles when considering how relationships with parents may be impacted.

Yolanda Ramirez, Senior Community Program Specialist, has also made her way to BHRS through Parent Project. She completed the course as a participant in 2012, became a Parent Project facilitator in 2013, a Health Ambassador in 2016, and is now in a leadership position at BHRS. In her role, Yolanda coordinates support and skill-building groups and educational classes for parents and caregivers. "I strongly believe in the power of peer connections and community education to enhance the journey towards recovery. By sharing my own lived experiences, I've witnessed individuals becoming more open to seeking therapy and substance use treatment", shares Yolanda.

The Health Ambassador Program was created in 2014 as a response to Parent Project graduates wanting to continue engaging. HAP graduates help improve the health and wellbeing of their community through teaching courses, identifying needs and leading change, reducing mental health and substance use stigma and more.

In partnership with course facilitators from StarVista, One East Palo Alto, CARON and Peninsula Conflict Resolution Center, Parent Project

has worked diligently over the past few years to adapt to a virtual landscape, offer more geographically accessible in-person courses, and rebuild community connections. Given their long-standing ability to model community engagement, facilitate meaningful connections, and deliver results, one can anticipate their roots will only continue to grow stronger.

To sign up for the current semester before March 13, email Joselyn at joselyn.bautista@starvista.org. To be added to an interest list, complete a [webform submission here](#).

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Recent Program Outcomes

During fiscal year 2022-23, Parent Project course facilitators conducted nine classes with an average 17 participants per class and 152 participants total.



Of those who reported their child had involvement with Child Protective Services (CPS) prior to the course reported no CPS involvement since the course began.



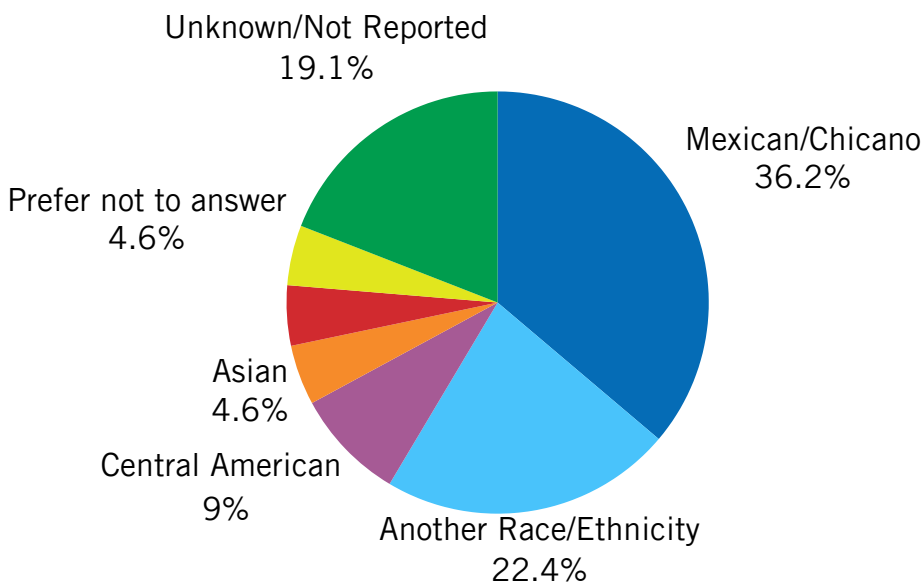
Of participant respondents reported feeling supported after taking the Parent Project course, compared to only 74% of participants prior to the course.



Of those who reported school suspensions prior to the course reported that their child had not been suspended since the course began.

Participant Demographics

Race/Ethnicity



Of parents or caregivers were ages 25 and younger



Reported Spanish as their primary language



Were born outside of the United States

Participant Feedback



“My favorite thing was seeing how many parents are serious about improving as parents and learning new goals.”

“The Parent Project gave me more confidence in the authorities and made me feel more secure.”

Contractor's Association Spotlight: Fred Finch Youth & Family Services

Fred Finch Youth & Family Services provides Therapeutic Behavioral Services (TBS) throughout San Mateo County. TBS is available to children/youth under 21 who have serious emotional and behavioral challenges. TBS is an adjunct service for youth enrolled with other mental health programs and is available to San Mateo County youth with full-scope Medi-Cal. TBS is a short-term, intensive, community-based program that offers individualized 1:1 behavioral support and interventions designed to prevent higher level placement (including psychiatric hospitalization) or to help a youth step down to a lower level of care. Services are provided for approximately 6 to 9 months, by 7+ master's level clinicians as well as coaches who have a bachelor's degree in a related field and who are often bi-lingual Spanish-

speaking. TBS collaborates with the referring primary program therapist while working closely with the youth's caregivers. Services are designed to maintain the child/youth's placement/living situation at the lowest appropriate level by reducing identified behaviors and achieving measurable treatment goals.

In fiscal year 2023, Fred Finch served 69 youth; 72% met or partially met their treatment goals. Among those who responded to a 30-day follow up post discharge, 94% remained stable at the same or lower level of care compared to admission.

Jennifer Jimenez Wong, LMFT, Program Director, began delivering TBS services through Fred Finch over 16 years ago. Any inquiries about TBS can be directed to her at jenniferjimenez@fredfinch.com. All referrals go through the ACCESS team.



Left to Right: Jennifer Jimenez Wong (Program Director), Lindsey Sorensen (TBS Coach), Andrea Chiang (Clinical Supervisor), Beatriz Avendano (Mental Health Therapist), Scarlett Rodriguez Martinez (TBS Coach), Jeri Tan (TBS Coach), Maria Vargas (TBS Coach), Lilach Margulis (TBS Coach), Clarisse Bautista (Program Specialist). Not pictured: Maricela Reyes (TBS Coach)

Looking Ahead to Spring

- Dr. Maria Lorente-Foresti, Office of Diversity and Equity Director, will be inducted into the 35th San Mateo County Women's Hall of Fame on Friday, March 8 in San Bruno. What a way to celebrate International Women's Day!
- Voices of Recovery and the Latino/a/x Collaborative are hosting a Cesar Chavez Celebration on March 29 from 4:30pm - 8:00pm at East Palo Alto Academy. More details coming soon!
- The 2024 May Mental Health Month Planning Committee has begun meeting. If interested in joining, please [register here](#).
- Save the date for the San Mateo County Pride celebration: Saturday, June 8 from 11am-5pm at San Mateo Central Park.