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\$9 MILLION GRANT WILL EXPAND CHILDREN'S SERVICES STATEWIDE

The Oklahoma Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services has received a \$9 million federal grant to expand its highly successful "Systems of Care" program for children with serious emotional disorders and their families.

Funded over a six-year period through the United States Department of Health and Human Services, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, the grant will allow the department to build upon a program that already has served more than 2,000 Oklahoma children.

"We started the Systems of Care program in 2000 with only a handful of counties," said Jackie Shipp, director of the ODMHSAS Office of Children, Youth and Families. "Since then, thanks to a similar federal grant, the program has grown to 41 counties."

New funding will allow the agency to expand the program to every county in Oklahoma, with a goal of serving 2,000 children annually by the end of the six-year grant period, she said.

SOC employs a "wraparound" approach to help children with serious emotional disorders. To achieve success, state agencies, local organizations, parents, teachers and others work as a team to address the child's – and the family's – needs.

"By soliciting input from the child and family, local agency partners can plan and put into place a tailored set of services to meet the child's physical, emotional, social, educational and family needs, Shipp said.

“Incorporating a variety of community support services allows us to achieve much more positive results for the child,” she said.

For children participating in Oklahoma’s SOC program for at least six months, a survey showed that the number of “out-of-home” services, such as placing a child in a hospital or residential treatment facility, had dropped by 45 percent. Additionally, the number of school detentions declined by 45 percent; self-harm attempts dropped by 68 percent; and arrests decreased by 49 percent.

Shipp said the program’s success is due, in large part, to strong support from Gov. Brad Henry, legislative and state agency support, and local SOC programs that contract with the agency.

“Our local SOC affiliates have far exceeded our expectations,” said Shipp. “Out of 28 groups in our national cohort, Oklahoma has served one-eighth of the total number of children. These programs also excelled in the national evaluation, so the praise goes back to the local communities.”

The legislature and Gov. Henry have been highly supportive of the program, as well.

“This particular grant is one that requires matching state funds,” Shipp noted. “When we received the initial grant in 2002, our legislators didn’t hesitate to step forward to provide matching funds.

“As a state, we have done more with this grant funding than any other state,” she added. “Oklahoma is one of the first to try to expand this grant statewide, and is seen as a model in sustaining this program.”

In addition to expanding the program statewide, continuation of the grant will allow for more focus on minority youth, youth living in rural counties, and those in the custody of the state Department of Human Services or Office of Juvenile Affairs.

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