



AGENCY TO DEVELOP SYSTEMS OF CARE FOR CHILDREN'S MENTAL HEALTH

Pandemic contributes to increased need

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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GRANITE CITY, IL – Unaddressed mental health issues in children have lifelong impacts. They shape social, emotional, physical, and mental health. They affect not only the individual, but also the family. In addition, they cost society in the form of unemployment or underemployment, health care, and criminal justice.

Children in one Southern Illinois County are especially at risk. In 2017, 24 percent of children in St. Clair County lived in poverty. Fourteen percent lived in extreme poverty.¹ 2014 saw 771 substantiated cases of child abuse and neglect – a 28 percent increase over the previous year.² The County ranks as follows for health outcomes among Illinois' 102 counties:

- 94th in health outcomes;
- 97th in quality of life; and
- 100th in health behaviors.³

Further, St. Clair County does not have enough primary care, dental care, or mental health providers.⁴

Implementing children's mental health systems of care can help communities respond to mental health issues brought on by and made worse by the COVID-19 pandemic. Chestnut Health Systems, a provider of behavioral health services, will use an \$850,000 grant to help address the issues described here. Funding comes from the Illinois Children's Healthcare Foundation, which recently announced \$4.25 million in total funding to improve children's mental health in the State.

Chestnut will use the funds to coordinate systems of care for children living in the circumstances described here. Specifically, Chestnut will do the following:

- Develop a trauma-informed system of care that ensures emotional and physical safety;
- Create a universal screening tool to uncover behavioral, emotional, and social challenges;
- Use evidence-based services and support to help children to develop social and emotional skills;
- Link youth with significant behavioral orders to evidence-based mental health treatment;
- Develop trauma-informed practices for youth-involved truancy matters and/or the juvenile justice system; and
- Assess capacity and support to ensure that schools, primary health care providers, juvenile detention facilities, and probation offices are screening consistently for social and emotional behaviors.

The St. Clair County *Systems of Care Coordination* project will serve children ages 5-18. Special emphasis will be placed on children with social and emotional learning difficulties related to adverse childhood experiences and exposure to trauma.

"Systems of care for children's mental health decrease stigma. They break down silos among systems that serve children by improving integration, identifying mental health concerns earlier, and connecting children and families to needed services," said Matt Mollenhauer, chief clinical officer for Chestnut Health Systems.

Chestnut Health Systems is a non-profit organization that has cared since 1973 for persons needing behavioral health services. Chestnut provides addiction treatment, mental health counseling, primary health care, credit counseling, and housing and supportive services. It is a leader in substance use-related research. More at www.chestnut.org.

Voices for Illinois Children *Kids Count* 2018 Report^{1,2}
Robert Wood Johnson 2019 County Rankings³
Health Resources Services Administration⁴

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