



## Section 5: Program Partners

### Getting Involved:

## Safe Schools/Healthy Students and National Children's Mental Health Awareness Day



### What is National Children's Mental Health Awareness Day?

The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration's (SAMHSA's) Center for Mental Health Services is launching an annual national initiative called "National Children's Mental Health Awareness Day." National Children's Mental Health Awareness Day is designated as a day in May of each year to coincide with "May Is Mental Health Month." This day presents an opportunity for local Safe Schools/Healthy Students (SS/HS) grantees around the country to promote their youth violence prevention and mental health services and programs to the communities they serve.

The theme of the inaugural celebration of National Children's Mental Health Awareness Day is "Thriving in the Community." SS/HS grantees throughout the country are encouraged to hold events and other activities to build awareness that children's mental health needs are real and that progress is being made to promote safe and healthy environments in which America's children can learn and develop.

### Why are SS/HS grantees participating in National Children's Mental Health Awareness Day?

National Children's Mental Health Awareness Day offers local SS/HS grantees an opportunity to inform people in the community about school- and community-based services that strengthen healthy child development and reduce youth violence. Since 1999, almost 200 local educational agencies have teamed with local mental health, law enforcement, and juvenile justice partners to implement school- and community-based mental health prevention and treatment services. National Children's Mental Health Awareness Day gives SS/HS grantees the opportunity to show their local communities that children's mental health needs are real and treatable.

Children and families in communities across the country have seen improvements in their lives as a result of the SS/HS mental health initiative. For example:

- In Millville, NJ, the SS/HS Regional Collaborative addressed healthy youth development by expanding mental health services available to students and families through collaboration between schools and community mental health service providers. As a result of the collaborative's work, 93 percent of the students referred to mental health services during the 2003–2004 school year used those services, a 22-percent increase from the previous school year. In just 3 months during 2004, more than 1,200 individual, family, and group therapy sessions were conducted through the SS/HS collaborative.
- Thanks to the SS/HS collaborative in Redding, CA, more than 80 percent of students in need of mental health services now have access to them. Partnering with New Directions to Hope, a local mental health care agency, and National University, the Redding schools have made



## Section 5: Program Partners

mental health care services available to families by placing mental health care workers at several schools. They also established a Wellness Center as a central location that provides additional therapy and mental health services to students and their families.

- In Lee County, FL, a 17-year-old at the Academy High School alternative program plunged into a serious crisis when her mother died after a long illness. The teen had been sexually and physically abused by her father as a toddler, and her mother had become her only parent. Feelings of loss and abandonment were overwhelming and she experimented with drugs and alcohol to ease the pain. Fortunately, her school had a mental health counselor as part of Lee County's SS/HS BRIDGES (Building Resilient Individual Development through Guidance, Education, and Support) collaborative. The counselor helped the struggling adolescent through one-on-one counseling and group grief counseling sessions. The 17-year-old reclaimed her adolescence, learned to have fun again, and became more productive in school. She has since graduated from high school, an important step along her road to a healthy and successful life.

### **How can SS/HS grantees get involved?**

SS/HS grantees can become involved in National Children's Mental Health Awareness Day in several ways, including:

- involving parents, youth, and community members in planning the day's activities;
- setting up information booths on children's mental health at local events;
- organizing collaborative activities with local mental health service organizations such as workshops and seminars. These could be on varied topics related to children's mental health such as, effective parenting and care giving, helping the depressed child, developing a child's social and emotional competence, and schools and families working together for children's success;
- reaching out to local media to publicize your SS/HS initiative and your grant activities that support safe schools and healthy students; and
- developing activities or materials for children and parents to do together.

### **Where can I get more information about National Children's Mental Health Awareness Day?**

Information and materials on National Children's Mental Health Awareness Day are available online at [www.systemsofcare.samhsa.gov](http://www.systemsofcare.samhsa.gov). You also can call the SS/HS Communications Team at 1-800-790-2647 or visit [www.sshs.samhsa.gov/communications](http://www.sshs.samhsa.gov/communications).