



## **Annual Report 2022-2023**

FamilyWorx Family Peer Support and Advocacy Program  
Montgomery County



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## **PROGRAM DESCRIPTION:**

FamilyWorx Family Peer Support and Advocacy Program at HopeWorx offers Family Peer Support to Montgomery County families whose children and adolescents have behavioral health concerns, providing them with peer support, advocacy, and education and helping them navigate the public child serving systems, including behavioral health, juvenile justice, child welfare, and education—as well as connecting with each other and community resources. All staff members, including Family Peer Support Partners (FPSPs), the Program Supervisor, and the Program Director, meet the nationally recognized definition of a family peer, and are currently raising or have raised a child or youth with emotional, behavioral, or mental health challenges. Nationally, family peer support is identified as a key service that enables children with complex needs to remain in their home and community by helping parents to become their own best advocates and find hope and inspiration from others who have been in their shoes.

## **2022-2023 PROGRAM SUMMARY:**

The FamilyWorx Program has completed its second contract year with HopeWorx. The team has undergone extensive personnel, professional, and community growth during this time. The priorities of this contract year included developing and training staff, building community partnerships, expanding our support group, and reviewing policies, procedures, and record keeping systems for the team. The team worked collaboratively to examine successes and challenges from our first year and began to develop a strategic plan for enhancing data collection, overall team wellness, continued community collaboration, and ongoing training and orientation programs.

In addition, FamilyWorx prioritized employee wellness practices in order to help mitigate increased workplace stressors, reduce staff turnover, and address burnout. Team members faced increased workloads as well as higher intensity needs from the families they served. When coupled with waitlists and lack of referral sources for these families, employees reported feelings of frustration and helplessness in providing meaningful support. Some strategies employed to improve employee morale and increase a sense of purpose included built in self-care time, intentional team building activities, additional training, and coaching.

During the 2022-23 fiscal year, the FamilyWorx team had direct contact with families 14,489 times. This represents a 70% increase over last year. Team members facilitated 22 virtual support groups. There were 187 outreach meetings to providers and community partners, as well as attendance at 148 community meeting/events. The team attended 307 training sessions, 81 work group meetings, and 393 separate individual or group supervision sessions.

## **STAFFING:**

### **Staff Updates**

This year, the FamilyWorx contract was increased to allow for a sixth full-time Family Peer Support position. The contract amendment was approved and fully executed in November of 2022 and FamilyWorx began actively recruiting for the position in January 2023. Monique Mitchell was hired to fill the position in February 2023. In keeping with well documented staffing challenges in the health and human services field, FamilyWorx experienced considerable turnover during the second half of the fiscal year, with three family peers terminating their employment between January and May of 2023. Two of the vacant positions

were filled (by Jeree Davis and Vanessa Plumley) by April, and one position remained open as of the end of Q4. FamilyWorx is committed to being especially intentional with its ongoing hiring process in order to ensure that qualified applicants fully understand and can perform all expected job duties and are prepared to support families and each other in a manner that aligns with county and organization standards. As a result of staffing shortages, coupled with increased demand for peer services, all remaining FPSPs have been working beyond capacity, supporting the families of between 35 and 50 youth each. Although the program has been able to avoid waitlists, some families experienced a slight delay in receiving more intensive direct support services from their FPSP this year. The Program Supervisor and Program Director continue to temporarily support other families as well, especially while they are waiting for extended support from their assigned FPSP.

## **Supervision**

Appropriate and adequate supervision is a critical factor to the success of peer roles. We regard supervision as an investment in the FPSP and favor consistent opportunities for mutual reflection focusing on the principles and practice of family peer support. Supervision during this contract year focused heavily on training, education, reviewing job expectations, and reciprocal learning through shared experiences. It is our goal to use supervision time as an opportunity to build team relationships, decrease job burnout, and work collaboratively to support each other and the families we serve.

Lisa Radcliffe, Program Supervisor, also provided regular supervision reviewing data and record keeping, as well as discussing opportunities for advancement and job diversification. Individual supervision with each FPSP took place for a minimum of one hour weekly. Group supervision also occurred weekly, for an average of 1.5 hours. Additionally, all programs at HopeWorx meet weekly for an all-teams meeting to discuss program updates, participate in team building activities, and attend group trainings and supervision.

In addition to formal supervision, FamilyWorx added a coaching and professional development component to each FPSP's schedule this year. Lori Warren, Senior FPSP, has completed significant training in Motivational Interviewing and The Coach Approach to Adaptive Leadership and facilitated coaching sessions for several team members for approximately two hours each per month. The purpose of coaching is to support team members in achieving a specific personal or professional goal by providing training and guidance. Another aim is to build employee morale by investing in both their personal and professional well-being, career goals, and true motivations so that they can reach their full potential.

## **FUNDING DIVERSIFICATION:**

In April 2023, the VNA Foundation of Greater North Penn awarded FamilyWorx a program grant of \$5,000. Through a flexible and partner-centered approach, the VNA grants aim to support the work of nonprofit organizations dedicated to improving health access and outcomes in the North Penn region. The grant funding will be used to create informational brochures and videos, from the family perspective, explaining various behavioral health services and supports. FamilyWorx will work in collaboration with FST, county partners, and Magellan to develop the marketing materials.

In addition, in December 2022, FamilyWorx received a \$5000 non-restricted donation from a community member. Those funds were used to provide transportation, lodging, and registration fees so that team members could attend a number of training programs and conferences related to children's services and peer support throughout the year.

## **PROGRAM EXPANSION:**

### **Youth Support Partner**

Per the RFP agreement, both FamilyWorx and FST were tasked with hiring a consultant who could help to determine how youth peer support could be utilized successfully within the family programs at HopeWorx. In March 2023, HopeWorx contracted with Marissa MacKeverican. Marissa has utilized her knowledge and lived experience to continue to break the stigma around behavioral health. She has experience as a Certified Peer Support Specialist, has worked on Hi-Fi teams, was the Youth Support Coordinator for Magellan Behavioral Health of Pennsylvania, and currently serves as the Community Support Program (CSP) Coordinator with NAMI Bucks County PA. Marissa met with key members of FST and FamilyWorx to develop a scope of work and interview questions. In June 2023, Marissa conducted five semi-structured interviews with individuals who had worked in various youth peer support roles in order to gather feedback on their perspectives about what they would need to maintain continued success in their roles. Interviews were transcribed by FST and will be reviewed in Q1 of the new fiscal year. Outreach with providers and youth may be conducted to gather additional information. A finalized job description for the youth consultant and the next steps for creating the position will be discussed in the next few months.

## **FAMILY SUPPORT:**

### **Direct Family Support Activity – Extended and Brief Support**

Throughout this contract year, families were supported both virtually and in person. There was a significant increase in the number of meetings that Family Peers attended in person as the contract year progressed. Travel throughout Montgomery County is an expected responsibility of the job, since we offer families support in whatever way meets their needs. Families have expressed that they appreciate the flexibility which FamilyWorx can provide, so the team plans to continue delivering support both virtually and in person, as the family prefers, going forward.

Throughout the year, FamilyWorx provided extended support services to families of 391 youth, which represents a 37% increase over last year. The average census of families served each month was 213. Brief support, in the form of outreach, initial referrals, and supports groups, was provided to families of an additional 103 youth, which brought the total number of families served during the 2022-23 fiscal year to 494. Families in 21 school districts and 49 municipalities across Montgomery County received Family Peer Support throughout the year.

Extended support includes one on one communication with families, documentation review, preparation for and attendance at system meetings (such as IEP meetings, Interagency Team Meetings, Juvenile Justice hearings, Truancy Hearings, Victim's Services Hearings, and Behavioral Health meetings), and other support as requested from families. In total, there were 4044 Extended Support contacts with families during the contract year, an increase of 31% over last year. This represents an average of 337 extended contacts with families per month.

As a supplement to extended support, FPSPs also provide brief support in the form of family check-ins, resource sharing, training or webinar opportunities, and warm hand-offs. During this contract year, FPSPs provided brief support to families 10,445 times for an average of 870 brief contacts per month. This represents a 91% increase over last year.

## **Primary Reason for Referral**

FamilyWorx tracked each family's primary reason for seeking Family Peer Support. This information was captured during the initial intake, where each family self-identified areas of concern. Quite often, once the primary reason a family sought out FPSP services was resolved, other areas where there were opportunities to collaborate with our FPSPs were uncovered. The primary areas where families identified needing support were in education, behavioral health, resources, and connection to a support group. Sixty-six percent of families served identified needing support with multiple child-serving systems, and 39% of families requested support for multiple children within the family as well. Approximately 28% of families served were classified as having very high or moderately high-intensity needs, requiring three to four or more hours of direct support for each child each month.

## **Support Group**

FamilyWorx continued to provide a virtual support group throughout the year. Meetings are scheduled the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Thursdays of the month, from 7-8pm. The meeting is co-facilitated by 2 FPSPs and follows a trauma informed, mutual aid format, allowing the meeting to flow organically with what concerns parents and caregivers bring with them. Participants are given the option to be on or off camera and there is no pressure to participate. We start the meeting with an ice breaker and a review of safety agreements, so everyone feels comfortable in the space. We then open the discussion to anyone who has something they want support with. Email follow ups are done for parents/caregivers requesting additional support and/or resources. Some parents have requested FamilyWorx Family Peer Support Services after attending a meeting. Registration steadily increased over the year with 157 families currently on the active registration list, which is a 60% increase over last year. Participation varies, with an average of 10 participants per group.

FamilyWorx partnered with FST to develop a survey for support group participants to assess their perceived successes and challenges with the group. As a result of the responses received, the team has added a speaker series to the support group offering. Our first speaker presented in May 2023 on long-term planning for children with behavioral health needs. A second presentation is scheduled for the fall and will focus on understanding PA Act 65 of 2020, the Children's Mental Health Consent Law. Upcoming presentations on self-care and crisis management are also being developed.

## **REFERRAL UPDATES:**

### **Referral Sources**

Targeted outreach to community providers and school districts to strengthen awareness about the FamilyWorx Program led to multiple new provider connections in the community throughout the year. Thirty-nine different providers referred families to the program, 15 of which had never referred families to Family Peer Support in the past. New referral sources last year included Abington Police Department, Abington School District, CCTC, Cheltenham School District, Colonial School District, Family Services, Montgomery County Intermediate Unit, Nexus School, PA Parent and Family Alliance, St. Luke's/Penn Foundation, Philadelphia Family Voices, Pre-K Counts, Upper Moreland School District, Upper Perkiomen School District, and YMCA Willow Grove. All new referral sources were a direct result of targeted outreach or direct connections made through Montgomery County Office of Mental Health/Developmental Disabilities/Early Intervention (hereinafter referred to as Montgomery County Office of Children's Behavioral Health).

In addition to professional referrals, 23 referrals came from family members and friends of families who are currently being served by the program.

### **Warm Line Outreach**

FamilyWorx provided extensive warm line support during the 2022-23 contract year. Warm line support consisted of contacts with referral sources and resource sharing with community partners. Many resources, including opportunities for families to participate in community events and trainings, support group and program flyers, inquiries regarding outreach and community events, and information sharing were sent to community partners throughout the year. During the 2022-2023 contract year, FamilyWorx contacted community partners 13,730 times throughout the year, primarily via email. This represented an average of 1144 contacts with referral sources, community partners, and providers per month.

## **OTHER PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS:**

### **HopeWorx For the Holidays**

Last holiday season, FamilyWorx and FST recognized the added emotional and economic challenges families were facing and wanted to do more. So, in October of 2022, the first annual HopeWorx for the Holidays Drive was launched. FST created a survey, which offered families who were being served by the FamilyWorx team an opportunity to identify any food, clothing, or gift needs their families had for the holidays. The needs survey was sent out in late October and the response was overwhelming. Families of 87 Montgomery County children and teens applied for support with various needs, many of whom expressed multiple areas where they could use assistance.

Fulfilling the needs of so many families in such a short period of time required herculean efforts on the part of the Holiday Drive Team. Countless hours were spent compiling and updating needs lists, soliciting donations, and outreaching to community partners who might be able to adopt some of the families. Employees gave up office and home space to house donations. Others helped to partner with local business owners and churches to procure goods. Volunteers shopped for items on wish lists, wrapped gifts, and organized donations. Holiday Elf Teams took on the task of delivering items to homes throughout Montgomery County. Others volunteered to write thank you cards to everyone who supported the drive.

Due to the overwhelming success of the drive, the program was expanded to include a back-to-school drive for the fall of 2023, as well as another holiday drive which is planned to begin in October 2023.

### **Mobile Crisis Pilot**

The Mobile Crisis/Family Peer Support pilot, funded through a grant from the VNA Foundation, launched on March 1, 2022, and provided access to 24/7 real time family peer support to families who were utilizing the services of the Mobile Crisis team. The pilot concluded on August 31, 2022. A key component of this pilot was ensuring that FPSP services not be considered as a replacement for crisis support, but rather a supplemental offering to give parents and caregivers an opportunity to connect to someone who had been in their shoes. To ensure consistency with this message, multiple training and outreach meetings occurred. Although there were several challenges implementing the program (which included phone app glitches, staffing shortages at Mobile Crisis, and some confusion about appropriate referrals), the pilot allowed FPSPs to directly connect with 26 parent/caregivers of youth. Twenty three of the 26 parents initially supported subsequently opened with FamilyWorx for continued services beyond the initial connection. At the completion of the pilot, FamilyWorx partnered with FST, who created and distributed a satisfaction survey to all eligible families. Ten families completed the survey. Overall

feedback was extremely positive. Families highlighted how helpful it was being connected to another parent and particularly, how helpful it was being connected to resources and support. A summary infographic was created and shared with FamilyWorx, FST, and Mobile Crisis. The summary infographic is available upon request.

### **Certification Efforts**

Although Family Peer is not currently a certifiable service in PA, the Community Mental Health Services Block Grant Plan has prioritized moving Family Peer Support forward to a certifiable service in the state of Pennsylvania. In December 2021, OMHSAS created a steering committee to review current family peer programs across the state and develop a certification and training curriculum process for family peers. Clare Higgins continued to meet with the steering committee twice per month throughout the year, with the goal of adding Family Peer Support to the state plan and creating a statewide certification. The steering committee is scheduled to convene over the next two years.

### **Awards and Recognition**

Clare Higgins, Program Director for the Family Satisfaction and Advocacy teams at HopeWorx, received two separate honors in Q4 which recognized her for her work with families, youth, and young adults.

The 2023 Maryella Hitt Advocacy Award from the National Alliance of Mental Illness was presented in recognition of Clare's outstanding advocacy efforts on behalf of those who struggle with mental illness. Clare was recognized during the annual NAMI Montgomery County Membership dinner, where she was supported by several members of her team.

Clare was also awarded the National Family Champion Award through SAMHSA and the NTTAC, which recognized one professional across the country who was using their lived experience to improve the mental health system through advocacy and support of other families. This award was presented during the 2023 Better Together National System of Care Conference. This was the first year that this award was bestowed, and Clare was honored and humbled to be recognized nationally for the work she and her teams are able to do in Montgomery County

### **Family Teams Mental Health Fund**

While discussing strategic planning for the family teams at HopeWorx, team members identified financial barriers to accessing certain supports and activities that they felt could improve their well-being, enhance job performance, and decrease burnout. In response to suggestions from the team, a mental health fund for team members was established in November of 2022. The purpose of the mental health fund was to provide partial reimbursement for self-care activities or therapeutic co-pays not otherwise covered through HopeWorx. Team members worked together, outside of regular work hours (on their own time), to create and sell various craft items and custom jewelry pieces at vending fairs and online. 100% of the profits from the sale of items are donated to the fund so that reimbursement for self-care activities could be requested by team members throughout the year.

### **Work Groups, Training, Community Meetings and Committees**

Team members attended 229 different work groups, community meetings, and committees throughout the year. The team attended 307 trainings which focused on trauma informed care, diversity and inclusion, LGBTQIA+ support, cultural competency, self-care, and enhancing the ability to serve families with a person-centered approach. Family Peers can play a critically important and unique role in representing and supporting family and youth voice in the community. Doing this well requires ongoing learning. We support continuing education, training, and certification opportunities which will enhance the FPSPs'

ability to serve families and provide meaningful contributions in the community. For highlights of meetings and trainings attended during the contract year, please refer to the infographic below.

All current FPSPs completed the five-day Family Peer Support Specialist Training offered through the Youth and Family Training Institute, as well as trauma training courses offered through Lakeside Global Institute. All team members are up to date on required clearances, HIPAA compliance and Mandated Reporter Training.

### **County Collaboration**

FamilyWorx is grateful for the continued collaboration with Montgomery County Office of Children's Behavioral Health. In addition to update meetings which continued throughout the year, FamilyWorx continues to consult with the county offices regularly for input and support on children and youth with multiple complex needs. FamilyWorx was able to work collaboratively with MCOBH at numerous Interagency Team Meetings, school meetings, and in conjunction with IBHS and Family Based teams. The County Office also continues to consult with FamilyWorx and FST on ongoing projects and opportunities.

### **Digital Outreach**

Keeping up with the use of technology, FamilyWorx uses email to engage with county families and community allies. We provide regular email communication to those on our email lists. At the end of Q3, there were 183 family contacts and 303 professional contacts on FamilyWorx list served. To be added to our email list, please email [lradcliffe@hopeworxinc.org](mailto:lradcliffe@hopeworxinc.org)

FamilyWorx also launched a Facebook page (<https://www.facebook.com/FamilyWorxMontco>) in 2022. The page is used to post motivational messages, provide information on community and company events, and create a forum for families to share resources and insights. There are currently 118 followers on the site, with the hopes of increasing that number in the upcoming year.

In addition to maintaining the Facebook page, FamilyWorx increased its digital presence throughout the year by connecting to community Facebook groups, special education alliances, family groups, and community message boards to share our program and support group flyers. A number of those organizations have shared our resources on their websites.

HopeWorx website has been updated with FamilyWorx team bios, detailed program descriptions, and program flyers. Please feel free to view additional information at [About : FamilyWorx : What We Do : HopeWorx, Inc. \(hopeworxinc.org\)](#)



## 2022/2023 Contract Year Attendance Highlights



### County Meetings

- Advocacy Coalition Meetings
- Children's Mental Health Zoo Day
- Children's Roundtable
- County/FamilyWorx Bi-Monthly Meetings
- CPS Supervisors' Meeting
- Suicide Prevention Taskforce
- Truancy Taskforce



### Workgroups

- Abington, Lansdale, Lower Merion and Norristown HUBS
- Call for Change Steering Committee
- CSAG Crisis Workgroup
- FPSS Steering Committee
- GLS Family Engagement Workgroup
- Juvenile Court Judges Commission Family Involvement Committee
- Mental Health Planning Council
- Transition Coordinating Council
- TAYYA Workgroup



### HopeWorx Meetings

- Bi-Monthly Family Teams Admin meetings
- BiWeekly Support Group Debrief
- Inter-Team Collaboration meetings
- Monthly Department Head meetings
- Monthly Fundraising Committee meetings
- Monthly Trauma Team meetings
- Weekly Family Teams Group Supervision
- Weekly Individual Supervision
- Weekly Staff meetings



## Trainings Attended

### Trauma-Informed Care

- An Overview of Trauma-Informed Care
- Applying Trauma Principles
- Basic Skills of Trauma-Informed Care
- Deepening Trauma Awareness
- Healing Trauma
- Recognizing and Understanding Complex PTSD
- Recognizing Vicarious & Secondary Trauma for Caregivers
- The Effects of Trauma on Youth & Families
- Trauma and Public Health
- Trauma in a Pandemic
- Trauma-Informed Cultural Sensitivity

### Family/Youth Voice and Involvement

- Engaging Families as Partners
- Guardianship, A Last Resort
- Helping Kids & Teens Manage Their Stress
- Listening to Young People to Transform Mental Health
- Meetings that Matter (Presenter)
- Navigating Autism through Childhood Years
- Pandemic Anxiety & Family Stress
- Recognizing & Addressing Mental Health Disorders in Teens
- Redefining Self-Care in Kids & Teens
- The Role of Families in SAMHSA's Office of Recovery
- Who Cares for the Caregiver

### Mental Health System

- Autism Courts training
- Back to Basics: Understanding Mental Health Literacy
- Disordered Eating
- Help, Not Handcuffs
- Hoarding: An In-Depth Review of Interventions
- Medicaid-Funded Supports
- Motivational Interviewing
- Navigating Depression
- Psychiatric Advance Directives for Youth & Young Adults
- Supporting Neuro-divergent Grieving People
- The Power of Dialectical Behavior Therapy
- Transitioning to Adult Systems

### Cultural Competency

- Autism-Friendly Inclusion
- Building Culturally & Linguistically Specific Recovery Community Organizations for Latinos
- Dismantling Racism in the Peer Workforce
- Ethics & Boundaries
- How Culture & Race Can Impact Identifying and Treating Mental Health Conditions
- Racism & Mental Health
- State of Black & Brown Mental Health

### Crisis Intervention

- Keystone Crisis Intervention Team
- Meeting the Mental Health Needs of Youth Before Crisis
- Mental Health First Aid
- QPR
- Reducing the Risk of Youth Suicide: A Discussion on Education, Prevention & Early Intervention

### Peer Support

- Advancing Parent Peer Support Practice, Program & Policy
- Empowering the Peer Workforce by Taking Charge Together
- FPSS 5-Day training
- Hearing our Voices: Peer Support & Mental Illness
- Power, Conflict & Integrity for Peer Specialists
- The Role of Peer Support in Ending Social Exclusion & Loneliness

### LGBTQIA+

- Collecting LGBTQIA+ Data
- Conversations on Diversity, Equity & Inclusion
- Cultural Humility, Intentionality & Vulnerability
- Gender Identity
- Understanding the Role of Resilience in Gender and Sexual Minority Communities

### Employee/Organizational Wellness

- Connecting Your Mind, Body & Surroundings: Nature as a Form of Healing
- How to Live & Work with Differing Perspectives
- Spiritual Tools & Resources for Practitioners
- Supporting Mental Health When Working from Home
- The Role of Nutrition in Mental Health
- Wellness in the Workplace

### Education

- Back to School: Opportunities for SEL Learning
- Explanation of Procedural Safeguards
- Integrated Care Partnerships in School Settings
- Listen to Students with Psychosis
- School Attendance & Truancy: What the Law Says
- School Discipline
- Supporting Young Adults with Serious Mental Health Conditions in Post-Secondary Education
- Transition from an IFSP to an IEP, the Nuts & Bolts
- Youth Peer Support Implementation Ideas for Schools & Systems of Care

### Other

- Fentanyl: Every Parent Needs to Know
- Grief, Loss & Loneliness
- Grieving During the Holidays
- HIPAA
- How Music Impacts Our Mental Health
- Is There Justice in Our Juvenile Justice System?
- Mandated Reporter
- Navigating the Juvenile Justice System with Mental Health
- Saving Our Children: Current Considerations for Preventing Suicide in Children & Adolescents
- What is Validation & Why is it Important?

### Leadership

- Coach Approach - Psychological Safety in Teams
- Immigrant & Employee Rights
- What is Peer Support & How Do I Supervise a Peer Support Specialist?
- Where Lived Experience and Work Experience Make a Difference