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IN THE LOOP

The official newsletter of the Family Satisfaction Team (FST) at HopeWorx Inc.



Welcome!



Welcome to the first issue of our newsletter. We are the Family Satisfaction Team (FST). We hope you enjoy our first issue of *In the Loop*. If you would like to be featured in our next issue, please email us at familysatisfactionteam@hopeworxinc.org and we would love to feature you.



FAMILY SATISFACTION TEAM

A HopeWorx Inc. team

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WHO WE ARE

What is a Family Satisfaction Team?

The Family Satisfaction Team (FST) is a state-mandated survey team that is responsible for gathering feedback from families regarding their experiences using behavioral health services that are provided by the county through PA HealthChoices in Montgomery County. We want to make sure your voice is heard by the county and providers so that services reflect families' needs in the county. Montgomery County's FST is housed within HopeWorx Inc. HopeWorx Inc. also houses the adult survey team, Community Satisfaction Team (CST).



Welcome letter by Sue Shannon, Director of HopeWorx Inc.

Welcome!

It has been a hectic few months here at HopeWorx as we have welcomed the Family Satisfaction Team and the FamilyWorx team into the HopeWorx peer support family. The opportunity to bring more people with lived experience into our workforce has been so energizing – the diverse experiences that each person brings strengthens our entire team. HopeWorx was already the home of the Community Satisfaction Team, which surveys adults in the mental health system, and AdvocacyWorx, which provides one on one peer support and advocacy for adults, and now, those teams can collaborate with the Family teams, sharing resources and knowledge. This has, in just three months, already been a productive partnership.

This newsletter is designed to give you a glimpse into the work of FST, to see what changes can come from the feedback that people generously give our team. If you would like more information, check out our website at www.hopeworxinc.org. I'd like to personally welcome you to the HopeWorx community, and invite you to contact us at any time to give us feedback on the mental health system or to ask for advice or support. Someone at HopeWorx is waiting to walk beside you.

-Sue Shannon



HopeWorx Website



FAQ: FamilyWorx

family peer advocacy team at HopeWorx Inc.

FST Research Assistant, Morgan Fowlie sat down with Program Director, Clare Higgins to answer some important questions about FamilyWorx...

What is FamilyWorx?

- A Nonprofit 501c3 group that serves families through family peer support in Montgomery County.
- Focuses on meeting families where they're at and supporting them in a nonjudgmental way, using their own lived experience when appropriate.
- Not clinical or legal service.



Who can receive support services from FamilyWorx?

- Any family in Montgomery County whose child has a behavioral health concern.
- Families of children from birth until school age, typically until age 21 (but TAY are not turned away).
- A diagnosis or doctor's note is not needed to receive support.

Who do you support more specifically?

- Families, parents, and primary caregivers.
- A peripheral support relationship exists with the children, but they are not directly supported.
- FamilyWorx's goal is to support the families, in order for them to become their own best advocates.

What is family peer support?

- Peer support means using lived experience in order to support another person who is in a similar situation.
- Family peer support specifically revolves around parents/caregivers who have children, have navigated through child serving systems, and have come out of that experience with stories of hope that they can provide other families.

"A lot of times we get families that are brand new to the behavioral health system. We get families whose kids are getting expelled from daycare, but they don't understand why or the family might not even identify that it's a behavioral health issue. We get families who are just at the very beginning of their child's journey, who don't have any formal services, but still need support.

Many families already know exactly what they need and they're doing a great job. They just need somebody to listen and feel heard. Sometimes all it takes is them knowing that you've been through it too, for them to just really relax and feel like they can do this on their own."

Does FamilyWorx require families to have Medical Assistance (MA)? Is there a cost to those using FamilyWorx support services?

- No, unlike many other services in the county, FamilyWorx does not require families to have Medical Assistance.
- Services are free; there is no cost to families.

Can families use services within the county AND FamilyWorx at the same time?

- Yes, because FamilyWorx is not a MA, billable service, there are no limitations on what other services the families can be receiving.
- FamilyWorx often helps get families connected to additional services (clinical services, legal services, etc.) and FamilyWorx works collaboratively with those other teams.

Is there a limit to how much support one can receive?

- There is no limit, either way; it could be a five-minute phone call, or some families have been supported off and on for multiple years.
- Supports are driven by the family's needs and desires.

"We know that sometimes in the behavioral health field, services are prescribed for you as a parent or as a family. That is not our intent at all. This is a collaborative effort, and we want you to be part of it."

"Quite often what brings the family to us in the first place is not what we end up supporting them with in the long run. It really becomes a conversation with the family about what they would like help with and how we can help. However long that takes, and whatever that looks like, is fine with us."

What does the process of receiving support services look like for families?

- Services are totally voluntary and referrals can come from anyone (i.e. school districts, behavioral health providers, the family themselves)
- No formal referral process or forms; referral really just means a conversation.

What is the Family Support Group?

- Conducted virtually, twice a month in the evenings (starting November 2021).
- Attended by all FamilyWorx family peer support partners.
- Is a 'mutual aid support group', meaning the focus directed by the members of the group. This is no prescribed question for each session.
- Opportunity to connect with other parents/caregivers, have a safe space to talk without judgment, and feel supported.



A Deeper Look into Family Peer Support

After answering some FAQs, we hoped to take a more personal look into the work done by family peer support partners at FamilyWorx. We were able to continue our conversation with Clare Higgins—Family Advocacy & Satisfaction Programs Program Director, Family Peer Support Partner, and mother of eight—who spoke candidly about her own personal struggles navigating having children with behavioral health needs.

When delving into her own lived experience Clare expressed:

"I honestly had an image of myself standing in the middle of an empty cornfield with an umbrella over my head, it pouring down rain, and having all my kids underneath me. That's how I felt. So once I managed to finally get through that, I said, 'I want to be able to help other people navigate through this'...I just wanted people to know that they weren't alone in this. Once I got into peer work and started really doing the work with families, I also realized that I needed to be more involved in the advocacy piece of it too; to be making change at the state level and making a difference in the lives of families. It's great if you can help one family through direct support, but if you're able to help more families through systems change, that's even better."

Clare went on to recount the biggest struggle on her journey, saying:

"I think the part for me that was really tricky was feeling not heard; feeling judged and not heard. When something is happening with your child, and it's overwhelming and frightening, and you don't feel heard, for myself, what I did was, I spoke louder and I spoke louder and louder and louder and louder. And the louder I got, the less I was heard. I think because as a result, I would get combative and aggressive and frustrated and then people would say, 'Yes, see! It's because you're a bad mom.' That part was really frustrating for me and I had to learn how to work more collaboratively with people in order to be better heard. I also had to figure out a way, going forward, that families could be better heard even when they were frustrated..."



“

I think my frustration was taken as ‘bad parenting’ or ‘not listening’ or ‘not following advice’ when really it was more, I was afraid and I needed help, but I wasn't getting the help I needed.

”

We wrapped up the interview by giving Clare the opportunity to share any parting words of advice to those out there looking for help:

"I think it can be really scary to keep asking for help and not getting the help that you need. It can be really frustrating. I can speak from my own experience that—I had gotten to the point where I was saying, 'Why even bother? because it's not going to be helpful.' But I believe that our team is different, and I think we truly want to hear you and we truly want to help build a plan around your needs, your values, and your thoughts. We will listen to that and honor that and appreciate that...it may sound very different than some of the other services that you might be receiving, but that's by design. That's because we've lived it and we know how helpful it can be to have someone who can listen and help. My advice is, don't be afraid to try different services out there, and also don't be afraid to say you don't want a service. It should be built around what you need and what would be helpful to you."



The Higgins Family

FamilyWorx

Family Peer Support and Advocacy Program

Family members sharing information, support, and advocacy services with Montgomery County Families whose children or youth are facing behavioral health concerns

All services at FamilyWorx are provided free of charge

WHAT WE DO:

- **Support families when navigating the child serving systems- including education, juvenile justice, behavioral health, and more**
- **Assist parents and caregivers in understanding their child's rights and responsibilities**
- **Help families prepare for and attend school and community meetings**
- **Provide information, referrals, training, and support to families and community partners**
- **Share our own stories of hope and strength as parents who have been in your shoes**



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Self-Care is a Necessity, Not a Luxury

Madeline Grund, FST Research Assistant



according to the University of Pennsylvania's Positive Psychology Center, Positive Psychology is "the scientific study of strengths that enable individuals and communities to thrive. The field is founded on the belief that people want to lead meaningful and fulfilling lives, to cultivate what is best within themselves, and to enhance their experiences of love, work, and play" (2021)

Positive psychology highlights and emphasizes the importance of happiness on mental, physical, and emotional health. According to researchers' happiness is determined by three main factors: genetics, circumstance, and intentional activity. Intentional activity focuses on one's individual behavioral choices and their subsequent impact on one's health and happiness. As positive psychology gains ground beyond the academic sphere, positive psychology practices, such as mindfulness meditation and gratitude journaling, have become a normal part of many people's daily routines. These practices are more commonly known as self-care.

When you hear self-care what do you think of? Maybe images of bubble baths, face masks, yoga, and meditation come to mind. Over the past couple of years, self-care has become a trending topic, an internet sensation, and ultimately synonymous with candles, facials, journaling, and meditative apps. Self-care has been framed as a luxury, a depersonalized commodity rather than a necessity. But self-care isn't something to buy into, it's about making sure one's needs are met as much as possible.

The World Health Organization defines self-care as "the ability of individuals, families, and communities to promote health, prevent disease, maintain health, and to cope with illness and disability with or without the support of a healthcare provider" (2019). WHO emphasizes the ability and therefore highlights the accessibility of resources that contribute to promoting, preventing, maintaining, and coping with life, health, and illness for not only the individuals but for their family and community as well.

The responsibility of self-care isn't placed *only* on the individual. Rather it contextualizes the personal needs of individuals and communities due to access and ability. People's lives and needs are different thus their self-care practices are different.

There is no self-care package wrapped in a bow that can be bought and has exactly what everyone needs to promote, prevent, maintain, and cope with all aspects of life. Self-care emphasizes equity over equality. For some, a bubble bath at the end of the day may be the alone time that helps them de-stress from the day. But what is a bubble bath besides an unattainable luxury to someone who doesn't have clean running water, hasn't eaten, or doesn't have access to health care? Clean running water is a basic need, a human right, not a luxury. Making sure one has access to the basic necessities essential to caring for themselves and the community they are a part of is what self-care looks like to them. As Audre Lorde explains, "Caring for myself is not self-indulgence, it is self-preservation..." (1988). Self-care isn't simply allowing yourself treats throughout the day, they are practices of strength and ultimately resiliency. Self-care is about one's needs being met not luxury commodities.

Self-Care includes:

- **hygiene**
- **nutrition**
- **lifestyle**
- **environmental factors**
- **socioeconomic factors**
- **self-medication.**

Self-Care promotes:

- **Self-resilience, empowerment, autonomy, personal responsibility, and self-efficacy**
- **Community participation, community involvement, and community empowerment**

Lorde, Audre. (1988). *A burst of light : essays*. Ithaca, N.Y. :Firebrand Books,

Positive Psychology Center. (n.d.). University of Pennsylvania. Retrieved September 24, 2021, from <https://ppc.sas.upenn.edu/>

World Health Organization. (2019, May 15). What do we mean by self-care? World Health Organization. Retrieved September 24, 2021, from <https://www.who.int/reproductivehealth/self-care-interventions/definitions/en/>.

Survey Report



2021 Mobile Crisis Support Survey Results

64 parents 1 youth



When asked to identify what could have been more helpful during their interaction, parents highlighted three areas:

1 To be given strategies & coping mechanisms

2 If the Mobile Team came out

3 Help facilitating care for their child

Highlights From Families



IMPROVE



- Nearly all parents (97%) felt they were treated with respect by crisis staff.
- Overall, parents felt listened to, safe, and supported by crisis staff.
- When support resources were given to families, 90% of parents perceived it to be helpful even if they had not used the resource.
- When offered strategies, 86% of parents felt they could use these suggestions/strategies in the future.
- 81% of families said they would recommend Mobile Crisis to other families.

- 53% of parents felt crisis staff helped them understand what may have contributed to the crisis.
- Parents highlighted wanting to be connected with service recommendations directly, when possible.
- Parents appreciated crisis staff calling to check-in, but felt stranded if waitlists were preventing their child from receiving care. Connecting families with family peer support may be helpful to families in this situation.

40+ Fall Pumpkin Activities with Children

[CLICK HERE](#)

RECIPE CORNER: EASY APPLE CRISP

Gone apple-picking as a family and not sure what to make? This classic and easy apple crisp with warm gooey cinnamon apples topped with crisp brown sugar oat topping is perfect to make on any cold fall day!

Ingredients

Filling:

- 6-7 fresh apples , peeled, cored, and sliced thinly (about 1/8-inch)
- 1/3 cup granulated white sugar
- 3/4 tsp cinnamon
- 2 tbsp flour
- 1 tsp vanilla extract
- 1 tsp lemon juice

Topping:

- 3/4 cup all-purpose flour
- 1/2 cup old fashioned oats
- 1/2 cup packed light-brown sugar
- 1/2 tsp baking powder
- 1/4 tsp ground cinnamon
- 1/4 tsp salt
- 1/2 cup (1 stick) unsalted butter, cold, diced into small cubes



Directions

1. Preheat oven to 375° F. Grease a large baking dish or small casserole dish.
2. In a large bowl, combine the sliced apples with the rest of the filling ingredients and mix until evenly coated.
3. In a separate mixing bowl, combine flour, oats, brown sugar, baking powder, cinnamon, and salt.
4. Add diced butter and using clean fingers, rub butter into dry mixture until it forms as pea-sized crumbs.
5. Place apple mixture into prepared dish and sprinkle the crumb mixture evenly on top.
6. Bake in preheated oven for about 35-40 minutes until topping is golden brown and filling juices are bubbling around edges.
7. Allow to rest at least 5 minutes before serving. Serve warm with vanilla ice cream. Enjoy!

HOPEWORX TEAMS

Family Satisfaction Team (FST)

-family & youth survey team

FamilyWorx

-family peer support & advocacy team

AdvocacyWorx

-adult peer support & advocacy team

Community Satisfaction Team (CST)

-adult survey team

CommunityWorx

-micro community open 3 days a week

Independent Monitoring for Quality (IM4Q)

-developmental disabilities survey team

click on the link
to learn more

COMMUNITY RESOURCES



[Montgomery County Children's Behavioral Health Guide](#)



[Student Assistance Program \(SAP\)](#)



[Mobile Crisis provided by Access Services](#)

1-855-634-HOPE(4673)



[Teen Talk Line provided by Access Services](#)

**call 866-825-5856, text 215-703-8411 or email
teentalkline@accessservices.org**