

Southington Youth Services

196 North Main Street

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ANNUAL REPORT **FY 2017**

The Youth Services Department has just completed its 43rd year of operation. Responding to the needs of the community, we offer an ever-changing variety of services to youth and their families. Most of our programs become filled up shortly after being announced and we often have waiting lists. This is a testament to the quality of our staff and programming, our ability to meet the needs of the public and our visibility within the community. This year this department went through a seamless change in leadership with the retirement of Sue Saucier after a 36-year career and the hiring of Christina Simms.

Southington Youth Services is located at the Municipal Center, 196 North Main Street. This office space not only houses Youth Services, but also Southington's Town-wide Effort to Promote Success (STEPS) our community prevention coalition. The department is in the same building as the Southington Board of Education and this has proved to be very advantageous to us.

For the 24th consecutive year, Youth Services received state funding through the Department of Education. This is from a line item in the state budget. The funding for this year was \$3,000 less than previous years. This year's funding totaled \$23,645. In addition, we receive yearly Enhancement Grant Program funding, \$7,550 beginning 5 years ago, intended for Youth Service Bureau direct service projects. Our staffing includes a Director, 2 Counselors, a Secretary and a Youth Prevention Coordinator. Thanks to a second 5 years of funding through the federal Drug Free Communities Grant of \$625,000 awarded to Southington STEPS in September 2014. Our Youth Prevention Coordinator is partially funded with these funds. Her job is to lead the Southington Town-wide Effort to Promote Success Coalition.

Youth Services Programs

Therapeutic

Individual Counseling, Crisis Intervention, Group Counseling.

Diversion

Juvenile Review Board, Alternative to Suspension.

Education

Parent Information Series

Community Programs

Youth Employment Training and Volunteer Service,
Grandparents Raising Grandchildren Support Group, Kristen's Closet, STEPS
and Hope and Support Group

Positive Youth Development When I'm in Charge, Babysitting, CPR, Peer Advocates, and STEPS Youth Council and Youth Committee.

THERAPEUTIC PROGRAMS

Referrals to our **individual counseling and family intervention programs** came from the school system, the police department, parents and youth themselves. As a matter of convenience and for community outreach reasons, we held many of our counseling sessions at the schools. The remainder of our clients met with us in our Municipal Center offices. At times our after-school hours were totally booked, so we are grateful for our close relationship with the Southington school system that we were allowed a space at all of the schools to meet some of our students.

Some of the problems we helped youth and families with were: family dysfunction, self-esteem, child abuse and neglect, truancy, drug and alcohol abuse, grief, depression, educational issues, sexual identity issues, self-harming behaviors, and stress/ anxiety. This year we met with 71 youth in individual counseling and served over 15 families. Many times we met with parents regarding students who needed more intensive services than we could provide. In those cases we were able to share a list of local resources that would better fit their child's need. This is a crucial service too, because many times, parents don't know where to go for help when experiencing a problem with their child. Our staff members stayed up-to-date on these services to best serve the community.

Our group counseling program has given us the opportunity to make contact with many more students than we could meet with individually. Working with the social work staff and guidance staff at Southington High School we provided in school group counseling services to 74 students on topics including high school adjustment, young women's issues, grief, anger management, racism, stress and anxiety, substance abuse, gender identity, sexual orientation, and relationships.

This year our counselors worked with the students and faculty at Alta. Through collaborative efforts with Community Services and Bread for Life we were able to assist this high risk population with the support needed to have a successful school year. In addition our staff was able to provide educational opportunities with the help of school faculty and YMCA Camp Sloper to a group of students that thrive in a non-traditional education setting.

DIVERSIONARY PROGRAMS

The **Juvenile Review Board** confidentially reviews all cases of juvenile arrests and after weighing all available information, makes appropriate recommendations to the families and the youth as part of a restorative process. This year 42 cases were reviewed and the students were diverted from the Juvenile Court or the Southington Police to the Juvenile Review Board. The juveniles' accountability consisted of community service, letters of apology, a Shoplifting prevention on-line education program, sexual safety course, substance abuse prevention presentations, positive youth development activities, Start Making a Right Turn program, and research essays. The Board knows what is available in our community to assist the young offender. The Juvenile Review Board model proves a decrease in recidivism when juveniles are handled in their own communities. This program of diverting youth from the court system is valuable because it benefits both the youth and our community. The Southington Juvenile Review Board was awarded a \$4,075 grant from the Department of Children and Families to be used to offer other services to Juvenile Review Board students. This grant was used for items such as tutoring, individual, group or family therapy, drug and alcohol assessments, and positive youth development programs.

Youth Services Staff continued working with Southington High School's **Alternative to Suspension Program**. This groundbreaking program allowed our staff to offer prevention and early intervention services to students in after-school groups, instead of these students being suspended from school. This year continued a successful collaboration between us and the school system. Our staff facilitated 4 sessions throughout the school year and reached 28 students in this program.

EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS

Our **Parent Information Series** consisted of 3 parenting programs this year. Sessions were: “Screenagers”, “How to Overcome Anger” and “Helping Children Overcome Anxiety”. Approximately 46 parents attended these workshops. We look forward to offering more sessions next year on important topics like Sexual Safety for Teens and Prevention workshops for parents.

COMMUNITY PROGRAMS

The Youth Services Department started a **Youth Volunteer Service Program**, this summer. This program matches able and willing youth aged 14-16 with town agencies and non-profits in need of volunteers. This program acts as a community service program but also as an indirect way to prepare youth for the work force. This summer, 14 youth applied and were accepted into the program. These youth have been placed at Bread for Life Summer Lunch program, LEAF’s Farmers Market; other options included the YMCA Race for Chase Triathlon Training program and Community Services. The program has been a great experience and will continue to grow in summers to come.

This was the first year of our **Hope and Support Group** for families that have loved ones going through a substance abuse addiction. The program meets the second Thursday of the month and is open to anyone needing support. The group has had an amazing turnout and we are looking to offer it twice a month in the fall. Families have appreciated the resource and access to support as they go through an extremely challenging time in their lives.

The **Southington Grandparents Raising Grandchildren Support Group** is supported by Southington Youth Services. Southington’s group was managed by the members who took leadership positions and planned the monthly programs. They held 6 meetings throughout the year. This year they had 6 grandparents or relative caregivers who attended regularly and 5 children were in attendance, too. A light dinner was offered as was child care and activities for the children. Meetings offered speakers from the Early Childhood Collaborative, as well as topics on health and wellness, domestic violence and school issues.

This was our 11th year of **Kristen’s Klostet Prom Project**. Named after a local teen tragically killed in a car accident, the program has become one of our most successful and community supported projects! It provides prom clothing and accessories to students having financial difficulties. Working with donations from local businesses, agencies and residents, the program assisted 68 Southington students with tickets, gowns, tuxes, shoes, jewelry, and flowers at no cost to them. It also included a shop at 722 West Street, a local business. Open during prom season, girls could obtain prom items for a small donation and 104 others took advantage of this opportunity, generating funds which are turned back into the program to help other Southington students in future years. The program was run almost entirely by 15 wonderful, committed volunteers who staffed the shop, did scheduling, record keeping, up keep and even alterations.

Youth Services staff was asked to train 31 **Peer Advocates** at Kennedy Middle School. Students were able to spend one school day identifying issues that students deal with, learning listening and helping skills, and setting limits on what they can help others with and when to call in an adult. This program is exceptional and has been a part of Youth Services for over 21 years and is updated yearly.

Youth Services is a founding member of the prevention coalition entitled “Southington’s Town-wide Effort to Promote Success” or **STEPS**. Our prevention coordinator managed the Federal Drug Free Communities Grant that STEPS was awarded. This is now the eighth year of funding in the amount of \$125,000. STEPS continues to gain tremendous support throughout the community from each of 13 community sectors and continues to reduce youth substance use through projects, campaigns and other environmental strategies.

Some of the accomplishment of STEPS this year included: members from the Youth Council presenting at the Connecticut Prevention Conference in May, a parent education night at SHS on substance abuse and current trends, a Public Service Announcement on the dangers of e-cigarettes, expanding the Asset Building Classroom initiative and training additional team members from each school, holding Transition Programs for all students going from 5th to 6th grade and 8th going to 9th grade, hosting a substance abuse prevention presentation for incoming freshman put on by the DEA and US States Attorney's Office, TIPS training for safe serving of alcohol, hosted community forums in the fall to discuss strategies on substance abuse prevention, a Safe Prom Campaign, and strengthening our partnership with the Southington Police Department for enforcement of underage drinking, compliance checks of restaurants and liquor stores, and the social host law. Two strong youth groups continue to be a part of STEPS along with the STEPS Advisory Board.

Kelly Leppard, the STEPS Prevention Coordinator, is a leader in the Prevention field in the State of Connecticut and is the current president of the Connecticut Association of Prevention Professionals. Kelly is asked to present at state and regional conferences and trainings using the STEPS coalition as a model for other communities to follow. The success of our coalition comes from Kelly's and our advisory board's dedication and commitment to making prevention a priority.

As you can see, STEPS continues to be a strong prevention organization in the community with great community and volunteer commitment. The focus will continue to make prevention a priority for Southington.

POSITIVE YOUTH DEVELOPMENT

"When I'm in Charge", a Red Cross certified program, was offered 7 times this year. Geared towards children aged 10-13, the 2-hour training teaches how to stay safe if you are left home alone. This popular program has been filled every time we have offered it; 92 students participated this year in 7 sessions.

We also offer the Certified **Babysitting** Course because it is in such demand. We were able to hold 7 sessions this year and 81 girls and boys became certified by taking the class and passing their tests. We will continue to hold this class as long as the demand is there. We held three **CPR** and **First Aid Certification** classes this year certifying 24 students. Summer is a good time for students to take advantage of these classes, which are offered at a reasonable fee.

This has been another busy, exciting year full of great energy at Southington Youth Services. We have consistently reached all segments of the community with our counseling services, programs, new initiatives and classes. We have developed new relationships with town groups and organizations as well as different departments at the Board of Education. We will continue to work with fellow collaborators in an effort to meet the needs of all youth in our community, especially the youth and families that are most at risk. Although we have had successes this year we still have incredible challenges facing the youth in our community. It will take a community effort and collaborating with parents to help students navigate their challenges successfully. The growing concerns with substance abuse, suicide, anxiety and depression make it critical that we work together and support the youth of our community

Respectfully submitted,

Christina Simms
Director