

The Rural DIFFERENCE

Behavioral Health Alliance of Rural Pennsylvania

YEAR IN REVIEW

Like many programs across the state, 2024 has been a challenging year for the BHARP HealthChoices program. With input and support from our members, counties, providers, Community Care Behavioral Health, and other stakeholders, BHARP continued to provide a successful program despite these challenges.

One of the primary goals for BHARP in 2024 was improving access to care. The Network Enhancement and Provider Workforce Stabilization Initiative, discussed further below, was one of the unique approaches by BHARP to address access issues due to workforce shortages.

The loss of members in the program due to the public health emergency unwinding (discussed in the fall newsletter) created significant shortfalls in revenue for the BHARP program. To help minimize the impact of the shortfalls, BHARP worked closely with Community Care to try to mediate these losses while maintaining our commitment to providing care to members. BHARP worked diligently to maintain levels of programming, and in some cases, expanded services where access to care prior to the public health emergency was already lacking.

Projects to improve quality across the program included routine monitoring of Community Care's quality processes with enhanced focus on member input. BHARP implemented a Town Hall process this past year, spearheaded by the BHARP Stakeholder Engagement Specialist (SES). The SES convened meetings across the BHARP region to establish a process for receiving feedback and building relationships. The SES then held a second round of Town Hall meetings specifically focused on streamlining and modernizing the Consumer/Family Satisfaction Team (C/FST) experience for members. Feedback from the meetings has led to the creation of additional options in how members complete surveys and a significantly shorter survey to save time.

The above initiatives are just a small sampling of what BHARP accomplished this past year together with our partners in the HealthChoices program. On behalf of BHARP, please accept my gratitude for these partnerships as we look forward to many more successes in 2025.

Sally Walker, Chief Executive Officer

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FAMILY NAVIGATOR PROGRAM: A BHARP AND COUNTY INITIATIVE TO SUPPORT FAMILIES

In collaboration with two county offices: Columbia, Montour, Snyder, Union (CMSU) and Huntingdon, Mifflin, Juniata (HMJ); Family Navigator programs were started to support families who have a child in the behavioral health system. A Family Navigator was hired for each program with the goal of working with families and helping them with their identified needs. This includes helping families to connect to identified supports, providers and system resources.

The Family Navigator program will benefit families as the Family Navigators have their own experience navigating child-serving systems and want to use their knowledge and skills to help others.

For more information about the Family Navigator program:

- Juniata Valley Behavioral and Developmental Services (Huntingdon, Mifflin, Juniata counties): 717-242-6467
- CMSU Behavioral Health and Developmental Services (Columbia, Montour, Snyder, Union counties): 570-275-4962



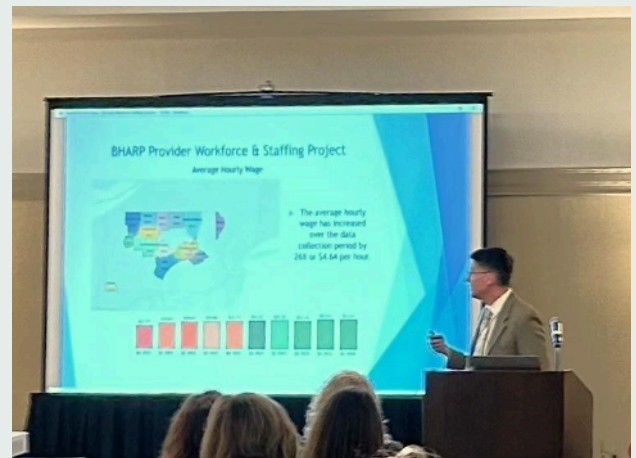
Pictured: Christina Paternoster (right), PA Parent and Family Alliance, provides training to Family Navigators, Ashley Cypher and Jennifer Robertson.

THE NETWORK ENHANCEMENT AND PROVIDER WORKFORCE STABILIZATION INITIATIVE

As behavioral health needs continue to rise and workforce challenges are consistently reported, BHARP has taken action to support providers. In 2022, BHARP developed the Network Enhancement and Provider Workforce Stabilization Initiative.

Using reinvestment funds, which are funds that BHARP is allowed to retain and reinvest in our communities each year, BHARP worked with behavioral health providers to address staffing challenges, provide tuition support for college students who are enrolled in human services degree programs, and identify future opportunities to enhance the workforce. This was accomplished through data collection, creativity, and innovative practices in recruitment and retention of staff.

Collaboration with providers was crucial in the success of this initiative. Providers used baseline data to improve wages, offer incentives and implement internal practices to support employee engagement. These actions had a positive impact on the workforce as demonstrated by a reduction in vacant positions and staff leaving the field. The success of this initiative is due to the collective efforts of BHARP staff, counties, providers and the state.



Pictured: Bob Zipf, Director of IT presenting on the PWS at the RCPA Conference in September 2024.

ENCORE TRAINING PRESENTATIONS OFFERED

Continuing the support of BHARP's vision of ensuring that all individuals receiving behavioral health services in the NorthCentral Region have access to a comprehensive array of high quality, cost effective community-based, and recovery-oriented services that maximize their potential for recovery, various stakeholders across the BHARP contract were once again invited to participate in Trauma-Informed Care (TIC) and the Juvenile Justice System, as well as Seeking Safety training opportunities.

TIC and the Juvenile Justice System

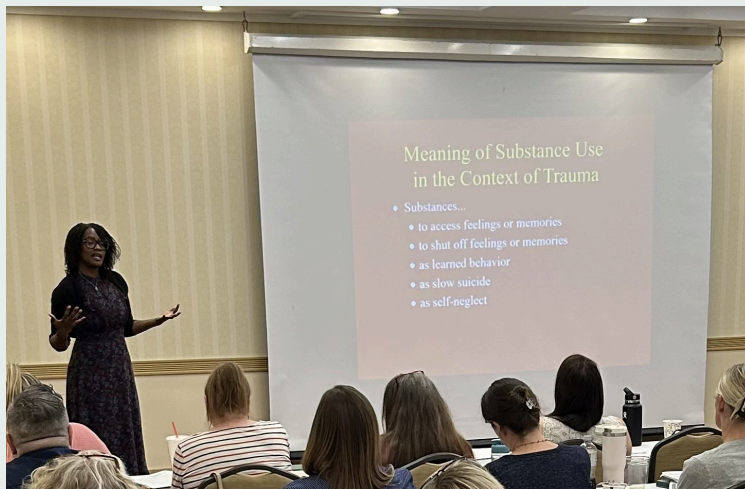
In October, BHARP welcomed back Kristine Buffington MSW, LISW-S who is a certified TF-CBT trainer, with more than 20 years of experience. Kristine is considered an expert in trauma informed care (TIC) and trains providers, courts, agencies, and therapists nationwide. She presented TIC and the Juvenile Justice System in both Mifflin and Schuylkill Counties to over 50 clinicians. The training objective was to assist professionals, caregivers, and other stakeholders in understanding the impact of trauma on youth development, its connection to juvenile justice, and ways to provide trauma-informed care.



Pictured: Kristine Buffington

Seeking Safety

Demetria Nelson, LCSW, MA also returned to our BHARP Region in October. She is the Commissioner of the Department of Human Services for the town of Greenwich, CT. She was first introduced to Seeking Safety in 2014 and has facilitated Seeking Safety groups and individual sessions ever since.



Pictured: Demetria Nelson

This training focused on developing a current understanding of trauma, addiction, and their combination, increasing a sense of empathy and understanding towards trauma and addiction, and modeling Seeking Safety, an evidence-based model for trauma and/or addiction. We had outstanding participation at this one day training with approximately 70 clinicians attending. All participants received their own copy of the Seeking Safety manual.

Continuing Education Units for both trainings were generously provided by The Meadows Psychiatric Center.

BHARP PARTICIPATES IN THE 1ST ANNUAL PEDIATRIC CAPACITY BUILDING INSTITUTE

BHARP staff and county representatives successfully completed the first Annual Pediatric Capacity Building Institute (PCBI) hosted by the Department of Human Services. Led by the Children & Families Complex Needs Planning staff, this nine-month training series maintained the goal to increase the administrative and clinical capacity across all systems supporting youth with complex needs and their families and to begin steps toward system change.

The in-depth and interactive training series acknowledged barriers complex needs youth and families experience when attempting to access treatment and support services while maximizing their fullest living potential. The PCBI curriculum promoted enhanced knowledge and understanding of related clinical topics, community-based resources, complex needs planning processes, and general understanding of other system's available resources and processes.



Pictured: PCBI Graduating Class Pictured with Pennsylvania DHS Secretary Valerie Arkoosh and Department Staff

Loretta Faust from CMSU Developmental Services noted “the ability to engage on topics related to services, specifically the importance of providing services in a trauma informed framework, allowed me to return to my own agency with suggestions regarding improving not only our own service delivery, but the need for thoughtful collaboration with agencies with the same goal.”

PCBI participants networked across systems and regions which presented an opportunity to develop new contacts and learn of organizational and system-level resources. PCBI participants included professionals and individuals with lived experience from areas such as behavioral health managed care organizations (BH-MCO), education, health care, county-level youth services, county-level intellectual disability services, Child and Adolescent Service Support Program (CASSP), county-level mental health services, advocacy, peer support, and primary contractors.

“The opportunity to network and openly discuss barriers to accessing services enhanced my knowledge of county and state systems and policies that can be leveraged in my role” noted Shelly Rivello, Clinical Coordinator at BHARP. Rivello further added “the exposure to the topics and shared resources helped me appreciate the complexities of the needs of the members we serve.”

The Pediatric Capacity Building Institute is an annual curriculum with the 2nd annual PCBI set to kick-off in March 2025. More information about the PCBI can be found on the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania’s website, www.pa.gov.

POTTER COUNTY THERAPY DOG HELPS FLOOD VICTIMS

Potter County Human Services (PCHS) has a special staff member, Jasmine, a service dog trained to comfort individuals who have experienced trauma. Jasmine's handler, Thomas Patterson, PCHS Human Services Director, explained, "Jasmine has unique skills to help children and others facing difficult situations. She can identify and comfort those experiencing trauma or stress."

Jasmine typically works with individuals involved in the court system or Child and Youth Services (CYS) to provide support. Therapy animals, like Jasmine, are trained to connect with a variety of people, fostering a strong human-animal bond. The use of therapy dogs has gained popularity due to their proven ability to reduce post-traumatic stress disorder, anxiety, and depression, while also helping victims rebuild trust in others.

On August 9, 2024, heavy rain from the remnants of Hurricane Debbie poured over parts of Potter and Tioga Counties, with some areas receiving more than four inches. This caused widespread damage and required numerous rescues. Jasmine stepped up to help in the way she knows best. Her calming presence brought comfort and hope to the hardest-hit residents and to the first responders, offering much-needed support during this challenging time.

In the aftermath of the flood, it was estimated that the county and its residents suffered \$1.2 billion in damages. While the rain and floodwaters have since receded, the impact will be felt for years as residents work to rebuild their lives. It is hoped that Jasmine's presence helped ease some of the emotional toll that residents endured during this challenging time.

Jasmine continues to spread her love and support to all she meets everyday.



Pictured: Jasmine

Upcoming Board of Directors Meetings

All meetings are held from 11:00am until 2:00pm at the BHARP offices

January 9, 2025

February 6, 2025

March 6, 2025

April 3, 2025

May 1, 2025

June 5, 2025

July 10, 2025

August 7, 2025

September 4, 2025

October 2, 2025

November 6, 2025

December 4, 2025

COMMUNITY-BASED ORGANIZATION SPOTLIGHT



A Community Action Agency

In 1964, President Lyndon B. Johnson declared a War on Poverty, which led to the creation of America's Community Action Agencies (CAAs). These organizations have since played a vital role in transforming lives by connecting millions of children and families to greater opportunities and strengthening communities across the nation.

By addressing a wide range of challenges, CAAs work to ignite economic growth and ensure that all families can thrive. Central Susquehanna Opportunities (CSO) is proud to be part of this nationwide movement. With a mission to provide opportunities, empower people, and strengthen communities, CSO is committed to uplifting individuals and families, helping them achieve self-sufficiency, and contributing to the development of a more resilient, thriving community.

Why Community Action Matters

Community Action Agencies, such as CSO, serve as the nation's eyes and ears, identifying barriers to economic stability and uncovering solutions that help families succeed. As a member of the Community Action Partnership, a network of over 1,000 local agencies, CSO bridges the gap between families in need and the resources that can transform their lives. CSO receives funding from both public and private sources, including federal programs like the Community Services Block Grant—a vital investment of tax dollars that strengthens the economic security of families across the nation. Locally run and community-driven, CSO has the expertise and dedication needed to serve families in Northumberland, Columbia and Montour counties, offering targeted solutions that address the unique needs of each community. CSO provides workforce development services as a partner in the PA CareerLink® offices in Northumberland, Columbia, Montour, Snyder, Union, Lycoming, Mifflin, Clinton, and Centre counties.

2025 NorthCentral Contract Community-Based Organizations

Bradford, Sullivan,
Tioga:
Chop Out Hunger

Cameron, Elk:
C.A.P.S.E.A.

Centre:
*Centre County Youth
Service Bureau*

Clarion:
East Long Ave, Inc.

Clearfield, Jefferson:
East Long Ave, Inc.

Forest, Warren:
*Forest-Warren
Mental Wellness
Association*



Transforming Lives: CSO’s Impact

CSO connects individuals and families to a wide range of services that help them succeed throughout life. From early childhood education programs that foster growth in children, to job search support for adults, and affordable housing solutions for families, CSO’s programs tackle the most urgent needs in the community.

Beyond individual services, CSO promotes community-wide solutions to pressing challenges like food insecurity and the shortage of affordable housing. These issues affect families in urban, suburban, and rural areas, and CSO is committed to developing strategies that benefit all families. Additionally, CSO shares its expertise with local, state, and national leaders seeking evidence-based approaches to promote greater economic opportunity for children and families.

Creating Lasting Change Together

CSO believes that Thriving Individuals, Thriving Families, and Thriving Communities are the foundation of a brighter future. The organization invites community members to join in making a difference—whether by accessing the wide range of services offered or by lending a helping hand through volunteer work. Together, CSO and the community can uplift lives and create lasting change.

To learn more about how CSO is working to improve lives in the counties it serves, visit csocares.org and explore the many ways the organization is creating stronger, more resilient communities for everyone.



Need assistance? Give CSO a call and they’ll be happy to help you!
570-644-6575

Shamokin:

2 E. Arch Street, Shamokin PA 17872

Bloomsburg:

160 W. 6th Street Bloomsburg PA 18715

Sunbury:

217 N. Center Street Sunbury PA 17801

Danville:

435 E. Front Street Danville PA 17821

Milton:

219 Filbert Street Milton PA 17847

2025 NorthCentral Contract Community-Based Organizations

Greene:
Blueprints

McKean:
YWCA Bradford

Mifflin, Juniata, Huntingdon:
Center for Community Action

Northumberland, Columbia, Montour, Snyder, Union:
Central Susquehanna Opportunities, Inc.

Potter:
Northern Tier Community Action Corporation

Schuylkill:
Servants to All

Wayne:
The Salvation Army



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