

DHHR Prepares for Safe at Home West Virginia Expansion

Karen L. Bowling, Cabinet Secretary of the West Virginia Department of Health and Human Resources



Progress continues with Safe at Home West Virginia as we move closer to the implementation of phase two. In the first phase counties, 115 youth have been referred for wraparound services. Of those, 16 youth have returned to West Virginia; 19 have moved back to their home communities from in-state residential placements; and 37 have been prevented from entering residential placements.

Given the difference the program is making in the lives of these children and their families, we are excited to expand this revolutionary approach. The Department's Bureau for Children and Families recently announced the selection of licensed behavioral health providers to act as local coordinating agencies for the next phase of the project, expected to launch summer of 2016. Grants were awarded to Burlington United Methodist Family Services; National Youth Advocate Program; Youth Services System; Genesis; KVC Behavioral Healthcare of WV; and Pressley Ridge.

These agencies will be responsible for the development and delivery of a high fidelity wraparound model with supporting services, and will hire wraparound facilitators who will coordinate the individualized services identified for the youth and their families in their homes. Local coordinating agencies are also tasked with providing those services or securing them from other sources. With the support of these agencies and our many partners, we will continue helping teens with behavioral health needs thrive in their home communities.

Phase two of Safe at Home West Virginia encompasses Barbour, Brooke, Grant, Greenbrier, Hampshire, Hancock, Hardy, Harrison, Lewis, Marion, Mercer, Mineral, Monongalia, Monroe, Nicholas, Ohio, Pendleton, Pocahontas, Preston, Randolph, Summers, Taylor, Tucker and Upshur counties. Our long-term goal is to serve 12-17 year olds and their families in all 55 counties over the course of the next two years, providing wraparound services to children, family members, caregivers and foster parents to support developing and maintaining a stable and loving environment.

Partnership Leads to Safe at Home West Virginia's Success

Jennifer Storer Hughes, KVC West Virginia

Safe at Home West Virginia emphasizes the necessity of collaboration and strong community partnerships to ensure success for at-risk youth. For West Virginia's youth to meet their goals, they need the support and services of a community truly "wrapping around" them. The first few months of Safe at Home have shown tremendous progress from this collaboration, led by the West Virginia Department of Health and Human Resources, Bureau for Children and Families (BCF).

- We appreciate the BCF case worker who took turns with KVC staff during a thirteen hour rainy drive to bring a West Virginia youth home. After spending eight years in residential treatment facilities, this youth has been thriving in his foster placement for more than four months. He frequently shares how much he loves his new family. We also appreciate the staff at his high school, who worked extensively with our facilitator to develop a plan that allowed a successful transition into public school.
- We appreciate the foster care agency staff that spent several hours on the phone with our team and with the foster family who agreed to provide care for a teen mother and her infant child in their home. Both mother and baby are doing very well, and have a safe place to live and grow while the mother finishes her education and prepares for independent living.
- We appreciate the BCF workers who not only show up to meetings and court hearings for our youth, but are available for consultation well outside of normal business hours.
- We appreciate the school that worked with us to develop a plan for a student with social anxiety and family concerns, allowing her to experience less stress at school and attend classes consistently.

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Partnership, *continued*

- We appreciate the coach of the youth basketball league who is helping a youth in recovery from a devastating injury, building up his confidence and giving him hope that he can still play the sport he loves. His foster mother describes this youth as a role model for the other youth in her home, and says that he is the peer on whom the others lean when they are going through a hard time.
- We appreciate the staff at the treatment facilities who have worked tirelessly with our staff to design discharge plans and help youth process the transition to a lower level of care. They have helped prepare us for potential challenges, ensured parameters are in place to reduce risks, and supported the youth as they joined their new families or reintegrated into their biological families.

It has been a privilege to witness the commitment of caring adults in the lives of these youth. The Safe at Home West Virginia partners clearly share an investment in youth well-being and a dedication to helping. We enjoy celebrating the successes already achieved with our youth and families and look forward to continued partnerships and collaboration as Safe at Home continues to grow.

Overcoming the Odds with Wraparound Services

Sarah Walls, Braley and Thompson/ResCare

In November 2015, Braley and Thompson/ResCare received a referral for DHHR's Safe at Home West Virginia program. The youth had been in residential treatment for two and half years, and had not had a home visit during that time. He had also not met his younger siblings who were born while he was in placement. His life experiences include significant trauma and loss, contributing factors to the behavioral problems resulting in his residential treatment placement.

Sara Seabolt Duncan, Youth Services Program Manager with Braley and Thompson/ResCare, advocated for the youth to begin home visits with assistance from the Safe at Home's wraparound services. Sara believed this would provide the extra supports needed for successful family reunification. Braley and Thompson/ResCare was assigned as the wraparound provider for his case. "Once the referral was made, I started communicating with wraparound facilitator Joseph Hall," she said. "Mr. Hall stepped right in and started assisting me in getting this youth home."

Joseph Hall explains that when he started working with the youth and his grandparents, it was apparent that they cared very much for their grandson, but needed guidance and support. "Often times these families feel lost and powerless to change things, but we were able to develop a good rapport with each other and I believe the family trusts me to work for their best interests. Wraparound cannot happen without that positive relationship with the family." He also added that in all Safe at Home cases, "a positive and cooperative working relationship with DHHR is important."

This young man was able to return home in early February 2016. The reunification has not been without challenges, but so far the youth is adjusting well to living with his family again.

Braley and Thompson/ResCare has also been working with a youth who had been in an out-of-state residential treatment facility for two years. This young man has no natural family for reunification, causing the first priority to be helping him return home to West Virginia. Through Safe at Home's flexible funds, Braley and Thompson/ResCare has provided the youth with holiday presents, taken him on outings, and purchased other items to remind him of his home in West Virginia.

"The youth's DHHR worker, Maribeth Nunnery, brought him back home just before the big snow storm in December. We were able to find a placement for him at Stepping Stones due to the extra support provided by DHHR during a 'barrier busting' meeting. Since he has returned to West Virginia, he has faced some challenges adjusting to public school again, but the wraparound process and the youth's own resiliency has helped him overcome those issues. The school, as well as the staff at Stepping Stones, Raymona Preston and Danielle Ford, have been very active in advocating and supporting this young man to be successful," said Joseph Hall.

The next step in this youth's wraparound process is to find a forever family. He dreams of an older brother and a dad who can teach him how to bow hunt, build a clubhouse together, and play laser-tag. He loves country living and being outdoors. Most of all, he wants parents who will love him and treat him like any other kid. We believe this young man can achieve his dream with the support of DHHR, Braley and Thompson/ResCare, and other service providers and community members who are invested in protecting and encouraging him.

