

Minnesota System of Care Expansion Grant

Sherburne County Progress Summary

In 2017, the Minnesota Department of Human Services (DHS) received a four-year System of Care Expansion Grant from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) to strengthen the state's children's mental health system. DHS gave subawards to 13 communities (counties, regions, and one tribal nation) to pilot new services and adopt system of care principles. Sherburne County received its subaward from DHS in November 2018. Drawing on insights from five project representatives from the county and provider agency (through evaluation site visits and key informant interviews conducted in May and June 2020), as well as administrative data provided by the partnering provider agency, this summary describes the county's efforts through July 2020.

System of Care efforts in Sherburne County

Sherburne County applied for a System of Care (SoC) subaward to pilot WrapMN (wraparound) services as a way to both minimize the need for more intensive residential interventions and to increase access to services and supports available in the community.

Through their efforts, Sherburne County and its partners hope to demonstrate:

- Successful outcomes for youth and families who have experienced the full WrapMN process.
- Families feeling more supported and being able to access to the services and resources they need without fear of stigma.
- Greater capacity by the county to be able to identify and respond to the needs of youth and families in their community

What is a system of care?

A system of care is defined as a spectrum of effective, community-based services and supports for children with mental health needs and their families that is culturally responsive, organized into a coordinated network, and builds meaningful partnerships with families and youth to help youth function better at home, in school, in the community, and throughout life.

Minnesota's System of Care for Children's Mental Health initiative is focused on creating better outcomes for youth and their families in Minnesota by bringing together the work of many partners across the state. The goal of the initiative is to create an accessible and collaborative network of mental health care, grounded in system of care principles, that enables families to connect to the right level of care at the right time and place, which lessens the need for more restrictive and costly interventions.

System of Care leadership and governance

Sherburne County's system of care efforts were initially led by a 4-person Leadership Team, comprised of two county staff members and two staff from Main Street Family Services, the agency providing WrapMN services. Responsibility for implementing various components of the grant, including efforts to increase youth and family engagement and improve cultural and linguistic responsiveness, were split between the county and agency. Over time, the Leadership Team expanded to include more county staff.

Project reach, scope of influence

The primary focus of Sherburne County's system of care efforts has been to launch WrapMN services and ensure families across the county can access the services. With time, many of the project representatives interviewed hoped that both access to services and integration of system of care values would increase across the county. However, multiple project representatives noted that doing so requires ongoing broadening of the project's Leadership Team and community partners.

Key partners

While implementation efforts have been led by county and agency staff, the team saw opportunities for other organizations to be more involved. The BRIDGES Collaborative, the county's children's mental health collaborative, has provided input to the work and has also helped disseminate information to families and other stakeholders. The partners have also worked with the Yellow Ribbon Group through the Elk River school district to design and implement a youth survey, and are planning to do more work with the Women and Youth Community Action Network. One of the project representatives noted that their system of care efforts complement other work done by the county to increase awareness of adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) and adopt trauma-informed approaches.

We have a motivated team...People are finding out how small the grant was but how huge it is in terms of its impact. A lot of people have suggested that they want to participate in this. I think at the last meeting we had three new organizations who wanted to be part of the system of care.

Key activities and highlighted accomplishments

Integration of system of care values

Through the SoC grant, DHS has emphasized the importance of integrating system of care values into local efforts by providing training and technical assistance and requiring grantees to develop a local cultural and linguistic competence plan focused on three of the National CLAS Standards.¹ Representatives interviewed described how they see these values being advanced through their work.

- **Family-driven.** It was clear to all project representatives interviewed that the WrapMN process is a family-driven approach to identify and help address the family's needs. However, at the time of the interviews, there had been little engagement with caregivers and families to inform the county's broader system of care efforts. The project representatives noted a few groups, such as a local NAMI support group, who they could potentially partner with in the future to increase family engagement more broadly.

¹ The National Culturally and Linguistically Appropriate Services in Health and Health Care (the National CLAS Standards) were developed by the United States Department of Health and Human Services Office of Minority Health.

- **Youth-guided.** Early in the grant, work to increase youth engagement was led primarily by the agency member also trained as the WrapMN facilitator. To hear directly from youth in the county, the project team worked in partnership with students from the Elk River school district to design and implement a youth survey. Despite work being delayed to some degree because of COVID-19 and the transition to distance learning, the project team received feedback from over 300 youth and will use that information to guide their work moving forward. As a result of the grant, the county made a change in how meetings are conducted when an out of home placement intervention is being considered so that youth have the opportunity to be involved and have a voice in the meeting, in a way that they feel most comfortable.
- **Culturally responsive.** The project representatives felt the SoC grant helped push them to become aware of additional steps they can take to increase cultural and linguistic competence, but they were at an early stage in their work to implement the CLAS standards and understand the needs of the community. As a starting point, the project team administered a survey to multiple community-based organizations to better understand unmet community needs and what agencies felt would help them provide more culturally responsive services. Both the county and provider agencies identified a need for interpreter services for the county’s growing Somali community. The county hopes to be able to hire or contract with an interpreter who can work across county agencies to meet the needs of families. Another next step being considered is providing training or creating radio spots in multiple languages focused on describing the signs and symptoms of mental illness and reducing stigma. One project representative noted that they are also planning work to review and revise policies, to ensure they lead to equitable practices and access to resources.

We have to look at agency policies and examine them through an equity lens...That’s going to take a long time to do, but I’m excited to get started with it and make improvements to the system.

I think that [the SoC values] stay with you. When you’re learning from a base of those core values, and you’re learning how to implement the work, based on those values and ideas, that you’re always building off those, those are your foundation.

Cross-sector collaboration

Although members of the Leadership Team identified some community partners who they have partnered with or started to engage in their work, the project representatives didn’t feel that cross-sector collaboration had yet changed as a result of the grant. One project representative noted that, as a result of COVID-19, there has been greater interest in looking at ways for various groups to collaborate in order to meet the needs of families. For example, the BRIDGES collaborative was planning to update their website and increase their social media presence to share information with families about what is available across the county, instead of printing resource booklets as initially planned. The project representatives noted that people realize the importance of coming together, but people are already doing a lot and do not necessarily have time available to support a new initiative.

WrapMN implementation

The primary focus of Sherburne County’s SoC grant has been to launch and implement WrapMN. Through the grant, DHS contracted with the National Wraparound Implementation Center (NWIC) to provide training and coaching to all SoC grantees to train supervisors and wraparound coordinators to implement a high-fidelity wraparound model, referred to locally as WrapMN.

Capacity and infrastructure

The grant-funded WrapMN model has a number of training and infrastructure requirements to build the capacity of the staff and agencies providing the service. Main Street Family Services has one WrapMN supervisor who has been consistently involved since receiving introductory training on the model in October 2019. The agency was without a WrapMN facilitator briefly in spring 2020, and had recently trained a new facilitator. Another aspect of the model is ensuring each agency has the infrastructure, including new policies and practices, in place to support and maintain the service. Main Street recently moved from the “pre-implementation” set of agency-level capacity-building activities to focus on “implementation” objectives in summer 2020.

Youth and families served

Through the end of July 2020, 13 youth had been referred to and determined eligible to receive WrapMN services. While all youth referred were considered to have needs that necessitate a high-intensity mental health services, none of them were known to have previously received services in an out-of-home residential setting. Of the 10 families who withdrew from services, three were seeking residential services for their child and the others planned to continue with less intensive county case management services. WrapMN is expected to be a 9 to 12 month process, and the four families who began services prior to July 2020 have not yet received services long enough to successfully discharge.

All youth and families who receive services are asked to participate in an evaluation where they are interviewed about their experience. Subsequent reports will provide additional descriptive information about youth served and their feedback, as participation in the evaluation increases.

Stakeholder impressions of WrapMN

The project representatives most familiar with the WrapMN process felt that the training they received from NWIC was helpful and that meetings have gone well with families. However, they also noted a number of challenges in launching the WrapMN model locally and engaging families in services. Referrals to WrapMN services were initially low, and some families did not get information that helped them fully understand what to expect. One project representative noted initial engagement in services improved after changing the referral process so that the process was explained by the WrapMN facilitator rather than a case manager who is less familiar with the service. However, another project representative noted that some families continue to have unclear expectations of the process and sometimes feel overwhelmed by the initial steps or uncomfortable seeking support from other family members and informal supports. This person also observed that some youth seem hesitant to engage, but expected that to change as a stronger relationship develops with the WrapMN care coordinator.

Despite these challenges, members of the Leadership Team have heard about good experiences families have had with the WrapMN process and are optimistic about the promise of an approach that centers on the needs of families and improves collaboration across providers and other supports. While gaps continue to exist, such as with respite care and transportation, the project representatives appreciated that the process is solution-focused and encourages the team to find creative alternatives to access supports.

I think what WrapMN does is unique, in that it is working to pull the entire system together for the youth - their family, their friends, their supports but also their formal providers. Without WrapMN, that does not really exist.

While individuals most closely involved with WrapMN implementation were pleased with the training they have received, members of the project team acknowledged that they were surprised by the intensity of training and coaching, particularly for supervisors. Multiple people noted that it would have been helpful for DHS to share information about the NWIC model and requirements for implementation before asking counties to submit proposals for grant funding.

Additional challenges

Staff and partners most closely involved in WrapMN implementation clearly described the challenges of piloting a new service model while also responding to the larger disruption of the COVID-19 global pandemic, which impacted health, employment and economic stability, social connections, and the educational experience of families in Sherburne County.

Within this broader context, members of the Leadership Team also identified additional service- and system-level challenges that have impacted implementation:

- **Unclear expectations of service implementation and deliverable requirements.** Some project representatives shared frustrations that the expectations of the grant and the requirements of implementing WrapMN were not clear when they submitted their RFP. One project representative noted that if they would have better understood the deliverable requirements prior to developing their staffing plan, they would have requested funding for larger team or allocated time differently to more fully support the grant. Members of the Leadership Team also noted that DHS could be a stronger partner in their work by providing examples of completed deliverables or working collaboratively with the team on action steps when a need is identified.
- **Uncertain financial mechanisms to sustain WrapMN.** Project representatives most familiar with WrapMN noted that the high degree of training, coaching, and supervision required through the model presented challenges for sustainability. While they understood that DHS was planning to pursue Medicaid reimbursement to support WrapMN sustainability and expansion, they were not clear on how likely that was to move forward. Given that few youth and families have had a full WrapMN experience to date, some project representatives were uncertain if they would have the data needed to make the case for local funding support.

Moving forward

The Leadership Team identified that the next phase would include building on the work to date to involve more partners, reach more families, and expand their work across the county. They also hoped to increase awareness of WrapMN so that they received referrals from a broader range of sources. One of the project team members noted that while each grant component will move forward a little differently, there are ways to make the work more interconnected.

The system of care grant was a jumpstart into work that will continue far beyond the grant. Like now that we've identified some things and we're on a trajectory that regardless of where we're at, we will continue on that trajectory because we know needs exist and what they are.

When asked to describe what success at the end of the grant looked like, project representatives identified a number of changes they hope to see:

- More families across the county access WrapMN and experience successful outcomes
- The county and the agencies it contracts with serves a more culturally and socioeconomically diverse group of youth and families
- Stigma around mental illness, particularly in the Somali community, is reduced
- Agencies and individual staff are more culturally responsive

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