

Kofi Services

Transforming the lives of African-American youth July 2011

Overview

Kofi Services is a culturally-specific, school-based mental health program for African-American youth in grades 2 to 8 and their families who are experiencing difficulty in school, personal relationships, or other areas of their lives. Kofi's goals are to improve behavior in the classroom and at home, and to maintain or improve academic performance and attendance. This is accomplished by providing cultural affirmation, mentorship, and role modeling; increasing parental involvement in the child's education and school activities; and inspiring hope for the future.

To assess these goals, Wilder Research conducted a process and outcome evaluation of services with youth and their families participating in Kofi Services during the 2009-10 school year. Multiple data sources were used, including parent and youth feedback about services, Client Characteristics Checklists, standardized assessments of behavior (SDQ and CASII), school attendance records, program service records, and parent satisfaction data.

Kofi youth

A total of 78 youth participated in Kofi Services during the 2009-10 school year. The average age of youth was 11 years old, although ages ranged from 8 to 14. Most youth were male (89%) and African-American (95%). Many youth experienced traumatic events and had a number of challenges, including behavioral issues such as impulsivity, hyperactivity, and attention deficits (79-90%); histories of low academic performance and suspensions/expulsions (54-58%); and family stressors such as parental divorce or separation, involvement with social services for at least two years, and chronic economic distress (58-82%).

A broad range of services and support

During the 2009-10 school year, Kofi youth received a range of individual-, group-, and family-based mental health services. On average, youth received 26 hours of service. Most youth participated in skills-based groups (91%) and received one-on-one skills training (86%). Nearly two-thirds of youth and their families (63%) also participated in psycho-educational family skills training. About one-quarter (23%) participated in therapeutic group sessions with a licensed therapist. As needed, some youth and their families were also referred to family therapy (13%) or individual therapy (6%).

Key findings

Kofi Services positively impacted youth and their families receiving services during the 2009-10 school year in multiple ways.

Child's behavior and mental health

Multiple sources of data suggest that youth demonstrated positive behavioral changes as a result of Kofi, including:

- Manage conflict better
- More aware of their emotions, and more comfortable expressing them
- More cooperative at home
- Less hyperactive/inattentive
- Better relationships with teachers
- Better at following school rules
- Commit somewhat fewer behavior infractions at school





Cultural identity

Both youth and parents reported an enhanced appreciation for African-American culture. Youth reported learning more about African-American history which gave them an increased sense of confidence and pride.

Parent/child relationship

Parents generally felt their relationship with their child had improved since their involvement with Kofi. They reported youth were willing to communicate more openly and talk with parents about school and their feelings.

Parental involvement in and relationship with child's school

Many parents said they were more involved in their child's schooling and had improved relationships with their child's teacher. They reported enhanced communication, feeling more welcomed at their child's school, and feeling more positive about their interactions with the school in general.

Parental knowledge and capacity

Parents reported they knew more about school policies and were better able to support their child's education. Specifically,

- Some parents felt better able to meet their child's emotional, physical, and cultural needs
- Many parents said they learned more about community resources and support

Program satisfaction

Youth were generally satisfied with the program and staff, noting how Kofi provided them with a forum to talk about personal issues and topics of interest.

For more than 100 years, the Wilder Foundation has combined direct service, research, and community development to address the needs of the most vulnerable people in greater Saint Paul.

I learned how to let go of stuff that's holding me back – like, don't keep on dwelling on stuff that's holding me back. Don't hold grudges. Let go and keep moving forward. — Youth

Parents were overwhelmingly satisfied with the services and staff. In particular, parents appreciated the one-on-one support staff provided to youth and their availability to talk with youth about issues in their life.

He is more excited about African American culture. {Kofi staff} has been able to demonstrate what I was trying to do at home. It's been a blessing. He is more willing to talk more about African American men as a whole. — Parent

He is much more open and willing to trust me. Kofi taught him that the people around you are there to help. — Parent

Issues to consider

To maintain and enhance the positive impact of services on youth and families, staff might consider:

- Expanding or extending the length of the program
- Identifying ways to provide additional support to youth during periods of conflict
- Encouraging parents to continue to stay involved in their child's lives and ways of routinely connecting with their child (e.g., reading, homework, eating meals together)
- Finding opportunities for youth to provide input into services and shape programming

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