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Project Rebuild adds behavioral and mental health services

Contributed By: The 411 News

Partnership with state will extend its services to East Chicago and Hammond

One day soon, children in crises – those with mental health or substance abuse problems – whose families only resources have been the juvenile justice system or intervention from the state will see increased efforts to keep them together instead of separating them.

Mobile crisis units and tele-health are on the horizon, too, said James Whitacre, a coordinator for Indiana's Division of Mental Health & Addiction. Whitacre had been invited by Project Rebuild to speak recently at a meeting of healthcare and social services providers who were there to learn more about Project Rebuild and its partnership with the division's System of Care initiative, a statewide effort that focuses on youth and their families.

The initiative provides funding and support for local communities that collaborate to provide youth with access to mental health and substance abuse services. SoC also shares the principle of Project Rebuild that the most effective solutions for care involve the entire family.

"People are afraid we want to take their children away or lock them up. We just want to help them," said Judge Inga Lewis-Shannon, founder of Project Rebuild, a truancy prevention program begun by the Gary City Court for middle school students in Gary's public schools. Excessive truancy, the court recognizes, often leads to those students becoming high school dropouts. And the court also recognizes that truancy reflects tensions in the home life of families.

Judge Lewis-Shannon says that most of the adult defendants in the Gary City Court are high school dropouts.

Project Rebuild's response to frictions in the homes and schools are three-month sessions involving parents and students. In its fourth year, the program has operated with a group of volunteers who provide academic tutoring to students, parenting classes, guidance, mentoring, and recently job training.

Now in its fourth year, the program will get a boost from the DMHA to expand its truancy program, add behavioral and mental health services, and extend its reach into East Chicago and Hammond.

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