

Tri-Town Youth Services Proposal Behavioral Health Services for Children and Teens

Submitter Contact Information

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Proposal information

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Background:

Founded in 1984, Tri-Town Youth Services is a nonprofit agency that coordinates, develops and provides services dedicated to promoting the positive growth and development of youth and families in Chester, Deep River and Essex. Governed by Public Act No. 75-487 we are a permanent part of the service delivery system for youth and families of Chester, Deep River and Essex, with oversight provided by the Department of Children & Families.

Description of project:

As the United States Department of the Treasury stated in its Overview of the Final Rule documents that guide the distribution of ARPA SLFRF, “Treasury recognizes that the pandemic has broadly impacted Americans’ behavioral health and recipients can provide these services to the general public to respond” (p. 15). **The Treasury goes on to list eligible uses of ARPA SLFRF which include the following direct services provided to our community by Tri-Town Youth Services: prevention, crisis care, diversion programs (for youth), enhanced behavioral health services in schools and equitable access to mental health services (to reduce disparities in access to high-quality treatment).**

Tri-Town Youth Services will provide behavioral health services for children and teens over the next two years. In partnership with Deep River and Essex, we are asking Chester to underwrite **three key staff positions** providing direct clinical services, prevention education, positive social-emotional skills development and early interventions for identified youth.

Part-time Clinician (MSW)

\$4,050 (1 year only)

Hiring one additional part-time mental health professional will increase families’ immediate access to clinical services at Tri-Town Youth Services. 15-20 hours per week will provide a combination of counseling, school-based social-emotional skills development at Region 4 schools and will provide a new point of contact for schools and municipal social services departments in support of parents seeking to meet their basic needs for housing, healthcare, food, technology, transportation or childcare.

Prevention & Wellness Program Director (MSW)**\$24,570 (covers 2 years)**

As a VRHS Liaison, the Prevention Director is responsible for co-teaching the Peer Advocates training course from October to May and enhancing the Youth Action Council's peer-led initiatives to address adolescent mental health issues. Initiatives include social-emotional skills development through Core Classes, Health Classes, school-wide Wellness Day(s) or drop-in wellness sessions during lunch and activity blocks. The Prevention Director runs the community's juvenile court diversion program, receiving disciplinary referrals from schools, police or parents for behavioral issues, conflict, or teen substance use. Tri-Town provides a comprehensive intake, an assessment of underlying needs and a restorative process to resolve problems and increase supports. For the next two years, the Prevention Director will work closely with the Executive Director to use a Strategic Prevention Framework (and cross-sector approach) to improve mental health outcomes for youth in our community, including a reduction in adolescent suicidality.

Youth & Community Engagement Program Director (BA, CHC) \$16,200 (covers 2 years)

The key to prevention is starting early! The agency's part-time Youth Program Director is dedicated to elementary social-emotional skills development and prevention education. Every 6th-grade student participates in the 8-week **4 Wellness Program** which promotes physical and mental health and teaches students to build healthy habits. Additional short-term social skills groups teach lessons from evidence-based curricula throughout the year, including Tag-in (5th grade lunch bunch using Zones of Regulation) and Girls Circle (after school program using One Circle Foundation). Complementary parent resources are provided through handouts, Tri-Town's website, weekly community emails and daily social media marketing.

ARPA funds requested (\$): \$44,820

In partnership with the towns of Deep River and Essex- each providing a fair, per capita share of ARPA Funds- Chester will underwrite three critical TTYSB staff positions in FY23 and FY24. The total request to Chester is \$44,820 (27% of the total 2-year personnel package). This two-year project was approved by Chester's Board of Selectmen on October 27, 2021.

The Town of Essex approved a contribution of \$39,820 to hire a part-time clinician immediately and contribute to the FY23 salaries of the Prevention Director and Youth Program Director. This project was approved at the Essex Town Meeting on January 5th and is contingent upon Chester and Deep River approving the project. Town of Deep River First Selectman, Angus McDonald has expressed support of this project and a desire to cover the two-year project from ARPA SLFRF Round 1 (funding FY23 and FY24 salaries in one allocation). Deep River is currently developing its ARPA distribution process.

It should be noted that the part-time clinician is a new position at Tri-Town. Underwriting the position with ARPA funds allows the clinician to provide critical services that are not billable to insurance, including: school-based mental health support, case management around basic needs and counseling for the uninsured or under-insured.

The Prevention Director and Youth Program Director positions have been funded by a 10-year Drug-Free Communities Grant administered by the Federal Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, set to expire on September 30, 2022. Tri-Town Youth Services has all of the necessary systems in place to hold federal dollars in a separate account, track monthly expenditures and provide detailed reports of hours worked and outcomes achieved.

Who would most benefit from the project if approved:

Children and teens in our community would benefit most from the services our staff will provide should Chester contribute to the salaries of three key positions. Some facts about local youth and the challenges they are experiencing:

- It is estimated that 50% of American youth have experienced a potentially traumatic event.¹ The additional psychological consequences of the Covid-19 pandemic (and subsequent Pandemic Trauma and Stress Experiences) cannot be underestimated.
- 14% of Connecticut youth (age 12-17) report suffering from at least one major depressive episode in the past year, and yet 66% of those youth **did not** receive any mental health treatment.²
- In the tri-town, 21% of youth report frequently feeling depressed or having attempted suicide at least once. This number is higher among upper classmen, as 36% of juniors and seniors surveyed in February 2021 reported feeling depressed or suicidal. ³
- Overall drug and alcohol use among teens declined during the pandemic, but depressed and suicidal students reported using substances at much higher rates than their peers. 24% of depressed students, and 39% of students who had attempted suicide reported using alcohol within the last 30 days. ³
- Another strong predictor of student depression and suicide attempts was reported for LGBTQ+ youth. Of the students who had attempted suicide, 70% were LGBTQ+, a 24% increase from 2019. ³

For local youth and families seeking help with mental health concerns such as anxiety, depression or the impacts of trauma, Tri-Town's current waitlist is 2 months. We receive an average of 5 calls per week seeking clinical support, each of whom we must turn away. We direct residents with state insurance to Child & Family Agency in Essex, where they are doing their best to prioritize Husky clients under 18. All other youth, families (and adult residents) with private insurance or limited coverage must be added to a waitlist at Tri-Town or with other private providers in our area. There are no openings among shoreline practitioners.

Middlesex Hospital, Youth Mobile Crisis (211) and Region 4 School Social Workers are all struggling to refer youth to local providers for follow-up, evaluation and mental health services. This is particularly concerning for youth who have experienced a mental health crisis, are stabilized and trying to create a consistent care plan to support their healing and recovery. Youth Mobile Crisis (211) team members are currently providing on-going case management and support, because there are no providers available to receive their young clients.

Positive impact of project to the Chester community:

This investment in direct clinical services, universal prevention education, positive social-emotional skills development and early interventions for identified youth will yield improved health outcomes for youth in the Chester community and improved quality of life for their parents and caregivers.

Tri-Town Youth Services' interventions are rooted in cutting-edge neuroscience, trauma-informed practices and evidence-based models. Federal investment in our agency's efforts to reduce adolescent substance use has resulted in:

- 28% reduction in adolescent alcohol use from 2005-2021
- 20% reduction in teen marijuana use from 2005-2021
- 13% reduction in teen cigarette smoking (from 14% in 2005 to only 1% in 2021)
- The average number of assets (protective factors) reported by youth has increased from 2005 to 2021, and increased among each grade (7-12) during the same period

Tri-Town Youth Services wants the opportunity to apply its proven Strategic Prevention Framework and successful multisector coalition model to address our current public health crisis- adolescent mental health and youth suicide. Our desired outcomes are:

- Increased access to mental health services (and waitlist reduction)
- Increased access to early intervention (increased parent, police and school referrals)
- Increased mental health supports identified by youth (and parents)
- Reduction in youth depression and suicide attempts
- Reduction in adolescent alcohol, tobacco/nicotine and drug use (delayed onset of use)

The entire community benefits from a strengthened network that provides high-quality prevention education, social-emotional skills development, early intervention and mental health services. Reducing the stigma around mental health, substance use and other life challenges improves the quality of life in Chester and creates a more compassionate, supportive and desirable place to live. **All youth and families benefit from:**

- Prevention Education and Social-Emotional Skills Development
- Improved School-Family-Community Partnerships
- Cross-sector collaboration to address mental health
- Improved standards of practice across sectors, including data collection and analysis
- An active Suicide Prevention Task Force and local Suicide Prevention Plan

¹ American Psychological Association, 2009. "Children and Trauma: Update for Mental Health Professionals.

² Mental Health America, 2022. "The State of Mental Health in America."

³ Search Institute, 2021. "Developmental Assets: A Profile of Your Youth. Complete Survey Report John Winthrop Middle School and Valley Regional High School."