

Competitive state-wide grant awarded to Prairie du Chien District

By Ted Pennekamp

The Prairie du Chien School District is one of 20 schools that received the maximum amount of \$75,000 from a highly competitive state-wide grant from the Department of Public Instruction (DPI).

The Prairie du Chien Healthy Children and Families Project 2018-19 will deliver sustainable mental health services for students and families of the Prairie du Chien School District.

“The grant is just awesome. It’s so exciting. I can’t wait,” said Prairie du Chien School Counselor Adrienne Udelhoven, who helped apply for the non-matching grant.

Key elements of the Prairie du Chien Healthy Children and Families Project include:

1. Collaboration with mental health agencies to provide increased access to mental health treatment via satellite clinic(s) in the Prairie du Chien School District.
2. Consultation by mental health professionals to include screening and referral for students who have mental health related contacts with school personnel.
3. Prevent mental health and substance use by implementing the Botvin Lifeskills Training curriculum for students and parents. www.lifeskillstraining.com.
4. Promote socioecological protective factors by engaging peers and caring adults through the Sources of Strength curriculum. sourcesofstrength.org.

Identified gaps of the school and community include:

1. Lack of screening and referral procedures for mental health.
2. Lack of evidence-based curriculum for preventing substance use.
3. Lack of access to mental health counseling in the community.
4. Lack of socioecological protective factors in the community.

The Department of Public Instruction reported that the grant awardees submitted outstanding grants and will be used as models for future grant applicants. The first year for the grant attracted proposals from 161 applicants, representing 182 school districts and charter schools requesting more than \$8 million.

Sixty-four districts and consortiums are sharing \$3.25 million in state grant funding to provide school based mental health services. Grants fund activities for the 2018-19 school year and range from just over \$11,000 to the grant maximum of \$75,000.

“I wanted to cry when I heard we got it. It’s going to be powerful!” said Udelhoven. “We are excited for the Botvin Lifeskills, Sources of Strength and overall community collaboration. We have a valuable plan to impact the community and be a model for the state.”

The Prairie du Chien School District was able to apply for and be awarded the grant due the dedication of Udelhoven, said Superintendent Robert Smudde at a recent school board meeting.

“The mental health grant is absolutely a wonderful thing for our district. As you know, mental health services in rural areas have been very difficult if not impossible to get for people who need it,” said District Administrator Robert Smudde, who noted that School Counselor Adrienne Udelhoven took the opportunity offered by the state and federal government to develop a program that helps the school offer these services through the coordination of Katrina M. Johnson, LLC, Soldiers Grove.

“The district was awarded \$75,000 to provide good character education as well as be a satellite clinic for students who need these mental health services,” said Smudde. “It is a one-year grant, and we are hoping to keep the momentum going so it becomes a service available long-term for our families.”

The project manager for the Prairie du Chien program is Katrina Johnson, licensed clinical social worker (LCSW). Deliverables will be provided by Johnson and select area therapists. Udelhoven said because this is her first year with such a program, Johnson will help in getting the program up and running, and also with awareness and fund-raising campaigns to make the program sustainable and able to continue on its own over many years.

“There’s a need for change in the Prairie du Chien School District and in the community,” said Udelhoven. “We need healthier activities for the kids.”

Udelhoven and Johnson said the program will provide prevention services and resiliency services for the children, their families and for the community’s well-being.

“This is a proven, evidence-based program. It works,” said Johnson, who noted the program will help with numerous concerns such as bullying, suicide prevention, substance abuse, skills to alleviate stress and many other issues. “I’m here to support the social, emotional and behavioral needs.”

More Key Elements to the Project

1. There are a total of three counselors in the Prairie du Chien community. These are at Gundersen, Mayo and County Health Services. In addition to few counselors available in the area, there are obstacles for people to access mental health care. Some of the obstacles include transportation, ability for parents to take time off from work for routine appointments, and a stigma about meeting with a counselor. The first goal is to set up a satellite clinic in the schools. The satellite clinic would allow for students to meet with their counselor at school. Parents would need to attend as needed, yet definitely reduce the obstacles described. Rebecca Miller, licensed clinical professional counselor (LCPC), private practice therapist in Boscobel, will establish a satellite clinic in the school.

2. The second goal is to increase the screening and supports for students and families to be referred to comprehensive care, such as primary care physician, psychiatry, counseling and other interdisciplinary teams. Prairie du Chien schools has approximately 260 to 310 students who receive supportive emotional counseling from school staff and there are approximately another 120 who receive routine counseling outside of the school. There is a need for supporting the 260 to 310 students who would benefit from routine counseling. Johnson and Udelhoven will be available for meeting with youth and families for education about accessing care as well as screening and providing information about presenting symptoms and emotional needs. Screening and consultation includes providing education to school staff about effective approaches and teacher/classroom modifications to support the needs of the student and families. All parents are encouraged to take advantage of this service even to discuss stress prevention and resiliency in families or begin putting a framework together to incorporate emotional well being and counseling as needed. Some people receive emotional relief with routine counseling and sometimes meeting with a counselor once or a few times helps to validate one's stressors and support well being.

3. The third goal is to have an evidence-based substance use prevention curriculum in the classroom. This year all of the third, sixth and freshmen classes will be offered a class in Botvin Lifeskills. This curriculum will be taught by Johnson. The students will learn and rehearse skills related to self-esteem, communication, impacts of media and peers, and the effects of substance use. The second part of this goal is providing two separate free workshops just for parents or caring adults which focus on healthy roles of adults regarding prevention skills for substance use and peer pressure. Rebecca Miller, LCPC and Jess Leinberger, LCPC-IT, will be facilitating these workshops. Leinberger also works for Crawford Social Services. The hope is that a group of parents and caring adults will repeat this workshop every semester for the next two years. The dates of the workshop are to be announced. The third component of this goal is approximately seven school employees will receive the training to teach Botvin Lifeskills and Adrienne Udelhoven, LCPC, will attend the national train the trainer workshop, which equips her to teach more staff and community members to facilitate Botvin Lifeskills. The school plans to raise funds to buy the workbooks for the students for the next two years, which would be approximately \$4,200 needed by June 2019.

4. The fourth goal is to address the socioecological areas effecting prevention of suicide, bullying and emotional well-being. The highly acclaimed and evidenced based program, Sources of Strength from North Dakota and Colorado, will come to the Prairie du Chien High School. Sources of Strength focuses on eight elements to well being; 1. Positive Friends, 2. Family Support, 3. Mental Health, 4. Medical Access, 5. Mentors, 6. Healthy Activities, 7. Generosity and 8. Spirituality. They will provide a full day training for 65 high school students, Peer Leaders, and another day training for eight Adult Advisors. The individuals will be nominated to take part in these trainings and the participants will be from diverse peer groups and adult groups. Adult Advisors are a group of connected, caring and local adults whose goal is to support, mentor and assist peer leaders in spreading hope, help and strength-based messages. This is an inclusive program and not exclusive, there are opportunities for each student, staff, family and community member to be involved. The Peer Leaders and Adult Advisors will design and implement Campaigns of Strength throughout the year and will meet every two weeks. Sources of Strength costs \$5,000 per year. Some schools in Wisconsin are in their fourth year of implementing Sources of Strength and Prairie du Chien is determined to receive community support to sustain this highly acclaimed program for at least the next two years, which would require receiving \$10,000 by June 2019.

The school already received \$250 toward the minimum goal of \$14,200 to sustain the award winning programs written in this year's grant. The future for school and community culture change is now and the good people of Prairie du Chien are going to lead the way for the state of Wisconsin and schools.

Access to mental health treatment and current community resources

The need for increased access to mental health is apparent in gathering the data. There are two times as many students receiving mental health contacts by Prairie du Chien school staff as those engaged in care at community and county clinics. During the 2017-18 school year, school personnel reported having routine contacts with 260 to 310 students pertaining to mental health with about 25 of these students having a need for frequent contacts or are in crisis. The community and county mental health agencies report that they have 120 students receiving routine mental health treatment. Data suggests an overwhelming disparity in students who seek internal school support and those who utilize outside agencies. This information supports the idea that access to care and students/families being open to seeking mental health treatment is a problem.