

Improving Youth Mental Health in Marathon County

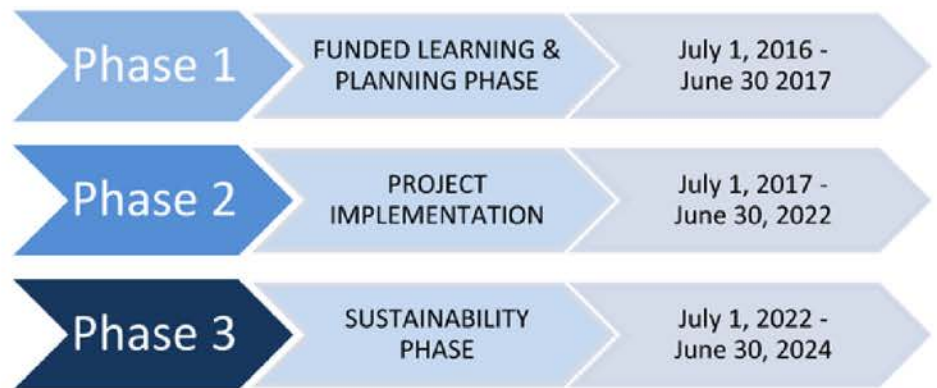
2017-2022



The Advancing a Healthier Wisconsin (AHW) Endowment was established by the Medical College of Wisconsin in 2004 to receive a portion of the charitable funds from the conversion of Blue Cross & Blue Shield United of Wisconsin from a nonprofit organization to a for-profit corporation. The proceeds of the sale were generously gifted to Wisconsin's two medical schools - MCW and the University of Wisconsin School of Medicine and Public Health - on behalf of the people of Wisconsin.



The Advancing Behavioral Health Wisconsin Initiative is AHW's eight-year, up to \$20 million commitment to advance mental health and behavioral health outcomes in 10 Wisconsin communities. Born out of a belief that it's possible to transform how communities support the mental and behavioral health of their residents, the initiative is taking a new, strategic approach - one that combines funding with resources, time, and supports that partners need to develop strategies, put them into action, and evaluate their impact for sustainable change. It is AHW change making in action, propelling promising works and ideas for a healthier Wisconsin today, and for generations to come.



AHW developed a uniquely structured three phase initiative that runs from 2016-2024. The final phase is a funded two-year sustainable transformation phase aimed at building upon the efforts of Phase I and Phase II activities in order to best continue the identified strategies and outcomes. The Marathon County Health Department applied with a team of community partners and was awarded the funds.

Public Health Educators with the Marathon County Health Department serve as project staff. Health Educators possess a unique set of skills, understanding of local community conditions, and knowledge of community change processes and strategic planning. Health Educators have forged meaningful relationships with a diverse group of community partners to support youth mental health work. They have disseminated youth mental health data and made connections through collaboration by engaging with community partners and leaders to facilitate decision-making to improve community health.

Public Health Educators focused on three strategies during Phase II:

1. Providing backbone staff support to the MCS-BCC (with the intent to transition out in 2022)
2. Providing coordination and funding for mental health education and training opportunities
3. Sharing mental health data with the community



During the project period, there were a total of 107 sessions in which local school districts, mental health clinics, and community organizations utilized project funding to increase their capacity to support students in and out of the classroom through educational opportunities and trainings.

In addition, project funding was used to support 22 continuing education activities, projects, and certifications related to improving youth mental health. Some examples include: 3 Marathon County mental health providers were certified in Eye-Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing (EMDR), a specialized trauma psychotherapy; seven attended a training on "Mental Health in the Hmong Community"; and several school districts utilized this funding to provide professional development to support student and staff wellness.

During Phase II, Public Health Educators aggregated, analyzed, and disseminated Marathon County Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS) results with community advocates, organizations, coalitions, and the media. Marathoncountypulse.org was released and the YRBS data dashboard was updated annually.

The Marathon County School-Based Counseling Consortium (MCS-BCC), was formed in 2017, specifically to address youth mental health through increasing access to school-based mental health therapy services.

The MCS-BCC is comprised of:

Mental Health Clinics

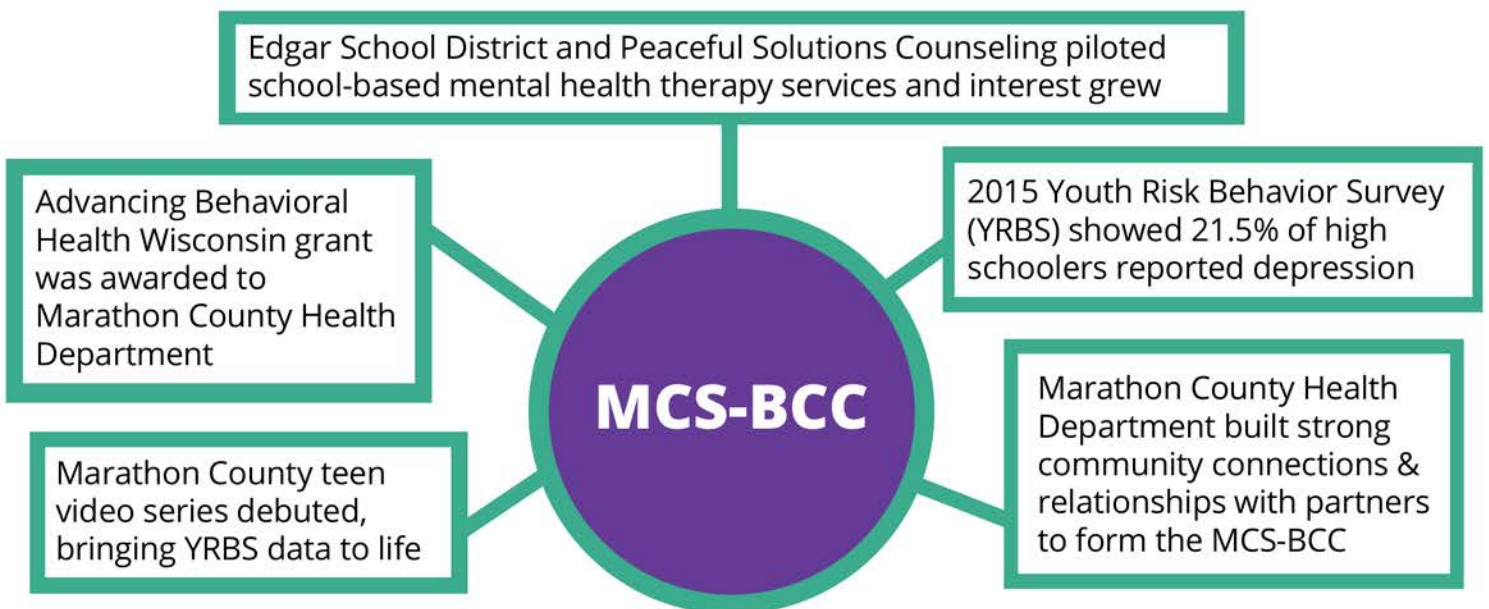
- The Achieve Center
- Bridge Community Health Clinic
- The Caring Tree
- The Center for Human Development
- The Center for Wellbeing
- Charis Counseling
- Children's Wisconsin
- Compass Counseling
- Empower Mental Health Clinic
- North Central Health Care
- Peaceful Solutions Counseling

School Districts

- Abbotsford School District
- School District of Athens
- Colby School District
- DC Everest School District
- Edgar School District
- Marathon School District
- Mosinee School District
- Rosholt School District
- Spencer School District
- Stratford School District
- Wausau School District

Community Organizations

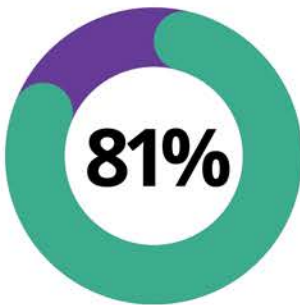
- Community Foundation of Northcentral Wisconsin
- Marathon County Health Department
- Marathon County Special Education
- United Way of Marathon County



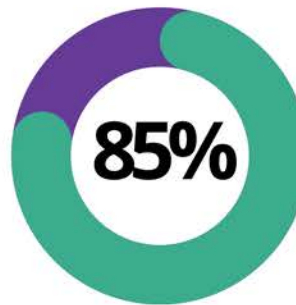
There are several benefits to school-based mental health services:

- Parents do not need to take time off work or find reliable transportation to take their children to appointments.
- Students do not have to miss as much classroom time.
- Schools are safe places where parents may be more receptive to seeking mental health care for their children.

The data is clear that school-based mental health (SBMH) is effective and has a positive impact on the lives of youth in Marathon County. Results from Client Satisfaction and Wellness Surveys of students that received SBMH indicate that it works. The vast majority of students that received SBMH services reported improvements and positive changes including:



81% of K-5th grade students reported that counseling has helped them with problems of feeling anxious, tense, nervous, or scared. (2020-2022)



85% of 6th - 12th grade students reported that counseling has helped them with problems of feeling sad or hopeless. (2020-2022)

The MCS-BCC has effectively built a mental health care delivery system that previously did not exist in Marathon County. The MSC-BCC accomplished their goal to initiate school-based mental health (SBMH) services in all ten Marathon County public school districts. Access to SBMH in Marathon County was a rural health inequity. Seven of the ten Marathon public schools districts are in rural areas, with driving times to the nearest mental health clinic ranging from 20 to 60 minutes one-way.

Access to mental health care at school bridged a significant gap for children and families in Marathon County's rural communities. This vast increase in services shifted the school-based mental health system in Marathon County and increased accessibility to services, especially in rural areas.

SBMH involves local mental health licensed therapists providing therapy to students and families in the school building. Therapists have provided education to school staff about mental health to better support their students in the classroom, as well as consulted with parents about their child's specific needs at home. Therapy is paid through a family's insurance and funding is available if cost is a barrier from the United Way of Marathon County. Parental consent is required for therapy services to occur.

Mental health counseling is a critical strategy to ensure all Marathon County residents meet their highest potential of mental health.

School Year	'17 - '18	'18 - '19	'19 - '20	'20 - '21	'21 - '22
Students served	341	420	452	344	449

Students in school-based therapy were asked how they felt about (mental health) counseling:

“ *It just helped to have someone else to talk to. It made me feel like someone cares about me. No one talks to me at home, so I only get to talk to people at school.* ”

"I feel good about it. It makes me feel better at the end of the day. I sometimes feel bad talking to my friends about things, but therapy is a safe space for me to do that."

"I feel great. Usually my days goes negative, but on the days I have counseling I feel better, and it resets my brain to positive."

"I was able to learn coping skills when I have my panic attacks."

"Happy and excited. I like that I get to tell you things and we get to play and draw."



