

Small Groups Make a Big Difference

We've all heard the saying "there is safety and strength in numbers." At the heart of that sentiment is the acknowledgment that individuals aren't always best served by going it alone. In many cases, it's the support of others that helps individuals realize their greatest success or get through their toughest time.

Bradley Hospital embraces a similar philosophy when it comes to its group programs: outpatient services that provide comprehensive mental health evaluation and treatment for children, adolescents, and families from southern New England and beyond.

The Yost family of Swansea, Massachusetts, is but one example.

Back in 2018, Carter Yost, then eight years old, was diagnosed with ADHD and social anxiety disorder. His mom, Stephanie, desperate to get her son the care he needed, turned to Bradley for help after seeing an article about their group programs in a local newspaper.

"We enrolled in Bradley's iFriend program and the entire experience was amazing," Stephanie recalls. iFriend is a social skills group for elementary school children, ages 8 to 11. The 10-week program helps kids develop friendship skills, learn how to converse better with peers, and cope with frustration. It also teaches parents strategies to help their children integrate social skills into daily life at home, school, and play.



"Certain treatments—including those that address interpersonal issues or discomfort in social settings—are better delivered in small group sessions rather than one-on-one with a therapist," explains Karyn Horowitz, MD, Chief Medical Officer, Bradley Hospital, and Director of Child Outpatient Psychiatry, Lifespan. "The goal of iFriend is for children, like Carter, to become more socially competent and confident—and they need peer-to-peer interaction to make that happen." Dr. Horowitz adds that iFriend has helped more than one child make their first friend. "That might seem small on the surface," she says, "but it's huge in terms of a child's development."

Stephanie agrees. "Carter always struggled in social situations and found it very difficult to talk to others," she explains. "If we went to the beach or the park, he would

(continued on page 2)



never leave my side to go play with other kids or interact with anyone. But because of what he learned in iFriend, he has made great strides.” One example, Stephanie shares, was on a family vacation to Myrtle Beach last year when Carter, on his own, walked up to a small group of kids he didn’t know at a park and asked if he could play with them. “That never would have happened before iFriend,” mom says. Also, Carter always wanted to learn karate, but never signed up because he couldn’t get past the anxiety of dealing with other kids in class.

“Well, now he’s a brown belt!” Stephanie proudly exclaims. Milestones like those Carter achieved are brought to fruition at Bradley through a combination of evidence-based therapies and a strong belief that parent/family participation in treatment is essential to ensure best outcomes. “A child might be with us for an hour or

two a week, but they’re with their parents for the rest of their lives,” Dr. Horowitz points out. “So, it’s critical that we support the whole family and educate parents on the same curriculum that we’re providing to their children. This way, parents can continually help their child develop their social skills and put what they’ve learned in the program into action.”

Stephanie says she is grateful for her family’s Bradley experience. “It gave Carter an opportunity to be in an element where he didn’t have to worry about performing. He wasn’t going to be ‘wrong’ and everyone understood him because they were in the same boat. For me, as a parent, it helped me understand my child better and enabled me to help him long-term. It built a lifetime foundation of skills and support that we can both draw from.”

ABOUT GROUP THERAPY PROGRAMS AT BRADLEY HOSPITAL

BALANCE



(Breathe, Act, Learn about Nutrition, Control, Exercise)

A new, 16-week group for adolescents, ages 13 to 18, who are mild to moderately depressed and struggling with weight management.

TEEN ANXIETY GROUP (TAG)



A 12-week program that uses cognitive behavior therapy to help teens overcome anxiety, stress and worry, and empowers them to regain control of their lives.

INCREDIBLE YEARS: POSITIVE PARENTING FOR CHALLENGING KIDS



A 16-week skill-building course that teaches parents effective ways to reduce their children’s aggression and behavior problems, and increase social competence.

iFRIEND

A 10-week social skills group for children in elementary school ages 8 to 11 to help them become more socially competent, confident and friendly.



YOUR LIFE, YOUR CANVAS



A 10-week open studio art therapy group for teens living with symptoms related to anxiety and/or mood disorders.

MINDFUL TEEN



A six-month Dialectical Behavior Therapy program for adolescents (DBT-A), ages 13 to 18, with a history of suicidality and/or other high-risk, impulsive behaviors.

PARENT PSYCHO-EDUCATIONAL PSYCHOTHERAPY (PEP) MOOD GROUPS



An eight-week program for parents with children, ages 7 to 13, who have mood disorders. Regulating emotions and solving family problems are among the covered topics.

COVID-19 Driving New Levels of Need: a Q&A with Henry T. Sachs III, MD

The president of Bradley Hospital, Dr. Henry Sachs has spent more than 25 years at the hospital as an attending psychiatrist, treating children with autism and developmental disabilities.



Henry T. Sachs III, MD

The need for children's behavioral health services had already reached high levels prior to COVID-19. What additional impact has the pandemic had?

The reality is, for the past decade, we were already seeing an upward trend in the need for intensive services, and that slope is now higher. Since the pandemic began, there's been a 20 percent increase in emergency needs among children and 30 percent for adolescents. Adolescence can be challenging enough, and now that period of growth when you build independence, social skills, and relationships is being interrupted. This is developmentally stunting, and that can translate into anxiety. Young children and adolescents alike absorb the stress of their family and environment, and their notion that the world is a safe place is being challenged.

How has your work changed this year, and how is Bradley ensuring its youngest patients get the treatment they need?

Incorporating telehealth has been tremendous, especially for delivering mental health services and reaching kids we couldn't otherwise reach. Our virtual attendance with older kids has been very high, and that speaks to the need and what they're going through. With our younger children, we've focused on safely meeting in person, so expanding our pediatric partial hospital program is particularly important because it will allow children to get the help they need and remain with their family and caregivers. These are kids as young as two and three years old, and even younger—we don't want to see them admitted to an acute care setting, which can be traumatizing. For all kids, we've ramped up our work with schools and referral methods. Teachers recognize change and can be incredible advocates. But with not all kids being in school, we needed to train teachers to identify a child in crisis without having them in the classroom.

Looking ahead, what do you anticipate as post-COVID needs among youth? Might there be long-term impacts from the pandemic?

It's fair to say there are two pandemics right now—the medical crisis of COVID-19 and the mental health implications we're seeing and will experience for years to come. There are financial impacts that exacerbate anxiety; educational losses and the disruption of development. And there will be challenges with reintegrating to what is considered normal and with recovering from an extended period of heightened fear; that it'll be okay to play with your friends, and okay to not wear a mask. It is critical that services be available to address these needs and minimize the lasting impact this time can have on the lives of our families and friends.

The Importance and Efficacy of Art Therapy

Like her Bradley Hospital colleagues, Melissa Weaver, LMHC, ATR-BC, art therapist, has seen the impact the pandemic has had on vulnerable children already experiencing challenges. She's also had a front row seat for how art therapy helps patients heal and cope with complicated elements of life.

"It's important that people understand patients' experiences in art therapy are as meaningful and relevant as they are in talk therapy," she says. "It is not arts and crafts. This is care that's delivered by trained, licensed mental health professionals." Art therapy has the capacity to bring words to a visual. When a person experiences trauma, the crisis puts higher verbal regulatory functions out of reach. So when Melissa begins a session asking a patient what color they identify with how they feel in that moment, it prompts transition from one brain space to another and open dialogue. Art therapy provides opportunity to access

non-verbal experiences, as emotionally-laden information can emerge in the form of colors and shapes.



"Every child is different and progress is measured individually," Melissa adds. "But the goal never wavers from seeing them walk out of Bradley having a healthier life and the ability to practice continued self-care." Where art therapy is clinical, therapist-directed treatment, Bradley is also proud of its revered—and philanthropy-driven—Healing Arts Program. With the support of community artists that offer dance, music, magic, and more, it's a program that provides valuable creative outlets for patients. "We're fortunate to be able to offer everything we do, and to have the continuum of care our patients truly need," says Melissa.

Real Jobs RI Program Skills Up Future Staff

Mary Claussen had always wanted to work in the field of behavioral health care, but it "seemed impossible," because she hadn't finished her undergraduate degree. And last year, due to the economic effects of the pandemic, she found herself underemployed after losing hours at her retail job.

So, when she heard about Bradley Hospital's participation in the Rhode Island Department of Labor and Training's (DLT) Real Jobs RI program, she jumped on the opportunity to apply. Mary is now one of about 30 Rhode Island residents who have been hired to work at Bradley through the new program, a partnership among Lifespan, Rhode Island College, and the DLT. The course provides participants with mental and behavioral health education, training, national certifications, and a clinical internship at Bradley.



After completing the training, which lasts either 12 weeks or an accelerated five weeks, successful participants are typically offered positions as behavioral health specialists. Director of Clinical Innovation Margaret Paccione-Dyszlewski, PhD, describes the role as "Bradley's frontline worker." "The demand for behavioral health service is increasing, so we're expanding our services and increasing our staff to meet the demand," Dr. Paccione says. A third session of the program, which is free for participants and funded by the DLT, will wrap up in May. Last fall, Mary received a job offer before she finished her internship on the adolescent inpatient unit. "I am so grateful for this program," she says.

Free the Future, a publication of the Bradley Hospital Foundation, is published for the friends and supporters of Bradley Hospital. For more information, please contact the Development Office at 401-432-1451.

lifespan.org/BH-giving



Bradley Hospital

Lifespan. Delivering health with care.®