

Oklahoma Institute for Child Advocacy

2005 Legislative Agenda for Children and Youth

Background Information

Children's Mental Health Issues

Issue #3:

It is estimated that as many as one in five Oklahoma children and adolescents may have a behavioral, emotional or mental health problem. For many families, the services required for their special needs children are fragmented, too costly, or not available in their community. To address this need, Oklahoma has adopted the "Systems of Care" approach. SOC is a comprehensive array of mental health and other support services organized into a coordinated network to meet the multiple and changing needs of children and adolescents with serious emotional disturbances and their families. The goal of the System is to reduce hospitalizations, keep children in their own homes, and provide services within their own communities.

In 2001, the Systems of Care model was tested in Kay and Tulsa Counties. The results were so promising that the legislature allocated additional funds in 2002 to start new projects in Canadian, Bechkam and Oklahoma counties. In 2003, Oklahoma received a major federal grant to help expand the program into new communities.

Systems of Care has become a highly successful "best practice" model for providing services to children with serious emotional disturbance and their families. Among the first 261 Oklahoma children to complete the six months of treatment in a system of care project, there was a 75% decrease in arrests and a 75% decrease in in-school suspension days. The cost of out-of-home placements, such as foster care and inpatient psychiatric treatment, decreased by 61%. There are currently SOC projects in 14 counties. Additional funding would allow expansion of the program into eight additional communities.

Child victims of trauma, such as domestic violence, are among the highest risk group for development of emotional disturbances and subsequent mental illness. Last year, DMHSAS established programs in 10 communities across the state to specifically address this at-risk population and provide early intervention treatment. Research based therapies are being utilized. Expansion of this initiative is needed to reach more children, particularly in larger communities.

Fiscal Note: The Oklahoma Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services is requesting \$1,000,000 for the expansion of Systems of Care, and \$500,000 to provide services to child victims of trauma. *Total request: \$1,500,000*

Recommendation:

The Children's Agenda supports increasing the funding for community-based behavioral health services for children and youth (0-21) including the expansion of Systems of Care statewide.