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School-Based Public Health Nurse Program Evaluation 2006-2010 PDHU and AMDSB

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Coordination of Evaluation

- **Morden Street Research Services** - Kristina Trim
- **AMDSB** - Michael Ash, Anne Copeland
- **PDHU** - Carol MacDougall, Dianne Ferguson-Brown, Renate van Dorp, Tracy Allan-Koester
- Lynn Bowering Consulting (Oct-Dec 09)

Perth County

- Located in the heart of South Western Ontario. Population of approx. 75,000
- Mix of rural and small urban centers
- City of Stratford (33,000), towns of Listowel, St. Marys, Milverton, and Mitchell
- No county-wide public transportation, fewer services than larger urban centers

Achieving Health Promoting Schools: Guidelines for promoting health in schools

- Healthy school policies
- School's physical environment
- School's social environment
- Individual health skills and action competencies
- Community links
- Health services

(IUHPE, 2009)

Introduction/Background

- In 2000, AMDSB pilot SBPHN Program: **2 FTEs** PHNs for 7 elementary and 2 secondary schools
- Now **~5.5 FTEs** in 18 elementary & 5 secondary AMDSB schools and **0.8 FTE** in 5 HPCDSB elementary schools [started in 2007]
- In 2008/09, over **1000 students** seen

SBPHNs provide:

- **Individual Services**
 - counselling, coordination, consultation, referral to services
- **Small Group Services**
 - small group sessions on health issues, parent education
- **Community Development for Healthy Schools**
 - relevant school & community meetings and school-wide health promotion

Philosophy of SBPHN Program

- Strengths-based approach
- Solution-focused practice
- Supportive assessment, counselling, consultation and referral
- Safe, accepting, non-judgemental environment
- Confidential

Purpose of Evaluation

- To demonstrate the **impact** of the Individual Services component of the SBPHN Program **on student health and educational outcomes**
- To identify any **needed improvements** to the program

Methods

- **Survey for students 12 years and older** —hand-delivered by SBPHN
- **Survey for parents of children under 12** (to be done in collaboration with child/ren)—mailed
- **Electronic survey for AMDSB staff** involved with program (principals, vice-principals; teachers; teaching support staff, e.g. guidance, resource support; other staff, e.g. EAs, secretaries)
- **Principals focus group**
- **SBPHNs focus group**

Student and Parent Surveys Sample

- All **current** student clients
September 2009-May 2010
- All discharged student clients for **three preceding school years**:
Sep 2006-Aug 2009 (06/07, 07/08, 08/09)

Response Rates

- Students 12 and older: 645 surveys sent; 485 surveys returned: **75% response rate**
- Parents of students under 12: 328 sent; 44 surveys returned: **13% response rate**
- Of the student respondents 12 and older, **43% identified as male and 57% identified as female**

Results will be reported in square brackets, with

- the first number being the response % from **parents of students under 12**
- the second number being the response % from **students 12 and older**

Highlights of Student and Parent Surveys

- Majority of students went to school nurse for:
 - Social skills or behavioural issues
 - Psychological and emotional well-being
- Most common issues were:
 - Family life/relationships [70; 64]
 - How I feel about myself [46; 32]
 - Relationships with other students [41; 38]

Highlights of Student and Parent Surveys – cont'd

- The School Nurse (% of respondents who strongly agreed or agreed):
 - made my child/me feel comfortable [91; 88]
 - made my child/I feel that our discussions were private [98; 90]
 - is/was a good listener [51; 94]
 - gave my child/me information we could understand [85; 90]
 - told my child/me where I could get more help if I wanted it [69; 79]
- Overall, my child/I received the help needed when met with School Nurse [88; 80]

Highlights of Student and Parent Surveys – cont'd

- Reported impact of the School Nurse on the student (% of respondents who strongly agreed or agreed):
 - **Deal with problems better [71; 76]**
 - **More hopeful about future [64; 68]**
 - **Not as worried about things [58; 78]**
 - Get along better with people at school [63; 62]
 - Get along better with people at home [57; 62]
 - Make better decisions about healthy living [58; 54]
 - Get into less trouble at school [48; 55]
 - **Have done better with marks [47; 41]**
 - **Have done better with schoolwork [46; 40]**
 - **School attendance has improved [40; 33]**

- Overall, how helpful have you found that working with the School Nurse has been? [where 1.0 = extremely unhelpful and 10.0 = extremely helpful]
 - students under 12: Mean **7.9**
 - students 12 and over: Mean **7.4**

Areas for improvement

- Parents asked for **more communication** between School Nurse and parents, and **more frequent meetings** between School Nurse and students
- Students felt program fine as was, but minority asked for **male nurses, more appointments**

Teachers/School Staff Survey

- Response rate: **24%** (167 / 711)
- Of the 167 surveys returned:
 - **principals and vice-principals** (2.8%)
 - **teachers** (34% elementary; 14% secondary)
 - **teaching support staff**, e.g. guidance, resource support (14%)
 - **other staff**, e.g., EAs, secretaries (7.8%)
- **75%** had direct working contact with School Nurse

Teachers/School Staff Survey Results

- Reasons for referral/most common issues referred were entirely consistent with those reported by students and parents
- **58%** have no difficulties making referrals
- Issues that make referral process difficult:
 - School Nurse has a large caseload or waiting list (18.6%)
 - Parents decline consent for students under 12 (9%)

Teachers/School Staff Survey Results – cont'd

- Over **90%** felt the School Nurse:
 - is approachable
 - acts professionally
 - maintains the confidentiality of students and families
 - focuses on students' strengths
 - has the skills and knowledge to meet students' needs [see p. 75 for more details]

Teachers/School Staff Survey Results – cont'd

- Reported impact of the School Nurse on students (% strongly agree or agree):
 - **Improved social/emotional/mental health (87)**
 - **Deal with problems better (85)**
 - **Get along better with people at school (81)**
 - Seem more hopeful about their future (78)
 - Get into less trouble at school (74)
 - Have shown improvement with their schoolwork (72)
 - Make better decisions about healthy living (64)
 - Have improved physical health (63)
 - **Have improved attendance (59)**
 - **Have shown improvement with their marks (54)**

Teachers/School Staff Survey Results – cont'd

- **89%** of school staff respondents strongly agreed or agreed that “Overall, students received the help they needed when they met with the nurse”
- Overall, how helpful has it been to work with the School Nurse? [where 1.0 = extremely unhelpful and 10.0 = extremely helpful]
 - Mean **8.2**

Teachers/School Staff Survey Results – cont'd

- Strengths of SBPHN Program:
 - Nurses were a **resource** to assist the teacher in helping the students focus on school
- Weaknesses of SBPHN Program:
 - Want the nurses to provide **more services** and have **more time** in the schools

Teacher Quote

- The SBPHN Program provides
“an opportunity for kids to connect with a health professional in a setting where they may be more comfortable...not sure if as many would make the effort to seek out services outside the building. The students relate well to our Nurse and make an effort to seek her out when needed. Building relationships with the kids is key.”

Focus Group Results

- SBPHNs Focus Group: all **9** nurses participated
- Principals Focus Group: **5/23** principals participated (22%)
- Consistency between both groups regarding how they view the benefits of the program for students, families, and school staff

Focus Group Results – cont'd

- Benefits were that SBPHNs provided:
 - Stable and consistent health and mental health care
 - In an environment that the students find familiar to them
 - To a community that is underserved for health and mental health care

Focus Group Results – cont'd

- Areas for improvement:
 - **More time** and opportunities to provide students and families with services
 - **Office space** for nurses with internet and phone access to communicate with parents and their public health supervisors and colleagues
 - **More** health and mental health care **providers** in the area

Focus Group Results – cont'd

- Principals felt that the care by the SBPHNs:
 - Offered them an **additional skill set** to tackle school problems over and above those traditionally offered by teachers and schools
 - Offered students and their families **counselling opportunities** to deal with their personal issues interfering with their classroom work
 - Provided teachers the opportunity to **learn more** about the issues their students face, while being able to focus on the learning needs of the students for the whole classroom

Limitations

- Low response rate by parents of students under 12 [13%] – 10% or lower is common for parent surveys
- Transient population
- Families struggling with other priorities
- Suspension of service for 6 weeks during H1N1
- Busy time of year for survey distribution (mid-May to early June)
- Difficulty distinguishing SBPHNs from other community agency workers

Discussion

- Greater reported improvement in the areas of
 - psychological & emotional well-being
 - physical health
 - social skills and behaviourthan in academic areas (marks, schoolwork, attendance), but students did point out a survey flaw that there wasn't an option to indicate if academic areas were not an issue at all (i.e., not applicable, therefore no improvement could be expected)
- Still, **33-47%** of students or parents and **54-72%** of school staff reported improvement in school success areas

Conclusion

- The SBPHN Program provided students, parents and school staff with:
 - **High quality services**
 - **Services in their local environment**
 - **Services that may not be available elsewhere in the local community**
- High levels of helpfulness reported
- Program provided students access to health care and interpersonal skills counselling
- School staff and parents less likely to see the program providing services that improved students' school performance

Principal Quote

- *“It’s a relief to know that there’s an expert there to deal with issues that none of my teachers have official training [in]. There are teachers that have good skills, there are people that are empathic, there are people that have innate health skills, but they don’t have the real training that the health nurse has. And that is hugely important.”*

For More Information

- Full evaluation report:
www.pdhu.on.ca/SBPHN_evaluation2011
- Carol MacDougall, School Health Manager
cmacdougall@pdhu.on.ca 519-271-7600 ext 322
- Michael Ash, Superintendent
michash@fc.amdsb.ca 519-527-0111 ext 113