Serving the LGBTQ Community

Young people who identify themselves within the broad category of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Questioning (LGBTQ) are a growing and diverse population. Statewide and in all programs, Delaware Guidance Services is helping those in this community with mental health needs.

Research has shown that LGBTQ youth are at an increased risk for depression, anxiety, suicidal ideation, suicide, and substance abuse and this is primarily because of pressures from society. The most significant issues facing youth in this community are non-accepting family members; bullying in school; fear of being out, open, or rejected; living with a hidden identity; and the absence of a trusted adult to turn to with questions. However, as DGS Outpatient Therapist Scott Selby, LCSW, noted, “Many issues for this population are not that much different from those in other groups.” He cited teenage angst, dating, and relationship issues as examples. Also, for some LGBTQ clients at DGS, the focus of their treatment is not necessarily related to their sexuality; they have higher needs, but certainly feel comfortable allowing disclosure with regard to their sexuality.

Kate Gehret, LCSW, is a DGS Outpatient Therapist who works with many LGBTQ clients. She described the plight faced by transgender youth. “Imagine a child born with female body parts who feels, inside, like a boy. It’s not fun, it’s not a choice, and it’s isolating.” Kate reported that outpatient counseling at DGS has helped many of her clients in this community. “They’re more hopeful about their future and relationships with family and friends,” she said.

“The keys to serving this population are unconditional acceptance, psychoeducation with regard to identity development, and working with the client and family to connect them to resources,” explained Clinical Coordinator Cori Meek, LPCMH, who works in both the Outpatient and Intensive Outpatient Program (IOP) in the Seaford clinic. Treatment in IOP is for higher risk children. This community-based program provides intensive therapy outside of the office setting. Therapeutic teams meet with children in their homes, schools, community centers, or places of worship. Clinical services might include individual, family and group therapies, psychiatric and psychological services, and the development of family support networks.

With regard to connecting clients and families to resources, Cori said, “There are a lot of good things going on in Sussex County around Gay-Straight Alliances (GSAs). GSAs are school and student led community organizations found in middle schools, high schools, colleges, and universities that are intended to provide a safe, supportive environment for LGBTQ youth.

Thirty-three middle and high schools in Delaware now have GSAs. Such organizations can be important for clients and therapists since part of the therapist’s assessment is to evaluate the school situation in order to identify needs, challenges, and resources. If a client’s school has a GSA and she is interested in joining the group, a therapist may go with her to an initial meeting. “Doing something like that for the first time can be anxiety provoking and when the therapist accompanies the client initially, it’s a great way to support the client and family through the process,” Cori noted.

Establishing a relationship with an adult mentor can be another great connection to make for clients. Clinicians in the DGS IOP program have worked with the PRIDE Council and Big Brothers, Big Sisters of Delaware to find mentors who will be a good fit and have time to spend both one-on-one with a client and also with the family.

“We teach and instill resiliency,” said Scott, which summarizes the treatment goals for Outpatient and IOP. “We also aim to identify clients before they get to a crisis point.”

Should a crisis arise for a youth, which is clinically defined as any situation that puts a youth at risk of hurting themselves or others and/or when the parent/guardian isn’t able to resolve the situation, the DGS Child Priority Response Services (CPRS) program is ready with mobile, 24-hour crisis response. Determining if a client identifies as LGBTQ is part of every CPRS assessment since this puts the youth at a higher risk for suicide, suicidal ideation, depression, and anxiety. “For LGBTQ youth whose family is not accepting of...
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their identity, they are at an even higher risk,” said Cathy Rose, LPCMH, DGS Director of Clinical Services.

“We are very supportive in these areas,” Cathy continued. “We provide plenty of information to families through psychoeducation and connect them to local resources such as Parents, Families, and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG). PFLAG is the country’s largest organization for parents, families, friends, and allies united with people who identify as LGBTQ. CPRS Crisis Clinician Rocky Polite said, “Sometimes we’re connecting them to basic outpatient counseling, but even then we’ll go the extra mile to make sure that it’s a good client-counselor fit.”

After the initial crisis assessment, a CPRS clinician formulates a safety plan which refers the client to the least restrictive environment, includes help for the family in terms of behavioral strategies to prevent another crisis, and/or referrals to long-term agencies. In the wake of a crisis, a client may also need to be admitted to a behavioral health hospital or residential treatment center.

A hospital stay, which is on average a week to ten days, is meant to stabilize a youth and ensure that symptoms are not worsening. Once symptoms are under control, the youth is discharged, but often returns to the environment in which in many cases may have triggered or contributed to their emotional/behavioral instability. In spite of the hospital stay, the core issues may remain and the transition to the next level of service may not be complete. The Collaborative, Acceptable Relationships and Engaged Systems Program (CARES) at DGS is in place to help bridge this often precarious gap.

CARES is a new short-term, intensive transitional program now working as part of the CPRS program in New Castle County. The program is particularly helpful for LGBTQ clients following a crisis since not being accepted by one’s family due to sexuality or a gender issue, can be an imminent risk factor for a client.

Lindsay Griffin, LCSW, is the CARES Grant Supervisor for DGS. “A good thing about CARES, is that we get to have individual counseling sessions with clients and also with parents/guardians. We can get both outlooks and then educate each about the other’s perspective and explain how it is impacting the relationship,” Lindsay explained.

“We work closely with the families. Acceptance is key for the parent-child relationship,” she concluded. Like other DGS programs, CARES also connects clients with appropriate services.

To paraphrase the words of the poet E. E. Cummings, sometimes it takes courage to grow up and be who you really are. DGS is proud to be serving the LGBTQ community and to be known for helping in this way. As CPRS Clinician Rocky Polite said, “The community is well-aware that we are here to serve all. Kids and families know that. We won’t pass judgement. We work through things and are as supportive as possible.”

Psychiatry Staff Update

Gunit Kaur Kahlon, M.D. recently joined the DGS staff in Dover as a full time Child and Adolescent Psychiatrist. Dr. Kahlon completed her training at Virginia Commonwealth University and at the Virginia Treatment Center for Children where she was Chief Fellow. She will provide psychiatric/prescribing services in our Seaford, Lewes and Dover offices. In addition, Dr. Kahlon will oversee the work of our two Advanced Psychiatric Nurse Practitioners working in our Sussex County clinics. Lisa Pappa, PMHNP-BC, is in our Lewes clinic and Theresa Parkhurst, PMHNP-BC, who recently rejoined our staff, works in our Seaford clinic.

Psychiatry is a critical part of the mental health treatment continuum. Approximately 45 percent of our clients receive psychiatry services in addition to their other Outpatient or Intensive Outpatient Program treatment services. Our psychiatrists conduct psychiatric evaluations, provide psychotherapy, assist with diagnoses and risk management, and consult with outside entities.

Prescribing and monitoring medications, for those who need it, is also an essential component of our psychiatric services. Our client population is experiencing extremely high levels of stress. For children, the problems have often interrupted normal development. As a result, they have

Vision:
To have quality mental health services available to every child in Delaware; to reduce the incidence of emotional problems in children.

Mission:
Delaware Guidance Services for Children & Youth, Inc. exists to provide quality mental health services for children, youth, and their families. We believe that all children have a right to good mental health and should have access to quality therapeutic care, regardless of their ability to pay.
### Highmark Walk for a Healthy Community

Join the Delaware Guidance Services Team and have fun at the Highmark Walk! Held on Saturday, June 4, at Bellevue State Park in Wilmington, on-line registration for the walk is open right up until the day before the walk. You can also register or make a donation in person that day right at the DGS table.

Registration begins at 7:45 a.m. and the 5K walk starts at 9 a.m. followed by the one-mile fun walk which begins at 9:15 a.m. There's no cost to walk, but walkers who raise or donate $30 or more will receive a t-shirt.

The Highmark Walk is great exercise and so much more. First, it's a great way to learn about and support the important work of local nonprofit health and human service organizations. By walking with the DGS team, you'll be helping young friends and neighbors in need get the quality mental health treatments they may need but otherwise wouldn't be able to afford. To register to walk with DGS and help us raise funds, log on to www.walkforahealthycommunity.org or use the easy-to-find link from our homepage at www.delawareguidance.org. You'll find all the online tools you need to rally your friends and family to participate. Bring signs to show your support for DGS, wear matching t-shirts, the options are endless! There's even the possibility to be a virtual walker, so if a friend or family member can't attend in person, he/she can still participate and support your fundraising efforts.

There's also great entertainment at the Highmark Walk. Enjoy music, pre-walk stretching and warm ups, refreshments, drawings for prizes, an information area, and strolling characters. New this year will be characters from Star Wars. Please join us for the walk and help us make a difference in the lives of Delaware’s children and youth.

### Building Resilience for a Brighter Future

With your help, Delaware Guidance Services can build a brighter tomorrow for us all. Today’s children and youth are our future and so it only makes sense to give them every chance we can to reach their potential.

The framework of DGS is a full continuum of quality mental health treatment programs for children and youth with the Outpatient Counseling Program as the cornerstone. All of our programs work in tandem with this important component of mental health treatment.

Some children face difficult changes in their lives such as family breakdown, divorce, or a death. Others struggle with anxiety, depression, or an attention problem. Still more grapple with the impact of trauma or have difficulty controlling their impulses and/or behavior. These are scared, angry young people who give up on friends, family, and their dreams and go off course in their lives.

Counseling in the DGS Outpatient Program helps. Just like placing one building block on top of another, clients in this program work with one of our highly-trained counselors to construct the resiliency, coping mechanisms, stress management techniques, emotional awareness, and behavioral modifications to make meaningful changes in their lives.

Instead of just struggling through day after day, our clients become happy, productive young people who are capable of functioning well and managing the issues in their lives.

Outpatient Counseling is also where we need your support most. Why? The reasons are many…

- DGS strives to help those with precious few financial resources—90% of the children we serve are from low income families.
- Some children are from families who don’t qualify for Medicaid but can’t afford their high-deductible or maximum out-of-pocket insurance plan.
- Insurance doesn’t cover the cost for a counselor to do whatever it takes, no matter what it takes or how long it takes, to help the children in our care, such as traveling to and from meetings with school officials and testifying on the child’s behalf in court.
- Finally, the demand for our services has long been greater than the resources we have with which to provide them.

In 2015, the statewide DGS Outpatient Program served more than 3,000 clients, however there are so many more—thousands—whose lives could be turned around if we had the resources to reach them in time.

Please consider a donation. Your gift will help build a brighter future for all of us. We couldn’t do it without you and are deeply grateful for your support.
DGS is a Best of Delaware Beneficiary

DGS is a grateful Best of Delaware Party beneficiary once again this year! The party will be held on Thursday, July 21, at the Dover Downs Hotel and Casino. During this annual event, Delaware Today celebrates the best of everything in the First State and the proceeds benefit local causes.

Drawing more than 2,000 guests each year, the party is one of the state’s most popular events. Party goers can browse and sample the offerings of Best of Delaware Winners in a variety of categories including restaurants, retailers, and services. There will be live music and dancing. An extensive silent auction will be hosted by DGS and Big Brothers and Big Sisters of Delaware, our fellow beneficiary.

Be sure to use the promotional code DGS16 to get $5 off your Best of Delaware Party ticket price!

For more information on the party, including tickets and sponsorships, check: http://www.delawaretoday.com.