

CLARKSTON AREA YOUTH ASSISTANCE

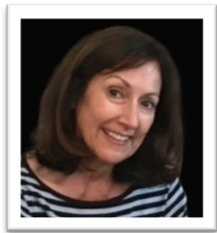
Since 1961



ANNUAL REPORT

2023-2024

Executive Team



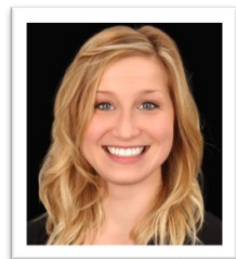
Jan Scislowicz
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Jackie Fromm
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From the Chair

Jan Scislowicz

I started volunteering for Clarkston Area Youth Assistance (CAYA) in 2008 for an afterschool program called the Homework Club (HWC). I had been retired as a science teacher from Cranbrook Girls' Middle School for 7 years and I was more than ready to work with students again.

I saw an ad in the local paper requesting volunteers to work with school-age kids helping them with their homework. I called the number and spoke with Anita Dempster, who at that time was chairing CAYA and running the HWC with Joyce Bleim. I was told that there was a 1st grade boy who would not talk, much less work with any of the tutors and asked if I would try to work with him. I agreed. Our first meeting began without eye contact. He wouldn't look at me. As is typical of my nature, I talked about many different things, one of which was about my dog. I could have sworn that my student looked at me for a split second. I continued talking and told him that I taught my son how to play football when he was very young. BINGO! His eyes lit up and a fantastic relationship was forged. He loved animals and football. I tutored this boy for 8 years with astounding progress. He became a skilled football player with the Clarkston Chiefs and earned excellent grades in school. He was a sensitive and caring young man. I must add that his parents were highly supportive and caring people.

My experience volunteering at the HWC was highly rewarding and the reason that I decided to continue working with CAYA in a broader spectrum of activities. There are always exciting challenges to develop programs that best meet the needs of the families and youth in our community. On that note, the HWC is currently going through a transformation into a new after school program.

The HWC is just one of the many ways that Clarkston Area Youth Assistance accomplishes its mission: **To strengthen youth and families and to reduce the incidence of delinquency, abuse and neglect through community involvement.** Everything we do focuses on prevention and strengthening families. Our primary and secondary prevention programs and services are described in this Annual Report.

Clarkston Area Youth Assistance is a dynamic organization that utilizes compassionate and dedicated community volunteers to help improve the lives of others in our hometown and beyond. We invite you to join us in this life changing endeavor.

Sincerely,
Jan Scislowicz

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Tricia Delude

Jamie Graves

Judy Parnes

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Caseworker

Sherry Snudden
Office Manager

Oakland County Youth Assistance

Liz Csizmadia
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Anna Torres
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Family Education

Jamie Graves, Chair

The Family Education Committee identifies and plans educational programs to promote family growth and youth development. Topics are chosen based on community trends. In the 2023-2024 school year, the Family Education Committee offered five programs: a three part series on resiliency that included Raising Resilient Kids, Helping Kids/Teens Handle Stress, and Rising From Challenges; a Girls Stand Strong group for middle school girls; and one session of the Power of Choice class. Easterseals also created the SMARTER Choices program, per our request, for middle schoolers. However, it did not run due to low enrollment, but we are hoping to run it this year.

The **Resiliency Series** interactive presentations were done by Diana Jennings, MS LLP and were designed for both students and parents to participate. Topics included strategies to promote resilience at home, how to help your child/teen strengthen their mental resilience and prepare to face life's challenges, how to recognize the signs and symptoms of stress, learn and practice mindfulness, and other stress reduction activities. Participants also practiced hands-on activities involving five protective mechanisms for resiliency building, wellness, and self-empowerment. Additionally, they also engaged in interactive activities based on the seven factors that promote resiliency and help adolescents cope effectively with adversity (insight, relationships, independence, initiative, creativity, humor, morality). All elements of these workshops were designed to promote communication, connectedness, openness, and engagement between family members. There were 60 total attendees that included 45 parents and 15 children.

The **Girls Stand Strong** group for middle school girls was facilitated by Samantha Walters and met for an hour and a half once a week for four weeks. The group covered self-esteem, healthy body image, decision-making, and positive communication skills. In total, 9 to 11 girls participated weekly.



Power of Choice is an educational class that teaches 8th-12th grade students about the risks of substance use. The class had a total of 9 attendees and was facilitated by Joan Baert from Easterseals.

Camp & Skill Building Scholarships



A big **“THANK YOU”** to our community partnerships for making these scholarship programs available for students to enjoy these experiences: Clarkston Community Schools, Independence Township Parks & Recreation, Camp Copneconic, Camp Ohiyesa, Independence Township, David W. Elliott Memorial Foundation, Goldfish Swim, Servant’s Heart Isshinryu Karate School, Karen Petterson Memorial Fund, Clarkston Conservatory, Bestway Driving School and an anonymous donor.

“I really enjoyed being able to attend Camp Copneconic 2024. I loved the food, meeting new people, playing football, swimming, being on Team Wolf, and being able to have new experiences.” -Camper



Youth Recognition Judy Parnes, Chair

The 2024 Youth Recognition Ceremony will be remembered as an evening of applause. On the evening of April 25th at Clarkston Junior High School, 71 students, from Young Fives to Grade 12, were recognized and celebrated for growth in personal well-being and/or for demonstrating their concern for the well-being of others. Each of the honorees received their own round of applause from over 350 proud appreciative family and community members, including over 40 nominators. As guests took their seats, three Clarkston High School students sang lovely solos.

Speaking at the Ceremony were: MC, Cari Neubeck, Independence Township Clerk; the Keynote Speaker, Staci Puzio, Director of Student Growth, Well-being, and Community Partnerships; and making Sponsor Remarks, Paul Brown, Independence Township Treasurer. **Staci Puzio noted how the honorees embody the essence of humanity and served as a beacon of hope for all of us.** Paul Brown directly addressed the honorees as “dignitaries” in their own right, telling them that their acts of kindness are like the kindness students had shown him 50 years ago--that inspires him to be kind to others to this day.

Each honoree’s affirmation, based on nominator words, was read aloud for all to hear, as the honorees walked across the stage, receiving heartfelt congratulations from dignitaries representing Clarkston Community Schools (CCS), Independence Township, Springfield Township, City of the Village of Clarkston, CCS Board of Education, Oakland County Prosecutor’s Office, and Oakland County Board of Commissioners. Directly following the Ceremony, everyone was treated to a festive Dessert Reception.



Finally, there is the rest of the Youth Recognition story, often unseen. **BEFORE** the Ceremony, every attempt is made to follow-up on RSVPs, even up to the day of the Ceremony, so honorees will have this special experience to feel seen, honored, acknowledged, valued, and loved. **DURING** the Ceremony, a CCS photographer captured some of the special moments of the connections made between the dignitaries and the honorees—quiet moments filled with pride, empathy, warmth, and love. **AFTER** the Ceremony, honorees leave with a folder of personalized certificates provided by area dignitaries, a printed copy of their own affirmation suitable for framing, and lifelong positive memories to call upon for years to come.

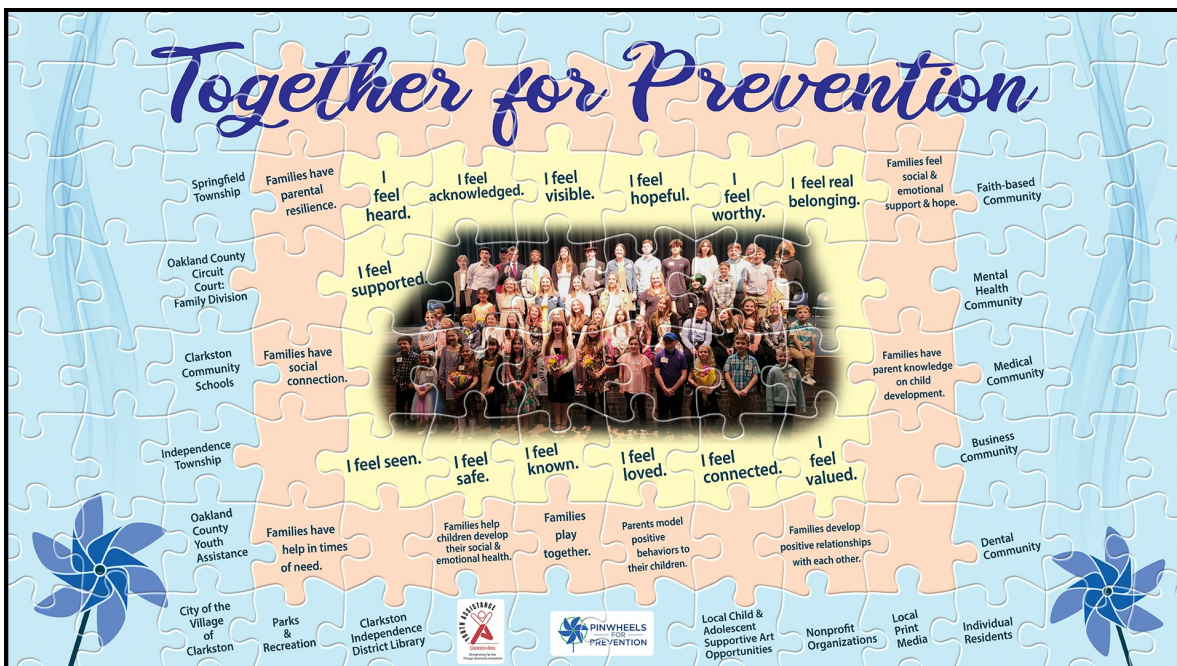


Pinwheels for Prevention Judy Parnes, Chair

This is a strength-based proactive program to PREVENT child and adolescent adversity and maltreatment, including child abuse—BEFORE IT HAPPENS—through strengthening the well-being of children, adolescents, and families. The focus is on PRIMARY PREVENTION—often ordinary things we can do every day to promote well-being. **Our Projects:**

Community Kick-Off: **TOGETHER FOR PREVENTION**

On the morning of March 14, CAYA's Pinwheels for Prevention Committee and CCS cohosted 36 guests, representing a cross-section of our community. Three brief narratives were presented, highlighting the importance of small acts of primary prevention and well-being: Lauren Klos, CAYA's Caseworker, presented **Everyone Has a Story**; Staci Puzio, CCS Director of Student Growth, Well-Being and Community Partnerships, presented "When a child walks into a room, your child or anyone else's child, do your eyes light up? That's what they are looking for." - Toni Morrison; Julie Meredith, Director of the CIDL, presented **Your One Small Act of Kindness Could Make a Big Difference to Someone Else**. By tradition, CCS Superintendent Dr. Shawn Ryan offered the "last word" this year regarding the importance of well-being for our youth.



This puzzle metaphor was shared at the Kick-Off to help define what well-being looks like for youth, families, and the community.

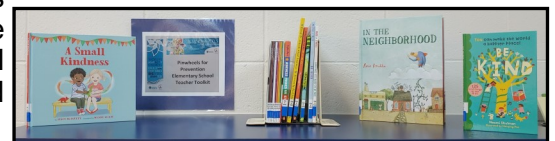
Blue Pinwheel Gardens of Prevention:



- 1,284 blue pinwheels planted
- 52 pinwheel gardens throughout the community
- Each garden had a yard sign promoting well-being
- CHS students in A World of Difference Class (AWOD) help with recycling the pinwheels each year

Elementary Pinwheel Bookmarks:

This year, 3,000 bookmarks were distributed, reminding students to be kind and welcoming. Each elementary school has a designated section in the school library for books reflecting the messaging of the bookmarks. Every book has a guide for classroom teachers, including a recommended grade level range. Seven more books were added to the nine books provided last year. Our partners were CCS, CIDL and Friends of the CIDL.



Caseworker Report

Lauren Klos, LMSW

“I was really nervous and thought that you were going to judge me for what I had gotten into doing, but when I first came in and saw your face and your smile, it was really nice. It made me feel comforted without you saying a word. It was like your presence just made me feel better and get better just because of you. I thought about you every time I thought about going back. I thought of you and I didn’t do it because of you. Thank you so much for your help, you mean a lot to me and I’ll miss you a lot.” -From a student, Winter 2024.

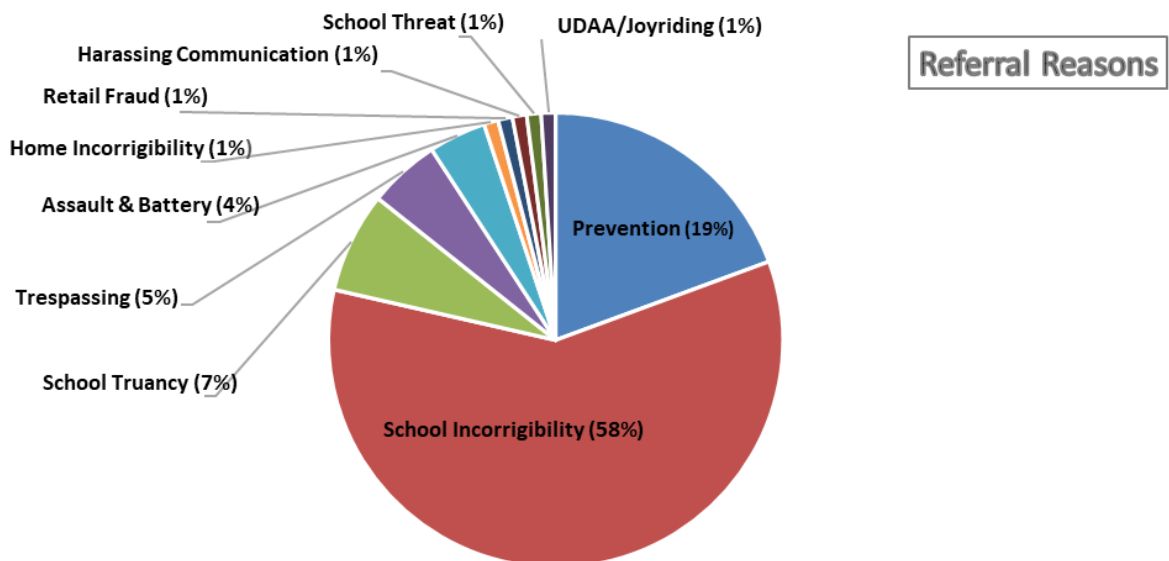
I get teary eyed every time I read this quote from a student I worked with this past year. It never gets old to see the impact of our Casework Services on youth and families. When I’m finishing up a case with a family, I have them write down how they felt at their first YA appointment and then how they feel on their last day. Some answers are short and to the point. Others write long paragraphs. Some even draw pictures. Then there are some answers that really touch me, like the quote above. Of course, most answers reflect some measure of growth and progress in the student and family. I always enjoy reflecting with the families on how things were when we started and how they are now as we end services.

Many parents and students reflect feelings of nervousness, fear, frustration, anger, and disappointment at their first appointment. One parent stated, “The first day I was feeling unsure of what to expect. I was hopeful that Youth Assistance would help [my student] learn more coping skills and gain support with better decision making. I left the first meeting feeling reassured that coming was the right choice.”

By the time we get to the case closure, many youth and parents recognize all the growth and progress they made over the course of being involved in YA Casework Services. “I am happy with the work we have done as a family with Lauren. I am happy I have resources moving forward to continue to reach our goals and maintain a healthy family relationship,” said one parent at our last appointment. As always, seeing such positive growth in youth and families encourages me to keep on keeping on, day after day and year after year.

Top 10 Trends: July 2023-June 2024

- | | |
|---|---|
| 1. Substance use: alcohol, vaping, marijuana | 4. Decision-making skills |
| 2. Parent support – connection to resources, parenting strategies/ideas/resources | 5. Friendships/peer conflicts |
| 3. Diversion cases—completing accountability assignments- community service (121 hours completed), vision boards, videos, research projects, court hearings, essays, apology letters | 6. Coping Skills |
| | 7. Mental Health |
| | 8. Family Relationships |
| | 9. Inappropriate Comments (racial, sexual) |
| | 10. Communication Skills |



Fiscal Year-End Totals

Casework Services: July 2023 to June 2024

161 total cases from July 2023 to June 2024:
74 New Referrals, plus 87 Open Cases from previous fiscal year

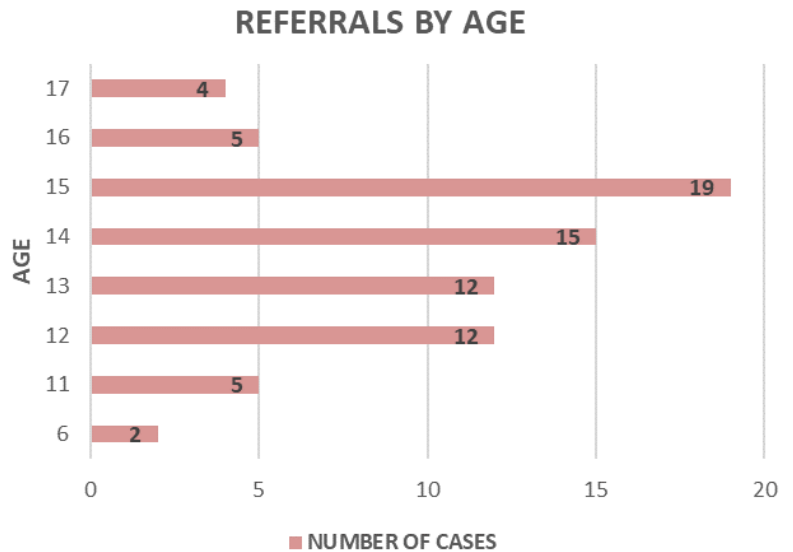
35 Information and Referral Consultations

215 total families impacted by Casework Services

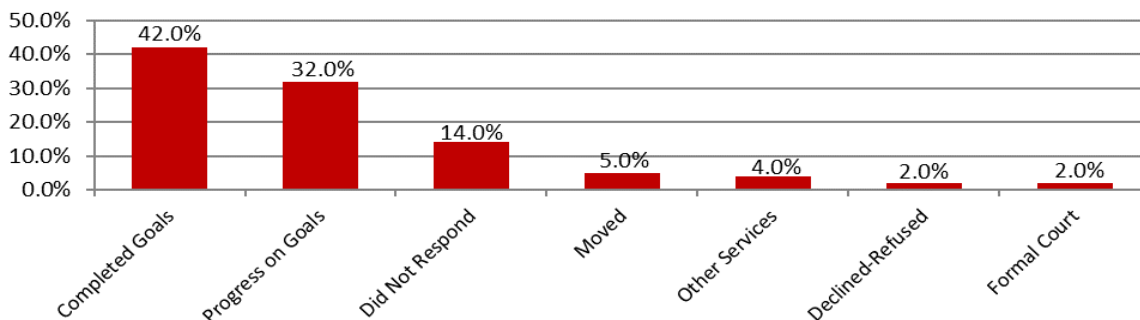
72% of new referrals engaged in services
9% - some contact, but not fully engaged in services yet
9% - started services, but did not finish
9% - did not engage in services

Fiscal year-end totals for new referrals:

REFERRAL SOURCE	TOTAL CASES
SCHOOL DISTRICT	60
OC JUVENILE INTAKE DEPARTMENT	7
PARENT/GUARDIAN	2
OC PROSECUTOR	2
CIPT INTAKE	1
COMMUNITY AGENCY	1
MDHHS/CPS	1
TOTAL	74



Closure Reasons (103 closures in 2023-2024)



“I feel confident in myself and much happier and I feel that this helped raise those feelings more. It was also great to get lots of new information from an educated mind.” - From a student, Spring 2024

“I feel very proud of [my daughter] for meeting her goals...She has accomplished a lot and made a lot of progress in the last 6 months.” - From a parent, Spring 2024

CAYA SPONSORS



Thank you to our sponsors, donors, volunteers and community partners. We appreciate the kindness, compassion, and donations that have been contributed.

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Pinwheels For Prevention Donors:

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Essence on Main Mercantile
Melissa Bridgman's A World of Difference Class

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Clarkston Living Magazine

Clarkston Area Youth Assistance is a volunteer-driven community organization. It is one of 26 Youth Assistance programs in Oakland County. Oakland County Youth Assistance is administered under the auspices of the Oakland County Circuit Court-Family Division. Principal funding is provided through the Oakland County Board of Commissioners. Each local Youth Assistance office operates with the sponsorship and financial support of its local school district and municipalities. Volunteers work with the Caseworker to plan and sponsor local prevention programs for youth and their families. More financial information is available in the office.