



OPERATIONAL AUDIT REVIEW MARY J. SHERLACH COUNSELING CENTER

James W. Henderson Financial/Accounting Controls Analyst

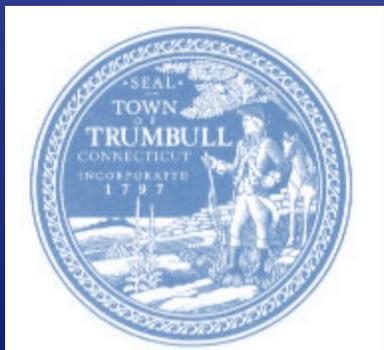


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January 9, 2014

Mrs. Elaine Hammers, Chairperson
Board of Finance
Town of Trumbull
5866 Main Street
Trumbull, CT. 06611

Dear Mrs. Hammers:

I respectfully submit the enclosed report entitled **Operational Audit Review of the Mary J. Sherlach Counseling Center.**

This audit examines the operations and functions of the Mary J. Sherlach Counseling Center as well as the policies and procedures of the Center.

- Provide an overview of the Mary J. Sherlach Counseling Center
- Review policies and procedures of the Center
- Examine counseling practices
- Examine utilization of services

I would like to thank the counselors of the Mary J. Sherlach Counseling Center Robin Bieber and Victor Olsen for their assistance in this audit as well as Director of Nursing Coleen Figliuzzi.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "James Henderson".

James Henderson
Financial/Accounting Controls Analyst

Executive Summary

The Mary J. Sherlach Counseling Center has been offering mental health counseling services for a numbers of years in the community. The center is staffed by Robin Bieber, M.S. who is a licensed Marriage and Family Therapist. Robin has been with the agency since 1988. Victor Olsen, M.A. is also a licensed Marriage and Family Therapist. Victor has been with the agency since 1992. The center also utilizes the services of two interns from Fairfield University. The review covered all mental health counseling services offered by the Mary J. Sherlach Counseling Center. The Center is not accredited by any outside agency however the Center is a Youth Service Bureau and a member of the Connecticut Youth Service Association.

The review examined: counseling services offered; utilization of counseling services; and all issues, challenges, and possible enhancements related to the administration of mental health counseling services at the Center.

Mental Health Services Offered

Mental health counseling services offered are individual counseling, family counseling, support groups, crisis intervention and information and referral services. These services are consistent with those offered by other counseling centers around the state.

Counseling services are held at the Mary J. Sherlach Counseling Center located at 121 Old Mine Road. Services are offered from 8:30 AM till 5:00 PM Monday thru Friday and also offer sessions after 5:00 PM by appointment only.

The Mary J. Sherlach Counseling Center is a department of the Town of Trumbull dedicated to enhancing the quality of life in Trumbull by providing family counseling for Trumbull residents and their families. Typical counseling goals include family interventions to address childhood attention deficit and behavior issues, parent-child conflicts, adolescent concerns, juvenile court deferrals, domestic violence, divorce issues, and individual or family psychotherapy.

When working with children, staff counselors strive to develop a team approach to treatment, coordinating the services of parents, teachers, guidance counselors, and doctors, as needed. Confidentiality is strictly enforced according to the wishes of clients or parents. The team approach is by the client's permission only, and not required. Services can also be coordinated with outpatient hospital aftercare.

Program Administration and Staffing

The Mary J. Sherlach Counseling Center is staffed by two full-time experienced counselors along with two interns. Victor Olsen, M.A. is a member of the American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy and is a licensed Marriage and Family Therapist. He is also an Approved Supervisor. The Approved Supervisor designation identifies those professionals who have met the educational, experiential, and supervisory training requirements to supervise marriage and family therapists, for AAMFT Clinical Fellow Membership.

Robin Bieber is a licensed Marriage and Family Therapist who specializes in adolescent treatment. Robin created a program called the Wildflower Adventure group that utilizes challenging outdoor activities to engage girls in ways that traditional therapy cannot. She began her career working at a domestic violence program.

At the present time the position of administrative assistant is vacant due to a retirement this past June.

The AAMFT has established and maintained standards for the practice of marriage and family therapy. The AAMFT's members and Approved Supervisors must fulfill stringent education and training requirements.

The American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy promulgates a code of ethics standards:

I. Responsibility to Clients

Marriage and family therapists advance the welfare of families and individuals. They respect the rights of those persons seeking their assistance, and make reasonable efforts to ensure their services are used appropriately.

II. Confidentiality

Marriage and family therapists have unique confidentiality concerns because the client in a therapeutic relationship may be more than one person. Therapists respect and guard the confidences of each individual client.

III. Professional Competence and Integrity

Marriage and family therapists maintain high standards of professional competence and integrity.

IV. Responsibility to Students and Supervisees

Marriage and family therapists do not exploit the trust and dependency of students and supervisees.

V. Responsibility to Research Participants

Investigators respect the dignity and protect the welfare of research participants, and are aware of applicable laws, regulations, and professional standards governing the conduct of research.

VI. **Responsibility to the Profession**

Marriage and family therapists respect the rights and responsibilities of professional colleagues and participate in activities that advance the goals of the profession.

VII. **Financial Arrangements**

Marriage and family therapists make financial arrangements with clients, third-party payers, and supervisees that are reasonably understandable and conform to accepted professional practices.

VIII. **Advertising**

Marriage and family therapists engage in appropriate informational activities, including those that enable the public, referral sources, or others to choose professional services on an informed basis.

Financial Support and Options

Salaries and fringe benefits account for most of the expenditures for the counseling center services. The 2013-14 budget of \$226,869.00 is made up of \$213,608.00 of salaries and fringe benefits. The Center receives a Youth Service Bureau Grant which helps to fund some of the center's programs such as the Wildflower Adventure Group, Kids on the Hill Social Skills Group and the Chess Club. Minimal funding is received from outside sources.

The Kids on the Hill group is designed to accommodate children who need attention and direction in adjusting to social situations and activities with peers

The Wildflower Adventure Group was started in 1997 as a positive youth prevention program for High School age girls. The program consists of a wide variety of challenging outdoor activities designed to increase self-esteem and leadership ability.

Modest fees are charged to clients based on each individual's or family's ability to pay .An agreement is signed by the client or clients prior to treatment. Cost of counseling service ranges from \$5.00 to \$30.00 per visit. There is no charge for the first appointment. A fee structure schedule is utilized based on family income to determine how much a client will be charged per session. Sessions are scheduled for approximately forty-five minutes. Medical insurance and credit cards are not accepted. A weekly activity sheet of clients seen is maintained with the amount collected from the client. The Center does not track statistical outcomes of the clients they see. Although a client satisfaction questionnaire is one of the requirements of the Center's Youth Service Bureau Grant.

Canceled and missed appointments are tracked on a weekly basis.

Scope

- What counseling services are offered?
- Examine utilization of services
- Identify issues, challenges, and potential enhancements related to the administration of counseling services offered by the Mary J. Sherlach Counseling Center

To conduct review:

1. Site walk through of the Mary J. Sherlach Counseling Center
2. Conducted interviews with the staff of the Center
3. Reviewed studies and articles on counseling services
4. Examined counseling practices
5. Reviewed policies and procedures of the Center

Findings and Recommendations

Finding 1

The Mary J. Sherlach Counseling Center is sometimes left unsecured which allows anyone from the public to enter the building with no town personnel at the site.

Recommendation

The building when unoccupied should always be secured to prevent vandalism and theft of town property. More than one person should always be on the premises during regular business hours given the isolated location of the Counseling Center. Two people should always be in the building especially in the evening hours of operation.

Response

There are occasions when staff is out of the office for meetings and conferences, and to conduct therapeutic group activities. Generally, one or two staff members are in the building at all times during business hours. Currently, one staff position is vacant and in the process of being filled. Staff recognizes the need for security of the building and can keep the building locked when unattended. Staff recognizes the recommendation to have two employees in the building at all times. When this is not possible staff can keep the doors locked with a door bell for the secure entry of clientele. Evening appointments are by appointment only. Staff is trained in crisis management including 911 emergencies. Trumbull Police, Fire, and EMS are familiar with the facility. Park Department rangers patrol the park at night and secure the entry gate. A security key lock-box is installed for emergency personnel access.

Finding 2

Building lacks proper signage identification to the public at large as the Town Counseling Center as well as sub-standard interior and poor outside lighting.

Recommendation

Proper signage should be located nearby the building identifying the Center as the Mary J. Sherlach Counseling Center to the general public. The sign should be clearly visible from the road to the public. Painting of the interior of the building will help improve the office space and be more welcoming to the patrons of the Center. The reception area can be upgraded with new furniture, decorated and with the use of better lighting make the initial impression more therapeutic and accommodating to the patron.

Response

Although service to town residents is generally arranged by appointment, signage would be helpful for those arriving at the office for the first time. Proper and appropriate lighting, as indicated in the recommendation would be a welcome improvement. Interior painting and updated furniture should reflect the excellent quality of service provided to the public.

Finding 3

Deposits are not made on a timely basis and left in an unsecured building.

Recommendation

Deposits should be made more than once a week to prevent possible theft of funds from the building. If funds must be secured on premises the security must be more elaborate than just a locked file cabinet. Funds not deposited should be kept in a locked safe with limited access .To help alleviate this situation since the Center is located in a remote site with a limited amount of personnel perhaps the Senior Center bus could make a run to the Counseling Center to pick up deposits and inter-office mail to be delivered to Town Hall.

Response

Deposits are generally made by the Administrative Assistant. This position is currently vacant and in the process of being filled. Staff recognizes the need for security of funds held on site between deposits. A secure safe should be installed, and deposits should be made when cash on hand exceeds \$100.00. The recommendation to include the Counseling Center in the inter-office mail delivery system would be a welcome improvement over the current method of driving to Town hall.