



It Takes A Village Program: Community Health Care Report Smart Love Family Services

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Mission:

Our mission is to help children, parents, and families achieve greater inner well-being, sustain closer relationships, and build happier, healthier lives. We do this by providing mental health counseling services, therapeutic tutoring/testing services, early childhood education, and community and parenting support programs.

1. *Identify the high risk/underserved and/or disadvantaged populations in the community(ies) that you serve and describe specifically the actions you have taken, based on relevant assessment data, to increase their accessibility to health services.*

The primary high risk/underserved and disadvantaged population Smart Love serves are African-American and Latino families. Grounded in census demographic data, community agency-derived statistics, feedback from the families of color we serve, and extensive research, Smart Love utilizes several strategies and actions to build greater health equity and increase their access to health services, including:

The *It Take A Village* program (ITAV) itself is in part designed to reduce barriers to embracing and participating in mental health care among “minority” populations, designed to provide a safe, confidential space for seeking counsel, care, and guidance for parents and youth of color, delivered by therapists who are themselves persons of color. ITAV was developed from initial inquiries from families and community organizations in Oak Park, supported by Smart Love’s own research and clinical experience;

Smart Love actively continues to recruit and employ therapists who are persons of color, as research and common experience underscore the vital importance of clinicians of color in evidencing cultural competence, shared experience, and commitment to equity;

Smart Love places particular importance on recruiting and supporting rising new clinicians of color, especially licensing trainees and recent graduates of local graduate programs in psychology and social work – providing them with clinical experience and supervision, along with the opportunity to work directly in community service programs like ITAV; and

Smart Love emphasizes outreach to local communities of color through relationships with other local service providers, direct marketing, and social media, reinforcing messaging around the organization's commitment to equity and accessibility.

2. Describe specifically the strategies you have used to gather input from high risk, underserved and/or disadvantaged population and their leaders as a basis for program or service development.

Smart Love initially developed the ITAV program in response to a request with a township community mental health board and another of its grantee organizations to address the questions, concerns, and mental health care needs of families of color in two suburban middle schools. The first year of what became a parent group program was dedicated to giving these parents the space and support to express their needs and receive care and guidance. At the same time, Smart Love's clinical staff utilized the lessons learned, research, and community inquiry to develop a curriculum for the program that debuted in the second year. By definition, the input of the participating parents was essential in informing and shaping the curriculum and adapting it over the program's ongoing lifecycle.

After the program's third year, feedback from African-American parents made it clear that the previously all-inclusive "minority family" approach needed to be revised. The Black parents indicated that they needed more specifically focused support and attention to their specific needs and concerns. This coincided with an increase in inquiries from Spanish-speaking Latino parents, resulting in turning the originally titled "Minority Family Program" into ITAV. The program now features 2 simultaneous parent groups (*Finding Strength Together* for Black parents and *Mi Familia* for Latino parents), along with a youth group that remains multicultural. A potential third parent group for biracial/multiracial families is currently in development, based on other inquiries.

3. Describe specific partnerships with other providers and community-based organizations to promote continuity of health care for high risk/underserved and/or disadvantaged populations.

Smart Love partners in varying ways with several community organizations, service providers, and public agencies to encourage access and utilization of local health care resources for the targeted populations. Among these are community mental health boards in the greater Oak Park area; the Oak Park River Forest Community Foundation; the Westlake Health Foundation, collegial providers such as DePaul Counseling Clinic, Hephzibah, and NewMoms; and community leaders at organizations such as the Oak Park Housing Center, several local religious congregations, the Collaboration for Early Childhood, and more.

4. Provide two examples of how you have used the community-oriented approach to program development specified in the attached principles to develop a program of service for high risk/underserved and/or disadvantaged populations specified in the guidelines. Include in each description components of the current program and the following quantitative information for the most recent year available:

ITAV has been developed and conducted in alignment with the Principles, noting the steps and approaches described above, including in particular:

- Serving high risk, underserved and/or disadvantaged community residents.
- Collecting assessment data about the health care needs of high risk, underserved and/or disadvantaged populations in service area.
- Implementing targeted activities to increase the accessibility of health care services to one or more high risk, underserved and/or disadvantaged population(s).
- Designing and implementing with community involvement new or expanded services to address the health care needs of one or more high risk, underserved and/or disadvantaged population(s).
- Gathering input from community leaders representing one or more high risk, underserved and/or disadvantaged population(s).
- Partnered with a wide variety of others including competitors and community based organizations to provide services effectively and efficiently to high risk, underserved and/or disadvantaged populations and promote continuity of care.
- Documentation of need from multiple perspectives including target population.
- Involving of clients in program decision making and implementation.
- Utilizing regular clinical supervision to sustain continuous quality improvement processes.
- Seeking sources of program funding to sustain program operations long-term.

The same community-based approach has been used for the preparatory research and program design for a yet-untitled program for parents of transgender/gender-fluid youth, for which Smart Love is currently seeking funding.

5. Number of clients served

35

6. Total amount budgeted by your organization for the program

\$54,500

7. Percent that program budget is of total agency budget

1.47%

8. *Percent of program budget that is directly reimbursed by third party payers*

0%

9. *Percent of program budget that is covered by public/private grants*

92% (remaining 8% funded through Smart Love general operating funds)