

The School-Based Mental Health initiative is helping make therapy accessible to children within the school environment, while the “I am more than...” mental health campaign is working to increase awareness of services for mental health within our community.

THE ISSUE

Mental health concerns that go untreated can have a devastating effect on individuals and families. Mental health is as critical as physical health and typically goes hand-in-hand with overall well-being. In Georgia, approximately 91,000 children have a serious emotional disorder of which over 85,000 have a mental health need and are not receiving support or treatment. Furthermore, the development of behavioral and mental health disorders leads to poor academic achievement, and is a major determinant of a person’s opportunities for employment and social mobility. While awareness around mental health is getting better, there is still a stigma attached to getting help. These facts are alarming.

UNITED WAY’S ROLE

United Way is a direct funder of mental health services through our Impact Fund and currently funds programs specifically around school based mental health in elementary and middle schools in Clayton, DeKalb and Fulton counties. These programs provide therapy in the school environment, which helps to alleviate access to care barriers and has also shown to have an impact on school attendance and behavior issues. In addition, United Way has convened a planning group of about six agency partners for the last two years to build awareness activities around the mental health stigma through a campaign called I Am More Than. The campaign focuses on increasing awareness of the mental health services available in greater Atlanta, the challenges surrounding it and how we might work together to begin to create solutions for the health of families and our communities.

THE RESULTS

Within its first year, the School Based Mental Health program served a reported **154 children and 133 parents** in both elementary and middle schools across Clayton, DeKalb, and Fulton counties. The programs evaluated clinical therapy outcomes, academic achievement, school attendance and behavior; and assisted in connecting students to interventions. In 2017, the “I Am More Than”... mental health learning forum had more than 200 attendees with a strong focus on strengthening mental health supports for children, families and the greater community. This work has directly impacted the implementation of the school-based mental health programs in the region.

