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Nationally-Recognized “Parents and Teachers as Allies” Program Addressing Mental Health of Youth to be Offered to Local Schools

Community Foundation’s \$10,000 Catalyst Grant to Fund Training, Raise Awareness

New Britain, Conn., November 21, 2013 – As the one-year anniversary of the Sandy Hook Elementary tragedy nears, and the national dialogue continues over the state of mental health of our youth, the [Community Foundation of Greater New Britain](#) is doing its part to further the discussion, raise awareness and fulfill its role as a community resource.

This week, members of the Foundation’s [Catalyst Fund](#) awarded a \$10,000 grant to the [Connecticut chapter of the National Alliance on Mental Illness \(NAMI\)](#). The funding will be used to bring the Alliance’s nationally-recognized “[Parents and Teachers as Allies](#)” training program to teachers, school administrators and parents in Berlin, New Britain, Plainville and Southington. The program helps families and school professionals be better equipped to identify warning signs of early-onset mental illness, and increases awareness and knowledge of community resources available to address the issue.

“We are thrilled to be selected for this grant and to now have the capacity to bring this important program to Greater New Britain,” said NAMI Connecticut Executive Director Kate Mattias. “This program is really going to bring to the schools an opportunity to learn about early onset mental illness, how to identify it and how to communicate and share resources with parents.”

“Our Catalyst Fund members had a difficult choice to make this year as all of our applicants for this grant offered outstanding, effective programming to address this important issue,” said David Obedzinski, tri-chair of the 2013 Catalyst Fund effort along with his wife, Linda, and daughter, Katie. “We are very enthusiastic about NAMI Connecticut’s program and its potential to help and enlighten New Britain-area families and educators.”

According to Mattias, one in five children nationwide has a mental illness, but less than 50 percent receive services. She offered other alarming statistics: Suicide is the second leading cause of death among children ages 10-14 in Connecticut; 70 percent of adolescents in the juvenile justice system have a mental illness; and 62 percent of children with a disability who drop out of school have behavioral health issues.

“Teachers need information and education on children’s mental health so they can talk to parents and caregivers and be better prepared to help students,” said Mattias. “That’s what Parents and Teachers as Allies is all about.”

Parents and Teachers as Allies is a two-hour in-service training during which NAMI-trained panelists offer personal insight and perspective along with specific tips and information about how to identify the early warning signs of mental illness, family response, living with mental illness and community resources. The panel consists of someone who is living with mental illness and who first exhibited symptoms in school; a parent or caregiver of a child with mental illness; and an educator who is also a parent or caregiver.

The Parents and Teachers as Allies program, begun nationally by NAMI in 2005, is offered in all 50 states and has served thousands of educators and parents. Here in Connecticut, NAMI has offered the program to more than 30 school districts, reaching some 1,800 professionals and parents. Southington High School, said Mattias, is the only school in the Foundation's four-community service area where the program has been presented to date.

The grant funding will be used not only to bring the program to interested schools and to support related outreach efforts, but also to train new panel members – ideally from the New Britain area, said Mattias – and to identify two current Parents and Teachers as Allies presenters to be trained by NAMI in St. Louis as state trainers, which will increase the organization's capacity to recruit and train even more presenters.

With the grant funding in place, Mattias said that NAMI Connecticut's next step is to reach out to school administrators in Berlin, New Britain, Plainville and Southington with additional information and to begin the process of scheduling 2014 presentations.

The Catalyst Fund is a giving circle of donors interested in improving the quality of life in Berlin, New Britain, Plainville and Southington. Three times per year, members gather to learn about a member-chosen issue facing their community, and to consider funding requests from charitable organizations addressing the issue. The group awards an annual grant of \$10,000.

For more information about the Catalyst Fund, contact Cheryl Farmer cfarmer@cfgnb.org or (860)229-6018, ext. 305.

Established in 1941, the Community Foundation of Greater New Britain connects donors who care with causes that matter in Berlin, New Britain, Plainville and Southington. It does this by raising resources and developing partnerships that make a measurable improvement in the quality of life in each of these communities. For more information, visit www.cfgnb.org.