

Minority Family Program: Community Health Care Report

Smart Love Family Services

2222 N. Kedzie Blvd, Chicago IL 60647 (main office) and
1010 Lake St, Oak Park, IL 60301 (program location)

Bill Cospers, Director of Program & Resource Development
773-665-8052 x272 / bill.cospers@smartlovefamily.org

Mission

The mission of Smart Love Family Services is to help children and parents achieve greater inner well-being, sustain closer relationships, and lead more enjoyable and productive lives. Founded in 2002, Smart Love Family Services provides therapeutic counseling, parenting/child development guidance, and early childhood education services for Chicago-area children and families.

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 Minority Family Program (MFP) was created to offer minority families an opportunity to participate in therapeutic groups and supportive services uniquely tailored to welcome and serve such parents and children in a culturally-sensitive and informed program that is both guided by a curriculum and responsive to participant needs and questions.

The need for the MFP was discerned through data and feedback from area service providers and other entities engaged in providing or supporting mental health care services in Oak Park and neighboring communities (including Austin, East and West Garfield Park, North Lawndale and Montclare in Chicago, along with River Forest, Elmwood Park, Forest Park, Maywood, Berwyn, and Cicero). Coupled with data collected from service providers, Smart Love incorporated recent research and review of the literature with its own clinical experience from serving that area since 2002.

An urgent need was identified for supporting these families who are dealing with pressures and challenges that particularly impact minority communities. Among these, negative factors such as family conflict, violence, substance abuse, and depression/anxiety disproportionately affect minority families in the targeted communities. Underlying and further compounding all of these are the enduring ills of intra-personal and institutional racism – and their legacies – which remain an ongoing destructive force, particularly on those most directly impacted by them.

One of the factors identified by local and scientific research is a long-standing cultural stigma about mental health care and accessing mental health services. This pervasive barrier has long prevented many people from seeking and receiving even urgently needed care that could have alleviated or prevented a vast number of debilitating conditions, diagnoses and situations. Smart Love's inquiry into and about this stigma revealed significant levels of

distrust, misunderstanding, and – perhaps most importantly – a profound sense of disconnection from many aspects of the health care system, and especially mental health.

Among the many factors that influence this perception of disconnection is the relative dearth of minority professionals who are clinical mental health care providers. Recognizing this as an important factor in changing attitudes to mental health care and overall access to health services, Smart Love developed the MFP to be led and delivered by minority clinicians. This has proven to be a significant lever for engaging minority families, who sense that their mental health care provider reflects and understands their point of view and experiences.

Smart Love hopes to utilize the structure, evaluative data, and findings of the MFP to craft a replicable model that it can both re-create itself and share with other service providers both locally and nationally.

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 gathers input from the targeted populations through direct 1:1 interaction with community leaders and service providers focused on those specific communities' needs. Smart Love also gains insights and knowledge from the results and findings of other organizations and collaborations. Among the personnel consulted outside of Smart Love are public agency leaders, funders interested in the community, and school/school district staff, in addition to program participants, their families and friends.

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 works with a number of health/counseling care providers and community-based organizations in sustaining and continually refining the MHP to best serve the evolving as well as the ongoing emotional and mental health care needs of its targeted population: Minority parents and families and those with minority children.

Partners like Strive for Success, which works to connect minority families in area middle schools with needed services, both communicate the purpose and availability of the MHP and directly connect families with Smart Love and the program. Other partners for outreach and participant enlistment have included Success for All Youth at the Oak Park River Forest Community Foundation, the Oak Park Library, School Districts 97 and 200, local pediatric/medical practices, and area religious congregations.

Many of these partners also provide data and input on local community needs and evolving issues facing minority families which helps sustain and refine Smart Love's ongoing delivery of the program and the identification of other resources for needs outside the parameters of the MFP itself. Another source of insightful data has been foundation and funding entities that support a range of service programs in the area.

Smart Love is developing similar partnerships with organizations serving West Side/West Suburban Latino community as it commences development of a Spanish-language MFP that will be launched in 2020-2021.

Smart Love is also an active participant in the CMHB of Oak Park Township's Mental Health Care Consortium which brings together a broad range of agencies that serve Oak Park and adjacent communities to share information, learn about community needs and resources, and build and sustain referrals for care and other services.

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:

As described, Smart Love has developed and continues to provide the MFP with significant community input and partner feedback, along with regular review of evaluative and qualitative data from program participants. These two lenses have proven the most effective means for continuously monitoring and ensuring the program's strategies, structures and outcomes to date.

The experience of developing and continuing to evaluate/refine the MFP based on community input and participant data has determined the similar approach Smart Love will utilize in developing a Spanish-language MFP, working with Latino-oriented community organizations, service providers, and funders. Insights gathered thus far for this expansion of the MFP are shaping the development of the program in several ways, including such possibilities as moving the program location to an area off-site from Smart Love's Oak Park clinic offices.

This data-driven, community-centered approach is also guiding the foundation for a new initiative to provide a structurally similar service for the parents and families of LGBTQIA young people, particularly those grappling with orientation and gender identity questions. Smart Love's direct experience in individual clinical cases prompted community research that indicates an almost total lack of locally accessible support and resources for these families in West Side/Near West Suburban communities. This has led to Smart Love working with a diverse range of organizations in the design phase of this program, including the Center on Halsted, Oak Park area schools, local religious congregations, and area LGBTQ organizations, and more.

5. Number of clients served

On average, 25 families annually participate in the existing MFP, giving the program a direct impact on at least 75 individuals. Launch of a Spanish language MFP is expected to double those numbers over the next 2-3 years.

6. Total amount budgeted by your organization for the program

\$60,000

7. Percent that program budget is of total agency budget

2.68%

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

0% of the program budget is provided by third party payer direct reimbursement.

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

20% of the current MFP program budget is funded by fee-for-service contract grants from public entities, primarily the Community Mental Health Board of Oak Park Township.