

PENNCREST School District Thurston House

Overview

PENNCREST School District has been operating PPT and ELECT programs for over 20 years. The original ELECT grant served only Crawford County pregnant and parenting youth. With recommendations from PDE and the Center for Schools and Communities, programming was added in Erie County, excluding the City of Erie, Warren, Venango and Forest Counties and most recently to Clarion County students. Based in Thurston House on the property of the Crawford County Career and Technical Center, the program travels to seminar sites which include Union City High School, Corry High School, Community Country Day School, Warren County Career Center, Erie County Technical School, Venango Technology Center and Clarion Hospital. The program offers services to 29 school districts in Northwestern Pennsylvania and multiple GED sites in the counties of service. PENNCREST Administration has a strong commitment to serving this at risk population through linked services and support.

The program offers services to more than 20 students per month who are expectant or parenting receiving TANF, Food Stamps (FS) or Family Works (FW), at least 6 young fathers for ELECT Fatherhood Initiative (EFI) and transition programming will be offered to those eligible and interested in work or continuing education transition for another 120 days after graduation. Of the counties served by the program, Erie County was in the top ten counties in 2007 with a teen pregnancy rate of 13.1% followed by Venango with a rate of 10.3% and Crawford with a rate of 9.6%, both in the top 50% of counties.

During 2008-2009, the program has served 130 students with TANF, Food Stamps, Family Works or EFI Services to assist them to obtain a high school diploma or GED, with the goal of breaking welfare dependence and of empowering students to move on to self sufficiency.

Approach

The Thurston House ELECT Program requires staff to travel into six counties to reach students for seminar classes and home visits. Support from each school district for referrals, attendance, student records and partnership to develop creative and flexible schedules is critical to student participation and success. Constant communication with the Program Coordinator assures a comprehensive approach to successful retention of students.

The program continues to strive for success in the target outcomes.

- Drop out rate less than 25 percent
- Retention of at least 25% of enrolled students
- Maintained or improved annual attendance
- Individual academic progress or maintenance in GPA and earned credits
- An area of concern is GPA. GPA's and earned credits should demonstrate academic achievement which maintains or reflects overall progress year to year for parenting or pregnant youth. Students are expected to make overall progress yearly.
- Graduation rate for seniors and GED students of at least 75% of students eligible to graduate

With a comprehensive tracking system, school attendance records and individual student reports, the program will meet PDE and DPW data requirements. The program employs data

staff for more than 40 hours per week and includes part time summer employment of more than 20 hours per week to meet data responsibilities.

With ongoing community involvement and participation on local committees, this program coordinates services to students while partnering with agencies, family centers, educational programs, School to Work and drop out prevention projects to assist in positive outcomes for the challenges that occur for students who are parenting while in high school.

Students are provided case management to monitor attendance, prevent drop out and for self sufficiency upon completion. The staff works with the CAO to assist students to meet post graduation goals of education, training or employment. Participants develop an Individual Plan with CAO caseworker's input and are encouraged to delay secondary pregnancy. Through the strong support of staff and case managers, the students are encouraged to find avenues to personal success.

At twice monthly seminars, issues that teens face are addressed in peer groups, individual support and through education programs on parenting and child development, financial literacy and budgeting, delaying secondary pregnancy, domestic violence counseling, resources to access child care and transportation. Also, in conjunction with the CAO, job readiness, career planning and vocational opportunities are explored. Students are given the opportunity to request topics and are offered input for recruiting peers and teaching peers about the realities of parenting while in high school.

An individual service plan (IP) is developed with student input and recommendations from the student's support system. Family contacts allow staff to provide programming relative to individual needs. Usage of Community Resource partnerships offers referral and resource

collaboration for student specific needs in the areas of nutrition life skills, career, parenting, pregnancy prevention and health services.

Many schools and students are successful with the implementation of creative and flexible programs that allow students to achieve individual success. Tutoring, summer school, alternative classrooms and correspondence courses are used for students to meet success and graduation requirements. Flexible scheduling is utilized by schools to assist students with transportation and child care needs as gaining the well as academic credits required for graduation. Mentoring is provided by former students, staff and college volunteers to increase support and long range planning for achievement.

Tutoring with homework help is available in each building to allow students to meet with the specific staff member teaching the class. Upon request, additional staff support to achieve educational goals is provided. Students are assessed on a case by case basis and assistance for success is provided with the school, CAO and Thurston House active as a team.

Attendance and retention of students is one topic of the monthly ISP review discussions with students and families. Schools are challenged to offer practices and policies to meet demanding student needs and to review practices and work toward graduation solutions. Schools are encouraged to review policy to ensure that students are not penalized for absences related to their children being ill. Pregnant and Parenting BEC 24 P.S. 13-1327 are to be followed by all districts. Students are encouraged to schedule necessary appointments for after school hours. Pregnancy complications and recovery students are offered Home Bound Instruction with physician request forms being approved by the school district. Some schools defer reenrollment until the following semester or calendar year to allow students time to deal with personal crisis. WIC is provided on site at the Thurston House location once each month to allow students to be

counted present during the school day appointment. CAO is encouraged to meet with students during this multi-agency time. A multi-agency format is used for students to have contact with Drug and Alcohol, Center for Family Services, CCIS and other programs in addition to WIC.

Retention of students comes from a strong connection with the Thurston House program staff, who work beyond the school day and hours to assist students with needs, provide activities and offer encouragement.

II. A. Program Management

Thurston House offers ELECT services to eligible students from Northwest Pennsylvania. Students are referred by agencies, schools, CAO, parents, other participants, self and the medical community. Aggressive contacts are made through advertising, imprinted incentives and training events to encourage referral.

Seminars are provided to both PPT and ELECT participants. Intensive year around programming is provided by PENNCREST School District to students in six counties including 29 school districts. Home visits, group events, parent meetings, out of school time events, grandparent child groups are opportunities to meet ELECT student needs year around.

Transportation to seminar sites is provided by individual school districts. Seminars are held at vocational-technical schools, home schools and a hospital. Students are provided with both group and individual time to reflect on the monthly IP. If a student is not in class, a call is made to the household and often a home visit is also made to provide a review of class materials, an assessment of specific needs and a support system contact.

Students are scheduled in classes at school sites for regular programming except in Clarion where a taxi is used to transport students. Once a problem is encountered, the solution is resolved with school, Thurston House and CAO collaboration. Creative scheduling with

abbreviated schedules, early release, late start and multiple individual options are being used in the districts to encourage students to return to school until graduation requirements are met.

Services are offered beyond the school day, out of school time and in the summer to maintain close contact with pregnant and parenting youth. Evening and weekend events are planned for teens, support members and families.

Data collection is done daily to reflect program needs and evaluations. Files are maintained on ELECT enrollees.

Young fathers, expectant, custodial and non-custodial, are enrolled in the Fatherhood Project. Separate group meetings, individual assessments and IP's are provided to meet the unique and personal needs of each student. Students under the age of 22 who are attending a middle or secondary school or GED and are earning less the 235% of the FDIG are eligible.

EFI participants receive ELECT services and intensive child care and development, self discipline, instruction in health and child safety, conflict and anger skills, resources to model appropriate parenting behavior, mentoring, budgeting, life skills, job readiness and job search, peer group and assistance for paternity establishment.

II. B. Attendance and Retention

Students are recruited for the ELECT program from schools, CAO, students, parents, medical staff and web site.

A potential participant completes a data card and participates in the PPT program unless referred by the CAO as TANF or Food Stamps. Publicity to agencies has recently been strengthened by holding a training for partnering agencies. While training each partner agency on poverty or related topics, Thurston House has been better able to advertise and recruit in the region.

Attendance is provided daily by each school site. If a student misses more than two days, the attendance staff is to call Thurston House and set in motion the plan for contact. Constant communication with the schools assists students to obtain assignments and to remedy problems

If a student is chronically absent additional home visits are done. A plan is developed with the student and is monitored by ELECT staff. The family unit is contacted to assist with attendance issues. Monitoring of student attendance and progress is critical to resolving problems early for the most ideal outcome.

Retention of students is critical to individual and program success. When grades or attendance slip, immediate contact with the school is made to implement a change to improve or remedy the issue. Student illness, family issues, housing, ill child, child care and “just giving up” are the most frequent problems that need to be evaluated and redirected for the student to be successful. Home Bound Instruction, based on individual school policy, is provided with physician request and approved application.

At initial enrollment, students in ELECT begin the move to transition by identifying interests, ability and aptitude for achieving long term goals. ELECT post high school transition services are provided to those receiving cash assistance at graduation. In small neighborhood groups or individually, students identify education or work goals and meet for 120 days or until employment or enrollment are complete. A curriculum is developed and led by Thurston House staff. Assistance is provided to overcome barriers to assessing child care, transportation, economic self sufficiency and realistic goal setting. Identifying a strong, supportive network allows the student to transition from ELECT to independence and problem solving or decision making in self sufficiency.

Retrieval is an option for any student who leaves the ELECT program or requests return to education and enrollment in ELECT. The student contacts the CAO or Thurston House and sets a meeting to determine the commitment, evaluate past performance, identify academic, social, health and personal needs and assist in defining goals and academic placement. An IP is developed from the assessment. The options of regular school or GED enrollment are evaluated and an appointment is made for re-entry. After a CAO referral on CWDS, all ELECT services are put into place with home visits, regular contact and support.

Often retrieval is a long process. Improving self concept, communication skills, problem solving and decision making skills are necessary. While self motivation is key, student maturity often increases success rates.

A student is tracked through case management with attendance records and monthly file reports.

Eligibility

Students are eligible when they are a TANF or Food Stamps recipient within the CAO system. Students may also complete forms for enrollment in Family Works or participate in the Fatherhood Initiative when they earn less than 235% of FPIG.

A pregnant or parenting youth must be enrolled in school or GED and plan to complete their high school education.

Case Management

Upon enrollment, an ELECT file is created for each student. After intake, an individual service plan is developed with the student and family and with CAO input if the student is Cash or Food Stamps. The AMR and Plan for Self Sufficiency from the CAO are used to complete

goal plans and educational placement. The IP is evaluated monthly and a new IP is completed in August and February until graduation or through Transition, if eligible.

Files are stored for students at Thurston House to record participation, schedules, contacts and service components. Each student's history and the progress a student makes are defined in sections of the file that is maintained each month. Recommendations from Thurston House staff, based on the student's plans and progress are included in the file to reflect plans and progress.

Students are reminded of ELECT/EFI outcomes at enrollment and student responsibility forms are discussed.

The student is seen each week for the first two weeks and biweekly thereafter. Home visits are made at least at least quarterly.

Reaching out to families and student partners, the case manager provides one to one personal support and assists students to overcome challenges to their success. The staff member assists when intervention is needed. The grandparent is a key to student success and attempts are made to form a strong personal connection.

Group and Individual Support

Seminar

Group support, summer activities, family events and grandparent opportunities are provided for students, staff, partners and other family to come together and support students, encourage successes and recognize achievement.

Individual

Support is offered at every student, school and parent contact. At seminar sites, multiple staff members are available when a student requests individual support and time for listening. Students can make collect telephone calls to request help during the work day. Off site and

home bound meetings occur by request. On site child care and PPT homerooms are available at the Millcreek site. Other locations work with students to coordinate child care center opening times and school schedules.

Service Learning experiences are incorporated into job readiness skills. Assisting organizations and individuals, using the goals of a senior project or serving as a mentor provides the ELECT student an opportunity to see the value in sharing both time and skills with others. Projects have included card making, mailings, Special Olympics Carnival and additional day to day projects with local organizations.

The program has adopted a project by Dianne Moran of Customized Communication Publishers. Thurston House was selected as the site to their have students use literacy skills and edit books for use by hospitals or pregnancy programs. The book provides information to young parents on pregnancy and birth. Thurston House students are pictured and quoted, and they assisted in editing the book. The book was released in Fall 2008. Thurston House is providing books to students who are pregnant, hospitals and school nurses in the six county area served.

Student Assessment

Upon enrollment a student is introduced to the program coordinator/home school facilitator (HSF) for case management. With input from the student, school and parent, the student identifies strengths and barriers to academic success and social and health needs are identified.

A contractual plan is developed to lead the student to successfully graduate from the best education option, with creative and flexible options explored, if needed. If the student is cash or Food Stamps, the CAO input is added from the AMR and Plan for Self Sufficiency.

Students are encouraged to schedule appointments after the school day and to take advantage of on the site WIC clinic if it is an option. Students are refocused to use problem solving skills in organizing transportation for necessary appointments.

Students sign a release allowing services and agencies to assist as resources in meeting goals or finding collaborations.

A file is created for ongoing record of services, contacts, resources, correspondence and records. Home visits to meet the student support system are done quarterly.

An exit interview is recorded with recommendations when a student terminates services.

Vocational and Career Planning

From enrollment, the goal of self sufficiency and future employment beyond high school and other education are addressed. Students are exposed to vocational and job readiness materials, DVDs and speakers to encourage them to look at traditional and non-traditional careers. Enrollment in Vocational Schools is encouraged as are courses in vocational skills at school sites. Students are encouraged to meet yearly or more frequently with guidance staff and utilize computer resources to research career interests. Students are encouraged to enroll in Career Link. WIA information is provided to families. WIA referrals are made with parent and student consent. Pre-employment skills and opportunities are encouraged through volunteerism and summer employment. If students do not complete a résumé in class work, assistance is provided for completion. The use of games, multimedia resources as well as attendance at college fairs and job fair participation is encouraged. Cleanliness, work ethic and behavior on the job are taught frequently. Maintaining a job, attendance and being on time are addressed as the student seeks a summer or after class employment site.

Mentoring, Tutoring, Homework Assistance

Students in need of homework assistance first contact the teacher for more direction, then guidance staff and then the Thurston House staff for assistance. Schools now have tutoring in place to assist students in need of academic help or homework assistance. When additional help is required, Thurston House staff work with students to complete coursework.

Home Bound Instruction is provided, based on district policy, to any student with verified physical condition that prohibits a student from attending school. Some buildings provide home bound to all post partum, or bed rest students. Alternative homework options are designed with the school administration and guidance assistance.

Summer Services

Thurston House will provide a minimum of twenty summer hours each week. The program coordinator is available by email or phone. Graduating seniors may participate in Transition as decided by student, program, support systems and CAO discussions, selecting the Employment Track or Training Track. Case Managers will offer supportive services, education and recourse referrals to assist student to achieve goals. Students will be exited at employment or entry into training or educational program or after 120 days.

For ELECT continuing students enrolled in summer school, or employed, at least one phone contact will be made weekly. The student will receive a minimum of four program service hours per month through telephone or student meetings.

Students not in summer school and students not working will be contacted weekly or more often as need is identified.

Each participant will be visited at home or selected alternate site monthly.

Additionally, monthly group sessions, family contacts and parent child activities will be provided. At least one summer session will explore skills for work force preparation and post high school education or college. One home visit will be made each month.

Enrichment activities will be held as co-planned with participants to build skill, increase leadership, explore opportunities in the community or increase educational and cultural experiences through minor field trips which provide child-parent interaction.

The major field trip, a six county field trip, involves a collaboration with the Erie Zoo in Erie, PA. Grandparents, students, children, past participants plan and organize travel to Erie, supported by gas card allowances, map, directions and reservation requirements on Father's Day each year. See schedule as attached.

Home Bound Instruction

Students are encouraged to discuss the need for Home Bound Instruction with their physician. With a request for homebound approved, schools provide a teacher to assist students to complete class work. Some buildings have policies to allow any pregnant teen to reduce class time and increase bonding time during the immanent birth and recovery. All schools allow students who are post partum, and legally absent with physician excuse, to complete missed class work.

General Equivalency Degree (GED)

ELECT GED is an option to those over 17, but under 22, who cannot complete regular high school. With ten or more hours a week instruction, along with addition hours provided through Thurston House to equal twenty hours per week, students work on educational skills and skills for self sufficiency.

The student most often transfers from high school to code 18 in ELECT. If TANF cash or Food Stamps, the student meets with the CAO. An interview determines if GED is appropriate. A referral is made to GED and a pretest given. A placement in appropriate classes is made. An ELECT staff person maintains contact with both GED staff and the student to monitor attendance and progress.

Past records of achievement, attendance, IEP and social history are evaluated before enrollment. Transportation options are identified. Child care is established. Students complete an IP to identify areas that need to be addressed. Additional services from Thurston House or the community are accessed and students complete 20 hours per week. IP service plans are reviewed monthly and revised minimally every three months. A case manager meets weekly with the GED participant. Additional services and education, including literacy, are provided to the students. Those may be family planning, domestic violence, housing, academic support in order to create a comprehensive system for completion. Attendance is monitored, progress evaluated, career interest is evaluated and Career Link resources are identified. The GED student is encouraged to participate in career and job readiness skill building activities. Home visits are made quarterly. GED sites provide Thurston House with attendance as required for CWDS.

Once GED hours are complete and the GED test passed, the students who are cash or Food Stamps may complete 120 days in Transition to employment or education.

II E. EFI ELECT Fatherhood Initiative

EFI is open to males who are expectant, custodial or non custodial parents. The students enrolled are provided a case manager and fatherhood education and resources. At least six identified young fathers will be served each month.

Males are enrolled in programs through Thurston House to increase knowledge, skill and self concept to accept the role of father. The male is included in pregnancy education. In addition, the males are offered enrollment in EFI to address additional services. In separate sessions for fathers, the students use agency partners for support and education of young dads. Students assist with planning topics and individuals are offered one to one support to meet IP needs. A fatherhood project Home School Facilitator (HSF) provides male support and case management. He is available at sites and activities beyond the school day, including summer events, and he works with the Project coordinator to plan activities for out of school time.

Intensive child development instruction is provided through pregnancy information. Bonding, discipline and boundaries, child care selection, relationships, child safety, medical needs, shaken baby syndrome, parent-child magazine and stress management child development and other topics are presented as requested.

A fathering support group meets with a fatherhood facilitator using materials from the National Fatherhood Initiative. Topics discussed include roles, expectations, recreation, parenting in a divided home and self health care.

Self-discipline instruction, anger management, delaying second pregnancy, conflict resolution, avoiding illegal activity, and resiliency skill are some of the topics presented.

Child health and safety instruction booklets for home instruction are given to students to provide them with answers to their questions. Health needs and immunizations, when to seek emergency help, color purple crying and safe car transportation are included in class work.

At each contact, conflict resolution and anger management are topics for skill development. Violence prevention, legal issues and referrals for intensive needs are addressed.

Opportunities to model appropriate parent behavior are available at youth events that are held out of school and at Thurston House.

Mentor and mentoring role models are used to motivate students to go on to school, engage in play and activity with the child and to see appropriate, loving male response to the child.

All fathers are encouraged to read magazines on parenting, use newspapers and library resources. Literacy instruction often is most successful when the father reads to the child, increasing his vocabulary.

Life skills training and family budgeting instruction are provided to males. The use of literacy materials and books for children encourages improvement in reading content and retention that increases test scores.

Job readiness skills are taught and increased through multimedia materials and one to one presentations. Students develop skills to assist them in completing job applications and successful job interviews. Strategies for managing funds for transportation and clothing, grooming and information on career specific education and employment are offered to meet student needs.

Students who do not acknowledge paternity at the birth are provided with DNA and paternity, support and custody information. The CAO often required paternity establishment for cash assistance. Awareness of responsibility is included and reinforced at each contact. Maintaining communication with the partner and family is encouraged as males learn to accept the new challenges in their lives.

Commitment

PENNCREST School District recognizes that the inclusion of fathers in the life of a student increases success toward meeting the program goals. PENNCREST supports the program in both Early Care programs and Thurston House. Research indicates that the children who have a strong support in the early years show increased success throughout their lives. PENNCREST also provides father support through Head Start.

Coordination with community programs

Local agencies are willing to partner in programming and to encourage participation with a community support system. Those on Probation are given community service hours for attendance at Thurston House programs in Crawford County. In Titusville, the Family Center offers additional programming for males. Union City Family Center serves the students in the Union City and Corry area.

School to Work, with seminars and resources, is provided to begin a career search and job readiness for teen males as well as female young parents. The School to Work library provides resources on multiple topics to increase skill development.