

Mental Health Monday: Affirmation Boards and So Much More

Host

We're back on Show Me Today, the voice of Missouri. This is our Mental Health Monday segment. Joining us is Angie Blumenthal, crisis counseling program manager for Hopewell Center in downtown Saint Louis. And they work with, Show Me Hope, Missouri, a crisis counseling program that was enacted to help during the pandemic. And, Angie, you did a lot of great work in the community, for all ages.

Host

But I want to start first with the things that you did for teachers and young students. You made some affirmation boards for teachers. How did this start? What schools did you focus on and how widespread was this?

Angie Blumenthal

We sent out a lot of material to a lot of the school districts in Saint Louis County and Saint Louis City, but one school district or one school that we worked with, very heavily with, was Mason Elementary School in the Saint Louis City.

And the reason why we were worked with that schools, because my kids at the time and we still actually work with them, attend that school. So we when Covid first started, we just started linking up with those teachers and that staff just because, it was our way of, you know, showing them obviously, that we appreciated them and they had, you know, opened their doors to us just because they knew me. Just because I was one of the parents of the kids that went there

Host

Yeah, oh, that's a great idea. And so has it grown? Has it spread?

Angie Blumenthal

Yes. We have been still working with that particular school but, we do offer to go into other schools, and do the same thing as well to, you know, present affirmation boards.

One of the things that we wanted to do was to let the staff and the teachers know that they were appreciated, and we knew that their jobs were super hard. And just doing online learning itself was, obviously a task. And being a parent, and having online school was extremely hard. So I knew that the teachers were dealing with it even worse.

So we just wanted to make sure that they knew we were there, and that if they had anything to talk to us about or they needed to vent or they needed to just, you know, support or resources that we were there.

Host

And what kind of feedback have you gotten from the teachers?

Angie Blumenthal

In the very beginning, when we first started this, some of the well, one of the principals of the, you know, of that particular school told me that they would have never gotten through Covid if it wasn't for our team that went in there.

There was some times where, you know, obviously when it first started, you know, they went strictly online and then some kids were able to come back in the building and then some kids weren't. And, you know, it was kind of a half and half kind of with the classroom. So the teachers were having to focus on the screens, you know, teaching those kiddos that were at home and then teaching the kids that were in the class.

And then, you know, it was just a lot for them. And so they were having, a lot of mixed feelings. Some of the teachers, even left, you know, when they started to open it up a little bit more. So the principals are struggling, the staff were struggling just to keep it, you know, together. So having those boards and having our team come in and check in with them, meant a lot to them.

And she specifically told me that, you know, there were some, times where they didn't know what they were going to do, but they knew that they had some resources with us. So it was really good.

Host

Yeah, that is. Angie, were teachers afraid too when classes opened back up?

Angie Blumenthal

Some of them then were we actually I actually had one teacher of my one of my daughters, actually, you know, they were online the very beginning of the school year.

And this was, you know, obviously when Covid first started hitting, but they were online and then when the school district or the area decided to go back into half in person, there was quite a few teachers that left and she was one of them. She, she gave us, you know, she emailed all the parents and she was talking to the kids, you know, online and letting them know that she's going to miss them.

But due to health reasons, you know, she was taking care of some, some other family members that she couldn't take the risk of them getting Covid. So, she had to leave, her teaching job. So that was kind of hard for them to deal with. So. Yeah.

Host

Yeah, tough for everyone involved in. I mean, when you hear the stories.

Angie Blumenthal is a crisis counseling program manager for Hopewell Center, downtown Saint Louis. And then you were also talking to kindergarten and first grade students in classes, about taking care of themselves. So how do you approach that with little kiddos?

Angie Blumenthal

Yeah, we had created here in the Saint Louis region some coloring books, that were we had an adult version, coloring book.

And then we had a kid coloring book. And some of my crisis counselors went into that particular school, to Mason Elementary, and did a presentation for, some kindergartners and some first graders. And, the kiddos loved it. You know, they were doing and basically it was just kind of letting them know that their feelings were valid and let them know that, they might be struggling. And this is kind of what it looks like. And if they needed somebody to talk to. And one of my crisis counselors told me when she got back that one of the kindergartners grabbed her on the way out the door and said, hey, if I need you, if I need to talk to somebody or if I'm crying, can I call you? And it was really heartfelt, you know, that a kindergartner, obviously, at that time was able to express himself, to let her know that. And so that was kind of like a reminder to know that the kids are, you know, the kids are suffering just as much as the adults are. So yeah.

Host

Boy, Show Me Hope Missouri has done so much and you and your work too at Hopewell Center, you did stuff for, first responders and, as well as, people, for senior citizens to.

Angie Blumenthal

Yes, so we, you know, we tried to get our population that we work with, our specialty population for the CCP program is a senior population. And what we did in the very beginning was we got some packets together, we put some resources together, activities, self-help, self-check in kind of packets, and we put them in envelopes, and we made them for the staff at nursing homes.

And we also made them, for residents at the nursing homes, especially when they were, you know, the nursing homes were closed and they couldn't see their family. And then the staff, you know, we weren't able to go in and check in on the staff. So we actually made, probably 3 or 400 packets, I think is what we did.

And we put some, like tea bags in there, some, you know, little mints or whatever, just to let them know something, you know, soothing and kind of, you know, they can drink a cup of tea and go through the packet, you know, have resources for them just to let them know that we were thinking about them and gave them our contact information.

And we also did it for, some area first responders in our area. We made some packets together and specifically gave those specific resources for firemen, police officers and EMT, and dropped them off, you know, at different police stations and firehouses. And they were very much

appreciative, for that. And just to let them know, a lot of times, we knew that the staff wouldn't actually reach out to us the day that we went in.

You know, that may be due to time or, you know, didn't want to talk in front of anyone else. So we made sure that we left our information for them in case they needed to talk to us later.

Host

Yeah. Angie, for those listeners who are tuning in on KMOX in Saint Louis, tell us more about Hopewell Center and what you guys do and how people can get in touch with you.

Angie Blumenthal

So basically with the Hopewell Center, we are a mental health agency, in downtown Saint Louis. We provide an enormous amount of resources for kiddos, adults, any ages. And we're located at 909 North 14th Street, Saint Louis, Missouri, downtown Saint Louis. We provide mental health services, case management. We have some residential, you know, services as well.

We have, trauma informed veterans program. So, our phone number is (314) 531-1770. And that's our main line. And with this program, with the Show Me Hope program, it's kind of intertwined with Hopewell, the Show Me Hope program is, you know, the disaster distress helpline throughout the whole state of Missouri. And that number is 1-800-985-5990.

So anybody can call either one of those numbers to get some help. And we can provide that for you. Just let us know what you need.

Host

Angie Blumenthal, crisis counseling program manager for Hopewell Center in Saint Louis. Keep up the good work. Thank you very much I appreciate it. And we appreciate you joining us here on our Mental Health Monday segment here on Show Me Today, The Voice of Missouri.