

# SCHOOL CONNECTIONS

Spring 2017

Mary's Center School Based Mental Health Newsletter



Mary's  
Center

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## School Based Mental Health Program (SBMH)

In this inaugural newsletter, we aim to connect the Mary's Center SBMH team, our school partners, and our community supporters with one another. We'll highlight a school, a therapist, and some features of our program. Mainly, we'd like to stay connected to support optimum collaboration for the health of our children, families, and communities by promoting behavioral wellness. SBMH is midway through its fourth year!

We are thrilled to be partnering with 14 schools in Wards 1, 4, and 5. Interest in our program is growing rapidly and expansion is underway!



Proud of our School Based Mental Health Team.

We believe this is due to our highly skilled and bilingual therapists working in strong collaborative partnerships with talented school teams to achieve real results for children.

## What we do.

Mary's Center SBMH Program seeks to *supplement and enhance each school's wellness team* by providing *diagnostic assessments and behavioral health treatment* to children who require clinical intervention.

Therapists provide individual treatment using methods such as Cognitive Behavioral Therapy, play and sand tray therapy, and mindfulness and meditation. Our therapeutic groups address trauma, high risk behaviors, adjustment to the US for our newcomer immigrant students, and social skills. Family therapy and parent coaching strengthen the family unit and accelerate children's emotional and behavioral gains. SBMH also provides some community support services to help families access tangible resources that enhance wellbeing.

## End of the Year Update

Between August and April of 2016, 15 therapists and 2 community support worker have received:

- ◆ Over 500 referrals for children to receive therapy services
- ◆ 40 referrals parents to receive therapy or community support

# Our School Partners

Mary's Center Partners with 14 schools in the District of Columbia. One or more mental health therapists partner full time in each school, reducing stigma and barriers to accessing diagnostic assessments and culturally responsive, trauma informed behavioral health care. Below is the list of schools by Ward.



Columbia Heights Educational Campus (Bell High School and Lincoln Middle School)

“The Mary’s Center SBMH Program began with schools contacting *us*, asking, if they gave us a space, would we send a therapist to *them* to treat the multiple, vulnerable students unable to get care in our clinic. The program was born. “

- Marisa Parrella, LICSW, LCSW-C Manager, SBMH

Ward 1	Ward 4	Ward 5
HD Cooke Elementary School.	Powell Elementary School	City Arts and Prep Public Charter School
Tubman Elementary School	Barnard Elementary School	Briya Public Charter School (Adult Education)
Bancroft Elementary School	EL Haynes Middle School	
Bruce Monroe Elementary School	EL Haynes High School	
Cesar Chavez Middle School	Roosevelt High School	
Columbia Heights Educational Campus (Bell High School and Lincoln Middle School)	Briya Public Charter School (Adult Education)	
Briya Public Charter School		

## Is your school interested in partnering with Mary’s Center,

Contact Marisa Parrella, LICSW, LCSW-C, Senior Clinical Manager, School Based Mental Health Program at [mparrella@maryscenter.org](mailto:mparrella@maryscenter.org) or 202-674-3754. Please also apply online on our website at [www.maryscenter.org](http://www.maryscenter.org)

## \$50,000 Grant Award from Fight for Children

We are so pleased to be partnering once again with Fight for Children to deliver expanded Community Support Services.

In 2016, Vanessa Leon and Sharon Perez from Mary's Center partnered with Dr. Grace Reid and her team at Barnard Elementary School in Ward 4 to deliver expanded mental health services and community support to families. Their efforts have connected families to needed social supports and services, provided parenting workshops, and identified and delivered mental health care to children and families. We will continue this work through 2017 with continued support from Fight for Children.



Vanessa Leon (left) and Sharon Perez, SBMH therapists.

### Vanessa Leon, SBMH Therapist at Barnard ES

Vanessa León joined Mary's Center in January 2016 and works as a School Based Mental Health Therapist at Barnard Elementary School. She holds a Bachelor of Arts in Psychology from George Mason University and a Master of Social Work from Smith College. Vanessa believes that everyone should take the time to care for themselves in order to continue juggling all the other roles they fill, a belief that motivated her to pursue the field of mental health. Bilingual in English and Spanish and the daughter of Peruvian immigrants, Vanessa feels grateful to utilize her language abilities in an effort to help expand access to such care across diverse communities at Barnard. In her free time, Vanessa enjoys spending time with family and friends, eating good food, dancing and being outdoors.



### Our School Groups

**Fall 2016 –  
Spring 2017**



**SELF  
ESTEEM  
START UP!**



- Acculturation groups across age levels
- Self-esteem/healthy relationships (including with self, peers, and boyfriend/girlfriend)
- Parent Child Interactional Therapy (PCIT) parenting
- Therapeutic Newcomers'
- Stress management
- Self-regulation and friendship
- Grief and loss
- Girls Empowerment /Social Skills for Boys

**Groups are offered and adapted for students of all ages.**

In October 2016, SBMH Therapist and Clinical Manager Rachel Osborn participated in a panel focused on trauma and immigrant mental health sponsored by The Avance Center at the Latino Health Disparities Annual Conference at George Washington University. Rachel spoke to best practices in assessing and working with trauma among immigrant youth and building health and education systems that are responsive to the needs and strengths of newcomer families.

Rachel continued advocating for accessible, culturally-responsive mental health services by paneling at the “Unaccompanied but not Alone” event on Creating Caring Communities in Public Schools in February 2016, co-sponsored by the Peace Warriors Network and Georgetown University. She’ll focus on eliminating access barriers to services and making schools welcoming and safe for all students.



“Many of our youth come to us with unthinkable degrees of trauma exposure: abuse, gang violence, homicide, among many others. People often comment: “It must be such hard work. How do you do it? Isn’t it exhausting?” And my response is always the same: it is not a burden, it is a privilege.”. - Rachel Osborne, LICSW, SBMH Clinical Manager.



“These youth are much more than their trauma stories, and each one carries with them a piece of wisdom, a secret, a mindset, a dream, or an unwavering faith in themselves and their futures that’s allowed them to brave scary, uncharted waters.” - Rachel Osborne, LICSW, SBMH Clinical Manager

## How to Help Children Cope With Anxiety

A sibling with a major illness, a father who has lost his job, an undocumented mother who faces the threat of deportation, a packed extracurricular schedule and excessive academic pressure. These are just some of the situations that cause anxiety in children.

As the Manager of Mary’s Center’s School Based Mental Health Program, Marisa Parrella has years of experience in helping young people manage and overcome their fears. She shares some advice on how to recognize anxiety in children and help them cope.

***Anxiety is manifested in various ways in children and symptoms can vary by age. Some common symptoms are:***

Preoccupation with fears and worries

For young children, increased anxiety in separating from caregivers

Fidgeting, restlessness, irritability, disruptive behavior in school

Marked increase or decrease in appetite; over or undereating



Continue on next page...

## Continued...

### *Things you can do to help cope with anxiety*

1. Acknowledge that the child may be feeling anxious and encourage him or her to share those feelings with you or a trusted caregiver.
2. Ensure you answer the child's questions as truthfully and age appropriately as possible. Often, the child's worry can be relieved by clearer information. Clarify misinformation also.
3. Identify and address some common physical symptoms associated with anxiety such as headaches or stomach aches, excessive sweating, racing heartbeat and fidgeting caused by increased levels of cortisone, one of the main hormones released by the adrenal in response to stress. These symptoms can be scary and make a child feel out of control and unable to focus in school.

Try this common relaxation technique to help manage physical symptoms at home, school, and before bed.

- Sit firmly in a chair or the floor, grounding your body/feet to the floor.
- Ask child to close his or her eyes (you can do this together) and with you take 5 deep breaths, breathing in through the nose and out through the mouth
- It's also helpful to have the child put his or her hand on his or her belly and feel the belly expand and contract (with small children, we call this "belly breathing")
- Encourage the child to participate in physical activities such as classroom yoga, stretching, or even a walk around the classroom or outside - fresh air helps!



4. Make any mealtime a positive time for the family; prepare healthy foods your child enjoys; talk about the child's day and practice relaxation before and after; once sleep and physical symptoms subside, appetite will regulate more easily.

5. Don't allow children to watch news channels unless you watch together and discuss what they hear (age dependent); turn off screens at least an hour before bedtime; have a nightly routine such as a bath, books, and snuggling together and start that routine early in the evening; practice the deep breathing technique described above before bed. Make sure your child doesn't consume sugary drinks close to bedtime.



Marisa Parrella,  
LICSW, LCSW-C

Marisa joined Mary's Center in February 2014. She is a Licensed Independent Clinical Social Worker (D.C.) and a Licensed Clinical Social Worker (Maryland). Marisa holds a Master's degree in Social Work from the University of Michigan and completed a Post Graduate Fellowship in Clinical Social Work at the Yale University Child Study Center. She speaks English and Spanish and enjoys running, hiking, cooking, reading and travel.

[Read more about our School-Based Mental Health Program.](#)