



Reaching Our Goals

By Lauren Balkan, MSW, LCSW

Every year when New Year's comes around everyone starts thinking about change. How they can make the New Year better, how can they make themselves happier, how they can lose weight, make more money or be more patient. I don't think about the year to come as much as I think about the year that passed. There are so many ways to measure success – personally and professionally – but the first thing you have to do is identify what is really important.

Measuring *Pathways'* success as a program is sometimes tough. So many times the proof of our success comes at unexpected moments, in ways that are impossible to measure. Sometimes it's in the form of notes left on my desk from students who miss me if I am out for the day. Or quotes from students on our satisfaction survey; statements like..., "the thing I like about going to *Pathways* is the ongoing support. They will never give up on you even when you give up on yourself." Or, it is in the ever-increasing self referrals.

In fact, half of all our new clinical cases are students who seek services on their own, and almost all of our early interventions (students who come on an as needed basis for short term work) are self referred.

This school year began with undeniable proof that *Pathways* has now been woven into the fabric

of Carteret High School, and there is no question that the students place value on what is offered. In September, we were graciously invited into Ms. Hanley's Freshman English classes to describe *Pathways'* services. We started each presentation with two questions... "Who has heard of *Pathways* and, what do you know about it?"

In every class, every student had heard of *Pathways* and knew it existed in the High School. That was certainly a good thing. But it was the answers to the second question that were so validating. In almost every class someone eagerly piped up that "*Pathways* was a safe place to go in the school". They also volunteered that "*Pathways* is where you go when you need to talk to someone". Or another version, "If you have a problem, you can go to *Pathways* and they help you."

The follow up answers always included our various groups and clubs but they were secondary in every class. What we expected to be very brief and primarily one sided were instead interactive, open discussions about

why students utilize our services, how they help and the comfort students feel accessing us. Students in the room also openly shared their connections to *Pathways* and encouraged others to utilize our services through praise for the staff or the services offered.



P.A.L.S. – Still going strong

What do high school students like to do with their time? Volunteer!! This fall, nearly 100 students enrolled in P.A.L.S., *Pathways'* community service club. As advisor for this recreational group, my largest challenge is keeping all of the participants busy with activities and community service projects. I continue to be amazed year after year at the dedication and willingness of these teenagers to spend their free time working to help others. Often I will ask students why they choose to do it. One student said the following:

“I like that we can help others. It makes me feel good about myself and it’s fun.”

By participating in P.A.L.S., these students are building their self-esteem, while learning the value of helping those who are less fortunate than themselves.

In the fall of 2011, 60 students participated in the Making Strides Against Breast Cancer Awareness Walk in Woodbridge, and 20 students attended a trip to Habitat for Humanity. P.A.L.S. students also volunteered at the Carteret High School Thanksgiving Luncheon for older adults in the community, and the students hosted a holiday food drive during the months of November and



December. As a result of their collection efforts, food baskets were prepared and decorated to be given to 35 families in Carteret at the annual borough sponsored Angel Tree holiday event.

We are proud to say during our 6th year of running P.A.L.S. that the club continues to be successful, and the students just keep asking for more!

S.A.D.D. Update

Students Against Destructive Decisions, commonly known as S.A.D.D. is in its second year at *Pathways* and is growing strong.

S.A.D.D. currently has over 40 members and has taken on a peer-led approach as student involvement and interest increases. Students have taken on leadership roles and run monthly meetings as well as coordinate activities. S.A.D.D. has taken ownership of the bulletin board by the school’s main office, where S.A.D.D. members acknowledge a group of new students every month, highlighting accomplishments, strengths, interests and just generally what makes them special. These activities offer opportunity for empowerment and growth for both the S.A.D.D. members and those they “spotlight”. Students also use the bulletin board to highlight any important events or activities taking place at Carteret High School.

Members are currently planning a Valentines’ Day carnation fundraiser to raise money for Women Aware in recognition of Dating Violence Awareness and Prevention month. Students have begun planning for S.A.D.D. week scheduled for the week of April 2nd. The event is designed to raise awareness on substance abuse and prom safety. As the year progresses S.A.D.D. students plan to continue to lead their peers towards positive decision-making.

Pathways' Right Path to Music (RPM)

Right Path to Music (RPM) is a recreational group for Carteret High School students interested in music. The idea for the group was formed by a student with a passion to produce music.

RPM affords talented youth with an avenue to express themselves creatively. In addition to writing and creating new musical pieces, students hold discussions about composition, studio building, studio recording, studio engineering, vocal performance, performances, careers, and image. Facilitated by a *Pathways* intern, the group provides support for students and a healthy outlet for the expression of their feelings.

Through RPM, youth are encouraged to take leadership roles in planning discussions, recruiting new members, facilitating chats, and teaching about genres that important to them.

RPM has proven to be very eclectic, so students are introduced to a variety of instruments and styles of music. Students are further encouraged to focus on the power of their talents, the strength of their imaginations, and the importance of support. Support from peers is promoted in sessions to ease fear and anxiety and enhance creative expression.

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Support from peers is promoted in sessions to ease fear and anxiety and enhance creative expression. Music is highlighted as a positive outlet and coping strategy, a celebrated talent and force that connects youth to one another.



Pathways' popular group Girl Talk has kicked off another year and remains a comfortable outlet for female students of all grades to get together with peers and discuss issues that are important to them while receiving support from peers. The group utilizes various activities ranging from teambuilding exercises to highlighting artistic creativity, in which strengths are recognized and encouraged. Some of the key issues that this group addresses are self image, relationships, personal values and strengths, goals, and making healthy decisions. This group meets every Thursday after school for one hour and is facilitated by *Pathways* staff.

Have a Voice in Pathways!

Pathways would like to invite you to become a member of our Community Liaison Board (CLB). The CLB is a volunteer component of School-Based Youth Services Program (SBYSP) which advises, assists, and provides support and advocacy for SBYSP.

Members include a representative of the school board, parents of enrolled students, teachers, representatives from the community, and students served by SBYSP.

The CLB meets on a quarterly basis to address our latest accomplishments as well as to initiate an open discussion for future programming. In order for our program to best address the concerns and needs of this specific community your input is essential. This will give you a voice in determining what services are offered to the adolescents in Carteret. We would be pleased to have *Pathways* represented by individuals like you, who are committed to addressing the concerns of the community and the students of Carteret High School.

To be added to our membership, contact Lauren Balkan by phone: 732.541.8960 X 4300 or by email: lauren@ncadd-middlesex.org



Meet the Staff

Steven G. Liga,
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CEO & Executive Director

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Office Manager

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Clinician II

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Clinician II

Interns

Toni Kiger-Rutgers University
Martryce Roach-Rutgers University
Toni Shy- Touro College

Catherine Donahue, RN
Nurse Practitioner

Funded in large part by the New Jersey Department of Human Services, Division of Prevention and Community Partnerships, the School-Based Youth Services Program seeks to help young people stay emotionally and physically healthy so they are more likely to stay in school, graduate and ultimately become productive, responsible community members. This program provides individual and group counseling, employment preparation, recreation, health services and club activities to the students of Carteret High School.

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