

STAFF FEATURE

Catherine's is heading back to school

In this edition of the Heartbeat Newsletter, we will dive into Catherine's Health Center's school-based services. First, Kenzie Newman, LMSW, shares about her work as a full-time therapist at Townline Elementary School within Kentwood Public Schools. Catherine's began providing onsite, full-time therapy at Townline in 2022. Townline Elementary is a beloved

school, with over 40 languages represented and 100% of the students qualifying for free or reduced lunch.

"One of my previous clients used to really struggle with regulating his emotions. He would become highly escalated to the point where he was screaming nonstop, throwing things, swearing, and trying to hurt himself.

The school attempted to refer him to outside therapists, but with his parents' work schedules and the co-pay, it was not an option for them. Once we received this grant and were able to provide free therapy right from school, he was referred to me and soon began services. By the next school year, he increased his calming tools to the point where he was ready to exit services with hardly any behavioral concerns. A few weeks later, I had a teacher come up to me and tell me a story about this client. She said he was one of the only students being calm and doing his work while others were not listening and being very loud. After praising him for it, she asked what he did to stay so calm around the others. He replied, 'I used my coping skills, obviously.'

"I am able to provide accessible services to students who would not be able to receive therapy otherwise."

"My favorite part about this partnership is that I am able to provide accessible services to students who would not be able to receive therapy otherwise. Having a full-time provider has made a huge impact on the school as the referrals stay in-house instead of needing to put the pressure on families to connect their kids to services. Being able to refer a student and provide the service right here in the building (for free!) has eliminated several barriers for our families. I am continuously honored to be a part of Catherine's and this program."



Kenzie Newman, LMSW (left) and Kara Kozlowski, LMSW (right), represent Catherine's at a Kentwood Public School's parent's night. Kenzie is a provider at Townline Elementary School and Kara is a provider at Crossroads Alternative High School.

LETTER FROM LEADERSHIP

“Why school health:” Megan Erskine, CEO

I began my community health journey at the intersection of public education and public health. I worked with schools and healthcare providers (medical, dental, behavioral health, vision) to provide services to students where they learn and grow—schools. The school district had a very comprehensive vision program; we provided vision exams and eyeglasses at no cost to students. Most of these students were low-income and may not have otherwise been able to obtain vision services. At one such school, there was a second grade student who the school staff identified as having significant vision issues. He also struggled with school and had an Individual Education Plan (IEP). After the student received glasses, the school called some months later to offer an update on the student. The student was excelling at school. He was no longer on an IEP and was reading at a higher grade level. He had been struggling in school because he could not see.

I think about this student often. I believe that every child in America deserves a quality education, and they deserve to have their basic needs met, so that they have a chance to be successful in school; that is part of the American dream. School success is statistically linked to social mobility and socio-economic status. Research shows that higher

socio-economic rates and academic achievement are correlated with better health outcomes. If we believe in a community where all people have the right to reach their full potential, we must invest in schools and youth. To take a quote from Joycelyn Elders, “I feel that we can’t educate children who are not healthy and can’t keep them healthy if they are not educated.”

“If we believe in a community where all people have the right to reach their full potential, we must invest in schools and youth.”

I believe that community health centers are the sweet spot between prevention and treatment. We can address upstream and downstream measures that influence a person’s health. The United States spends less than 4% of total healthcare expenditures on prevention. Healthcare spending accounts for 17% of our nation’s GDP; this is twice as much as the average in other rich economies. Unfortunately, this spending does not result in better health outcomes. The United States spends the most on healthcare and has the worst health outcomes compared to other developed nations. We have the best health system in the world, but it is not available to everyone which results in significant health inequities. Community health centers like Catherine’s are part of the solution in improving health outcomes and decreasing healthcare costs. We meet people where they are by providing affordable primary care services that allow people to stay well and out of the hospital.

If we want to prevent expensive healthcare treatment in adults, we must increase health resources for youth. Data shows that low-income students who have access to healthcare and mental health services in school engage more with the health system. Disenfranchised families often do not have the resources nor capacity to bring children to essential appointments. Finally, research shows that providing healthcare, mental health services, and health education to youth, especially in early childhood, prevents the development of unhealthy behaviors in adulthood and positively impacts a person’s long-term physical, social, cognitive, and emotional health. Services provided in schools where students learn, grow, and play could be considered one of the most profound delivery methods of preventative healthcare.

At Catherine’s, we are investing in school health because we believe that schools are the hubs of their community. Our primary goal is to remove health-related barriers to learning so that students may be successful in school. When students are successful in school, they are successful in life. We support parents and families by allowing students to stay in school, so that parents can stay at work. We know that loss of seat time due to out-of-school appointments and illness can have a significant impact on a student’s success in school. Additionally, we support teachers and school staff by mitigating health-related challenges, so that teachers can focus on teaching.

We are honored to work with Kentwood Public Schools and in the future Godfrey-Lee and Grand Rapids Public Schools. We sincerely believe that this work will have a profound impact on our community’s future health and economic well-being.



PARTNER HIGHLIGHT

Kentwood Public Schools

Catherine's alone cannot make kids healthy, but when we partner with a nurturing school environment as guests in their spaces, we can do our part in addressing health related barriers to learning. The relationship we have with the school district and individual schools is the most important aspect of a successful school-based health program.

We have been fortunate to start our journey into school-based health with Kentwood Public Schools (KPS). With

our Streams clinic's proximity to Townline Elementary School, a natural partnership formed. With their dedicated leadership and a common goal of thriving students, the relationship has allowed services to grow into additional schools, with more on the horizon.

"We can do our part in addressing health related barriers to learning."

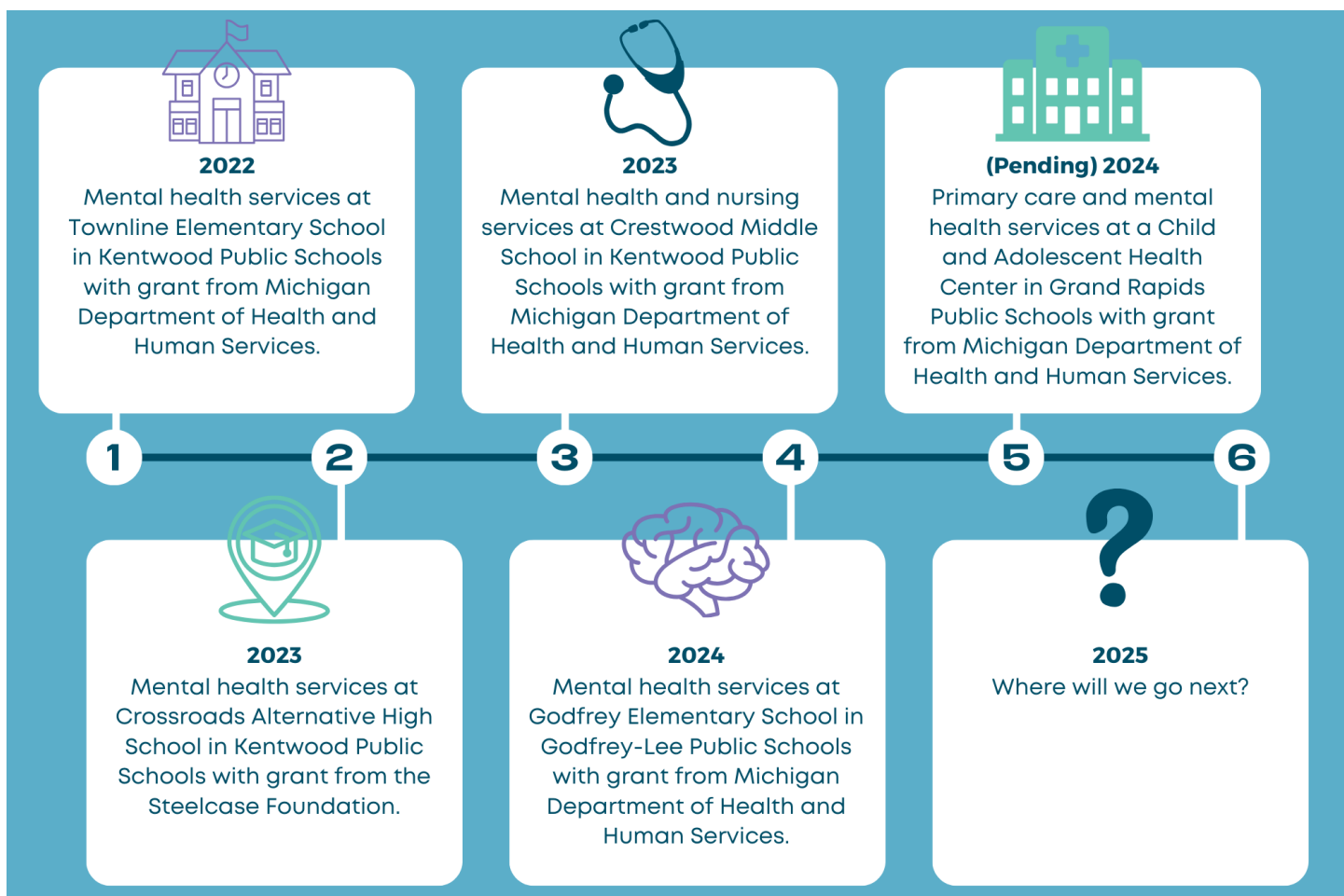
Our school programs also benefit from the partnership of community members through a Community Advisory Council. Members of this council include Catherine's clinicians, KPS staff, parents, and students, to ensure all voices are represented and heard in the development of health services.

We are grateful for our KPS partners and their commitment to healthy kids and families.

OUR JOURNEY

School-Based Health: When and Where

In just a couple years, we have entered and grown in the school-based health space. All of our school-based programs are grant-funded, which allows us to provide the necessary services without affecting the operations of our clinics.





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UPCOMING EVENTS

Healthcare for the Unhoused Series

Part I: Stories from the Frontlines

May 2nd at 6:00 pm
The Golden Age

Tickets are on sale:

catherineshc.org/events-at-catherines-health-center

Part II: Townhall

October 25th at 6:00 pm
Center for Community Transformation

Catherine's at Mitten Brewing

April 29th from 11:30 am - 9:00 pm
50% of profits of all dine-in and take-out orders support Catherine's!

Coffee and Conversations

June 19th at 9:30 am at the Creston clinic
September 11th at 9:30 am at the Streams clinic

Register in advance at:

catherineshc.org/events-at-catherines-health-center

About Catherine's Health Center

Catherine's Health Center is a 501(c)(3) non-profit Federally Qualified Health Center. Catherine's has provided high quality, affordable and compassionate health care for over 27 years. Today, Catherine's provides comprehensive medical, behavioral health, and dental services at several locations throughout our community.

Thank you for your support! **If you have any questions or would like to make a donation, contact:**

Ally Stephens, Development Director
(616) 336-8800 ext. 1206 | astephens@catherineshc.org

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Our Locations

Catherine's Health Center Creston
1211 Lafayette Ave NE
Grand Rapids, MI 49505

Catherine's Health Center Dental
781 36th St SE Suite B
Grand Rapids, MI 49548

Catherine's at Streams
280 60th St SE Suite #200
Grand Rapids, MI 49548

Catherine's Health Center Wyoming
950 36th St SW
Wyoming, MI 49509