

# LIFE LINKS

... your connection to mental health and wellness

## FY 23 (July 1, 2022 - June 30, 2023) Report to the Community

### *Our Mission*

*To design and deliver an array of high quality, cost effective, outpatient behavioral health services oriented toward consumer recovery and responsive to the needs of the consumers, their families and the community.*

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### **Meet Joey King, our new Executive Director**

Across the country many people like you are attempting to navigate the growing challenges that face so many Americans. Rising costs of utilities, groceries, and healthcare are making life difficult for many families. In addition to the challenges of everyday life, mental health and substance abuse issues are increasing in both adolescents and adults. Data from 2021 indicated that one (1) in five (5) adults are dealing with a mental illness. That calculates to 57.8 million adults. The most common mental health disorders are Anxiety, Depression, and Post Traumatic Stress Disorders which make up 30% of all mental health disorders. In our community, LifeLinks is here to ensure that all individuals in need of behavioral health care will receive the services that are needed. With open access hours, LifeLinks can ensure that no one will be placed on a waiting list who is in need of care. (Continued on page 3)

### **Leadership Team**

Joey King  
Executive Director

Megan Bennett  
Director of  
Outpatient Services

Andrew Bunyard  
Director of  
Community Support  
Services

Mandy Bute  
Human Resources  
Coordinator

Debby Cook  
Compliance Officer

Sarah Gracey  
Chief Financial Officer

## Mobile Crisis Response

Like a physical health crisis, a mental health crisis can be

devastating for individuals, their families and their communities. A mental health crisis is any situation in which a person's behavior puts them at risk of hurting themselves or others and/or prevents them from being able to care for themselves or function. Our dedicated and highly trained Crisis team is available via our hotline, 866-567-2400, 24 hours a day 365 days a year. As a designated Mobile Crisis Response Team LifeLinks' Crisis team members respond wherever the crisis occurs - in a community setting, school, emergency department, home, doctor's office, etc. An Engagement Specialist, a person who has lived experience and has had a successful recovery from mental health or substance use, accompanies the Crisis Clinician in a team response model. The Engagement Specialist shares an understanding of mental health/substance abuse with the consumer in crisis and helps the consumer become and stay engaged in the recovery process reducing the likelihood of relapse both during and after the crisis situation. LifeLinks Crisis team has a no decline policy and always provides services to anyone, anywhere, at any time.

**LifeLinks served  
3,359 individuals  
including 974 children  
and adolescents!**

In FY 23, our team of 17 assisted over 3,700 consumers in crisis with face to face or telephonic crisis services. But, even with the high demand for this service, the quality remains high as reflected in consumer comments: The crisis team was "very helpful, patient, and kind" with a young, speech-impaired child who struggled with behavioral issues. "The Crisis staff was fantastic! They brought both a wealth of knowledge and experience to us and most importantly, they made our crisis feel almost effortless and far less stressful than what it could have been." "Your team was extremely kind and helpful. I am so appreciative of the time they spent with our family." LifeLinks and our community should be proud of our Crisis team and the services they provide in Coles, Cumberland, Douglas, Moultrie, and Shelby counties.

## LifeLinks' New Mental Health Crisis Center Opening in 2024

At the end of the calendar year in 2022, the IL Department of Human Services and the IL Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity partnered to launch a first of its kind \$15 million capital improvement project for eligible not-for-profit human services providers in Illinois. This was a highly competitive grant application which would allow an agency to physically expand or improve upon services in its facility. LifeLinks applied for this grant, and on April 14, 2023, received notification that we were chosen to receive \$249,000. This funding will allow LifeLinks to renovate a portion of the unused warehouse space on our main campus into a Mental Health Crisis Walk-In Center. This walk-in center will provide adults experiencing a mental health crisis to have a safe and comfortable place to de-escalate. As outlined in the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA's) plan for the future of crisis services, this center will be "peer staffed, restful, voluntary sanctuary for people in crisis. Preferred by consumers, peer respite offers a low cost, supportive step-down environment for individuals coming out of or working to avoid the occurrence of a crisis episode." As a cost-effective alternative to emergency department visits for mental health crises, our crisis center will ease crowding in our local hospital's emergency department for more urgent physical health issues as well as more severe mental health crisis situations that put the consumer or others at risk of harm to self or others. Services will include crisis assessment and intervention; a safe place in which to rest and relax; support from peer counselors with personal experience in managing mental illness; interventions from professional counselors including teaching de-escalation skills and developing safety plans; linkage with referrals for emergency housing, healthcare, food and mental health services; and identification of and referral to community resources. Together, this program will serve our community and the public good. Renovations will begin in the fall of 2023 with the program expected to open in 2024!

**LifeLinks provided  
\$394,113 in free and  
reduced care.**



## Caregiver Connections: An Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation Program

A study conducted by Walter Gilliam showed there is a pipeline from expulsions, suspensions and other exclusions during early childhood years in daycare and preschool, which connects to later life incarceration. Preschool children are expelled more than three times that of K-12 students. The study showed that teachers' implicit biases affect their perceptions of challenging

behaviors, and teachers need more support and more resources to help with relationship building. Caregiver Connections was started to address this troubling trend and today 36 Early Childhood Mental Health Consultants provide this grant funded service throughout Illinois. Our Early Childhood Mental Health Consultant (ECMHC), Lisa Flynn, serves six (6) counties: Coles, Cumberland, Edgar, Clark, Shelby and Moultrie.

The services provided by an ECMHC are at no cost to providers and parents. When asked by the childcare provider, the ECMHC observes the child exhibiting difficult behaviors in the classroom setting. The ECMHC works with the teacher, Center Director, and sometimes the parents to help children develop appropriate social emotional skills that can diminish or eliminate the troubling behaviors. Another hallmark of the program is that the ECMHC offers trainings to childcare providers. These trainings focus on a wide range of challenging behaviors, what is creating the behavior and how to help the behavior, as well as staff strengthening, team building, confidentiality, and self-care for the provider.

Success stories abound in this valuable and rewarding program. Numerous children have not been expelled or removed from a center through consultation and working closely with the teachers and directors. The excitement from providers and teachers is infectious when they discover new ideas or techniques to help children learn how to self-regulate. One teacher cried happy tears when she realized that she had taught a two-year-old how to self-regulate through co-regulating with her. Our ECMHC is currently consulting with two teachers who work with toddlers, and the work they put into teaching their children about social emotional skills is inspirational. They have ten toddlers and all of them are learning how to slow and deep breathe using pinwheels. The toddlers have been shown how to use a safe place, or cozy corner, (an area for children to go where there are pillows, fidget toys or calming toys, books, stuffed animals or dolls) when they just need to have some space away to calm down. The teachers talk every day about feelings and validate those feelings and then share different ideas of what to do with the frustration and mad feelings. They focus on making connections and building strong relationships with the children and meet the children where they are at emotionally. The entire team – teachers, directors and our ECMHC - love seeing the positive changes in the children and in the classroom.

### Meet Joey King, our Executive Director

*(Continued from page 1)* Furthermore, with a dedicated team of crisis clinicians available 24-hours a day, LifeLinks can ensure that anyone who is struggling with a mental health crisis will have an immediate response for crisis intervention services.

At this time, I would like to formally introduce myself. My name is Joey King, and I have resided in Charleston, Illinois, since 2001. I have a Master's Degree from Eastern Illinois University in Community Counseling and am licensed with the State of Illinois as a Licensed Clinical Professional Counselor (LCPC). Previously, I worked for LifeLinks as a Mobile Crisis Response Supervisor from 2007-2012. For the last decade, I have worked in Champaign, Illinois, in hospital and residential behavioral health administration.

Looking ahead to next year, we are excited about the new Crisis Walk-In Center under development. It is being renovated and will be operationalized on an evidence-based model endorsed by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, and is a wonderful opportunity for enhancing our crisis program which has served this community for more than 20 years! Additionally, LifeLinks will be focusing on expanding and strengthening our current services. The employees at LifeLinks are extremely skilled and talented and can treat a wide variety of mental health disorders. With the demand for increases in services, LifeLinks will continue to adapt and grow to meet the needs of the community.

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