



TAG in Action: Anu Family Services

As part of its national call to action, **Adolescent Health: Think, Act, Grow**® (TAG), the Office of Adolescent Health in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services has identified a number of successful strategies for improving adolescent health throughout the country.

The Goal

Anu Family Services helps children and youth address their grief, loss and trauma so that they may develop permanent connections with loving and stable families.

The Game Plan

Anu Family Services, Inc. was established in 1992 as PATH Wisconsin, Inc. PATH was an early founder of the treatment foster care model and was cited nationally as a prime example. In 2008, PATH Wisconsin became Anu Family Services. Anu uses a unique combination of trauma-informed approaches to address relational trauma through a lens of grief and loss, which helps youth restore their capacity to connect and engage in healthy relationships. Anu now operates in Wisconsin and Minnesota and provides a full continuum of client-driven, family-centered services including treatment foster care, parent coaching, intensive permanence services, and intensive trauma services.

The majority of Anu's clients are adolescents and their families. The youth have often experienced trauma from neglect; emotional, physical or sexual abuse; illness; parental illness; parental incarceration; or removal from their original parent's home. It is not uncommon for youth to exhibit a wide variety of symptoms or pain-based behaviors such as opposition, lying, stealing or aggression. Anu staff learned that once youth understand that their pain-based behaviors are normal responses to grief and trauma, they could develop healthy, trusting relationships.

Anu builds networks of support for youth by engaging in exhaustive searches to find all the people that a young person had loved and lost: family, schoolmates, teachers, coaches, or even a lunch lady. Anu's staff has expertise in trauma-informed parenting and provides one-on-one parent coaches to foster, adoptive and kinship parents. Parents are trained on utilizing "Present Moment Parenting" and are given skills to parent youth who, due to trauma, often don't respond to typical parenting methods.

The Winning Plays

Mechele Pitt, Anu's Executive Director, explained that Anu staff empower youth by putting them in control of their future. This is critical because youth in the "system" have been given little, if any, control in their lives. "Our specialty is understanding what you actually need to do differently to help youth heal. When we saw youth continue to push away adults who loved them, we better prepared the adults to understand the youths' pain-based behaviors and respond accordingly. When we saw how little control these youth had, we let them set the pace of their casework and even fire their caseworkers. When we saw that it took a unique approach for each youth to heal, we took time finding what interests each of them and began connecting youth with all kinds of healthy activities from mindfulness to art or equine therapy. We are relentless. We do whatever works to help youth heal, build healthy relationships and re-connect."

Learn More

Anu Family Services
<https://www.anufs.org/>

