

Bridges for Youth provide Coordinated Services

by Harriet Dehlinger

Denise Chamberlin and Patty Bula, recently attended a meeting of the Adams-Friendship Area School Board. Denise and Patty, represent Bridges for Youth, a private non-profit agency that provides many services to at-risk youth and their families in the community. One such service is the County Coordinated Services Initiative which is in place in Adams County. The Adams County Coordinated Service Team Initiative (CST) strives to help children with multiple needs, remain in their own communities, at their own home, and school where they are most comfortable. This is accomplished through the establishment of a comprehensive coordinated community-based team of strength based care, centered on the individual and the family.

Coordinated Services is a process used to improve the lives of children and families who have complex needs and who are involved with multiple agencies. Statewide there are 46 counties and five tribes involved, including Adams, which has a grant that will run out in 2009.

Locally, Charlotte Preiss, Principal at Adams-Friendship Elementary School, found a need for such services, and as a result there are 12 family teams in our community. Teachers and principals are involved and referrals come from school and parents, Health and Human Services, and other agencies as well, making it a team effort.

Several persons in our community have recognized that no single agency has the staff or

resources to provide all of the essential services many of our families need and deserve. When agencies collaborate, there is simply more to offer to children and families who are struggling. More resources to children and families can be provided when multiple agencies and families work together. Project Partners in Adams County include: parents, Bridges for Youth, Adams-Friendship Area Schools, Adams County Health and Human Services, Adams

County Sheriff's Department, the City of Adams Police Department, Adams County Public Health, Adams County Court Services, Adams County Domestic Violence, Adams County Head Start, and Northland Community Services. Together, these agencies can make a difference in the lives of Adams County children and families.

CST offers voice, access and ownership to families who lack the knowledge or ability to advocate for themselves. CST is based on the premise that in order for a "family team" to work, it must include parents, children, school staff, doctors, therapists, extended family and friends. Utilizing such a diverse group of people, families can get the support and guidance they are lacking. The CST process can include and involve all community members to some degree.

For additional information, please contact Denise Chamberlin, Bridges for Youth, 600 South Grand Street, Friendship, Wisconsin 53934 or 608-339-9309.



Patty Bula and Denise Chamberlin. — PHOTO BY HARIET DEHLINGER