

Beech Leaves

WINTER 2021

COVID-inspired creativity keeps services coming to kids and families

Providing school-based services hasn't been easy when many kids haven't even been at school, but that hasn't stopped our Beech Brook teams.

For more than 10 months now, the debate about how our nation's children will learn during the pandemic has raged on. Completely virtual? A hybrid model? In the classrooms, masked and separated by Plexiglas? How do we weigh the need for socialization and the value of face-to-face education versus the very real concerns for the safety of the student and school personnel? School districts have been forced to make tough decisions...and then

change them, often more than once. Teachers have had to prepare for multiple scenarios at the same time. Parents, already struggling with their own jobs and pandemic-related stress, don't know how to plan or what to expect, especially now as the coronavirus rages on, worse than ever.

It may be a while before we know the toll this will take on the kids, not just on their education but on their long-term emotional health.

Most people agree that even the most well-adjusted children need the structure and socialization that school provides.

But for children who are struggling with mental health issues, the situation can be dire indeed. In a virtual classroom, it's much harder for teachers to recognize when a child needs help.

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A Message from Tom Royer, President/CEO



2020 - A PANDEMIC AND RESILIENCE

Having a few days off during the holidays gave me a chance to reflect on the year. Many news outlets were rehashing the events that occurred (or

started) in 2020. The lists were mostly made up of negative things. From a deadly pandemic, a global economic recession, constant political strife, a global movement for racial justice, and even "murder hornets" arriving in the U.S., 2020 has changed us, forever.

But as difficult and as stressful as the past year has been, I have a hard time feeling very bad about it from Beech Brook's perspective. Our mission is to help children and families thrive by promoting healthy child development, strengthening the ability to overcome adversity and enhancing family health and stability.

And we did that, despite hurdles we have never experienced before. If I had to come up with one word for 2020 as it pertains to Beech Brook, that word would be resilience.

Any one of these events in 2020 would have been challenging. All of them together is something that we have never experienced. But the one event that impacted Beech Brook, our clients, our staff and everyone in the world was (and is) the pandemic. And like the pandemic of 1918, Beech Brook

once again rose to the occasion and demonstrated our resilience.

Through it all, we were able to maintain employment for all of our 225 staff members.

We were designated as one of Northeast Ohio's Top Workplaces for 2020. The yearly honors, presented by *The Plain Dealer* and *cleveland.com*, are based on feedback from an organization's employees.

We managed to implement a new website and rebranded the organization. Among the elements in the new logo are a bridge representing Beech Brook's work to help families overcome adversity; a sunrise to symbolize new beginnings; and the overall shape representing the people with whom we work. The blue color was chosen to represent warmth, quality and trustworthiness... qualities which we believe define the way we do our work.

These are certainly great achievements, but we are not here to get awards or design websites. We exist to help children and families thrive.

The World Health Organization announced January 9, 2020, that a deadly coronavirus had emerged. Since that date, more than 419,000 people have died of the virus, just in the United States.

On March 17, 2020, Beech Brook decided to send staff home to work remotely. At the time I thought we would be back in April.

From a deadly pandemic, a global economic recession, constant political strife, a global movement for racial justice, and even "murder hornets" arriving in the U.S., 2020 has changed us, forever.

Immediately, we had to grapple with how to move an inherently social organization, with a 168-year history of working face-to-face with each other and with those we serve, to a remote workforce, distant not only from one another but from the children and families who need us. How would staff deal with issues such as working from home? What if they were homeschooling their kids? How would they cope with loved ones who have lost jobs and the lack of access to things we always took for granted? How do we adapt to the isolation?

After a couple of weeks, most of the operational issues had been worked out. Our IT department created systems that allowed everyone to function from home. That was the easy part, as it turned out, and we have learned so much. There will be valuable lessons to take forward from this experience.

But I was worried. In the best of times, one out of five people struggle with a mental health concern...depression, anxiety, traumatic experiences, loss, violence, substance abuse or other tragic events in their lives, along with far more serious mental health conditions.

I worried that our kids and families were not getting enough food. I worried about basic needs. How would this add to the traumas they have already suffered?

I worried whether there will be enough resources to deal with the volume of mental health and social issues we will face.

Resilience. Our staff stepped right in and made food deliveries. They helped families access academic resources from schools. They picked up and dropped off laptops to our kids and families. These things are

In December, we completed our annual agency-wide outcomes and satisfaction report...Positive, clinically meaningful change surpassed previous years. Discharged clients showed greater improvement in their mental health than they did last year. We exceeded state benchmarks for improving problem severity and functioning, and the vast majority of children and parents were very satisfied with our services.

important, but we needed to turn our attention to our mission quickly.

Staff immediately began to create videos, tip sheets and other resources, free to anyone who wants to visit our website to help families deal with racism, the pandemic or issues with homeschooling and anxiety. They created more than 70 of these resources.

And it turned out that I also didn't need to worry as much about our kids and families as I thought.

In December, we completed our annual agency-wide outcomes and satisfaction report. The report confirmed the great work we do with our clients and families every day. This is the reason we exist.

Positive, clinically meaningful change surpassed previous years. Discharged clients showed greater improvement in their mental health than they did last year. We exceeded state benchmarks for improving problem severity and functioning, and the vast majority of children and parents were very satisfied with our services.

I found that Beech Brook is an incredibly resilient organization and that when we are all committed in our hearts and our minds, there is nothing that we can't overcome. These results demonstrate Beech Brook's commitment to make a

positive impact on the kids and families of our community.

On January 22, 2021, we will celebrate Beech Brook's 169th year of helping children and families in Northeast Ohio. 2021 will bring its challenges, too. Many experts were and still are predicting that the next major impact of the COVID-19 pandemic will be a mental health crisis. But we stand ready to do what we have always done...help children and families thrive.

Stay well. Keep in touch, and we will look forward to seeing you again sometime soon!



COVID-INSPIRED CREATIVITY KEEPS SERVICES COMING TO KIDS AND FAMILIES

continued from cover

And with a return to traditional classrooms still unclear, new solutions to help the children, their families, school administrators and teachers were a must.

Jennifer Bruehler, senior director of Beech Brook's Behavioral Services, says her six School-Based Behavioral Health teams, which include 40 therapists and 17 REACH workers, have risen to the challenge with creativity and enthusiasm.

Three other Beech Brook teams who provide another model of school-based programming in the Chardon, Twinsburg and Orange schools, have done the same.

Teamwork and thinking out of the box

From the start, they've all been focused on finding new solutions to help connect with the kids, the parents, the teachers and other partners.

"A lot of people have been involved in trying to make this successful," Jennifer says, adding that the Cleveland Metropolitan School District (CMSD) has worked well with all the providers (such as Beech Brook) from the start to make sure everyone was connected with the right platforms, had access to other resources, such as learning pods, and had opportunities to share ideas and strategies.

"My supervisors have been wonderful at helping their staff members be creative," she says. "Even the new people we've brought on during this time have been really great."

But it's been a scary time, too. Some of the therapists have been dealing with very high-risk kids who have run away or threatened suicide. Another therapist helped a

family deal with the death of their 15-year-old son who was shot, likely by a gang member. With little or no face-to-face contact, it's a lot harder to provide the therapy and support these kids and families need.

Diana Wallace is one of the clinical supervisors in the School-Based Program.

Like all of Beech Brook's school teams, Diana's staff of therapists and mental health specialists are currently providing a mix of virtual, in person and hybrid service models, adapting as the situations change.

"In the past, kids were able to escape their chaotic home environments in school," says Diana. "And when we were working in the homes, we were able to provide more parent education while we were there."

Back to basics meets high-tech solutions

"For the first two months of the pandemic, we were really getting back to basics," Diana says, "making sure families had food and were safe."

That work continues but each team has also developed an array of services to support their clients and meet the needs of the schools, with resources ranging from videos and tip sheets, wellness information, teacher support consultation groups, and professional development trainings to address the issues both students and teachers are facing. Many therapists have made videos to introduce themselves to the children and teachers and encourage them to reach out with any concerns.

Diana shared the stories of just a handful of the children with whom her team is working.



*Diana Wallace, LPCC-S, ATR-BC
Clinical Supervisor, School-Based
Behavioral Health Services*

- One child was simply not engaging regularly in his telehealth sessions, but his guardian did not feel safe having anyone in the home. The staff member on the case decided to create a "therapeutic tool kit" including basic items that many Beech Brook clients don't have...paper, crayons, a stress ball, and some therapeutic worksheets. At the beginning of each telehealth session, the client was asked to pull out his kit. By the end of the second session, the client's engagement, mood and therapeutic progress had improved dramatically. The worker has continued to re-stock the kit whenever supplies are getting low, to the child's delight, and the therapist, this once super-resistant client and guardian have shared their appreciation and enthusiasm for each upcoming session.
- Still another family - one of far too many - was suffering from "food insecurity," a term which doesn't really capture the painful truth that there are far too many

people who are hungry and who don't know where their next meal will be coming from. Although the schools provide regular food distribution, this child's guardian, who is disabled, had no means of transportation. The daily distribution sites were too far away to walk and carry food back. But thanks to this family's Beech Brook worker, who began to do the weekly food pick-ups for the client and family, the guardian says that her anxiety about how to make ends meet has greatly decreased. And the child has also shared that he doesn't have to go hungry or worry about not getting enough food. His aggressive and acting out behaviors have also decreased, which his therapist believes is a direct result of having this most basic human need met.

- Another child was recently identified by a Beech Brook

therapist who was sitting in on a virtual classroom, observing the students for signs of distress. The teacher, administrators and guardian were not aware of the extent this child had been struggling until the therapist picked up on the signs and brought the situation to the school's attention. Thankfully, the child is now getting the help she needs.

Next up: interactive therapy rooms will bring a range of services together

The team is currently working on a new plan to pilot interactive therapy rooms which will hopefully be rolled out program-wide early in the year.

"These interactive therapy rooms provide a virtual therapeutic space where clients can click on the screen for links to videos from our Beech Brook staff, as well as animated yoga, mindfulness and breathing

exercises," Diana says. "Our clients will also be able to access online therapeutic games, interactive art-based activities, therapeutic worksheets, audio books on therapeutic themes, etc.

"This is a way to emulate what the real therapeutic space is like and offer clients more control in a time when they have less. It's another super creative way that we are hoping to engage our clients in a virtual environment."

Doing whatever it takes has always been a hallmark of Beech Brook's commitment to helping vulnerable children, and our great school-based teams are continuing to deliver on the mission every day through creativity, flexibility, dedication and courage. And whatever the next months bring, they'll be ready to rise to the challenge.

Beech Brook staff develops new ways for the "new normal"

As the pandemic set in last year, our staff began to look for other ways to help children and families in a virtual environment, and they quickly began producing virtual resources for this "new normal."

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Progressive Muscle Relaxation



Activities that relieve tension in your body which is often caused by anxiety and stress.

For Teens **For Preteens** **For Younger Kids**

When talking about difficult situations, conflicts and the feelings that come with it, it can be easy for us to fall into defense mode. Whenever approaching your teen (or anyone else for that matter!) using an "I-statement" is one way to communicate with them in a way that will be more likely to be heard and understood by your teen and evoke a positive response from them.

I feel (Feeling word: hurt, frustrated, disappointed, scared, etc.)

when (Non-blaming statement of what happened.) because (This is how it affects me.)

and I want or need (Specific request of what you want them to do differently.)

Beech Brook 216.831.2255   @BeechBrookCleve
HELPING CHILDREN & FAMILIES THRIVE www.beechbrook.org



The Racism Discussion

Beech Brook staffer Samuel Pitts gives some tips and suggestions to help African American parents talk to their kids about racism.

BEECH BROOK STAFF DEVELOPS NEW WAYS FOR THE “NEW NORMAL”
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Though our “new normal” has now become life as usual, our team has been on a roll, and they’re showing no signs of stopping! To date, they’ve produced more than 70 tip sheets, newsletters, videos, social stories and more to post on our website, not just for our clients but for all kids and families.

Exploring Diversity Book Lists

For Children Ages 0-3



Whoever You Are
by Mern Fox



Baby Born
by Anastasia Suen



One World, One Day
by Barbara Kerley



*More, More, More,
Said the Baby*
by Vera B. Williams

Check out all these helpful resources!

Just open the camera on your phone and scan the QR code to see all our resources.



You can also visit our website at www.beechbrook.org/resources

If you have concerns about your teen’s online usage and suspect they may be involved in cyberbullying or participating in inappropriate online content:

- Stay calm and listen to your teen.
- Set boundaries while giving them space.
- Set up expectations and make them clear to your teen (write them down if needed).
- Be available for future conversations about any concerns or issues your teen might have.
- Be sure to avoid angry confrontation—this might keep them from talking with you in the future!



Even though face masks cover people’s mouths, they can still talk and smile.



Self-Care Tips During Times of Stress

Follow local health guidelines.
 Observe local and county guidelines, wash your hands frequently, practice social distancing, and wear masks where and when appropriate.



Practice good sleep hygiene.
 Try to avoid excessive sleep, which can be a common way of escaping. Strive for a consistent sleep routine: going to bed and getting up at the same time every day; not using your bed for anything other than sleeping; and putting away phones and other electronics that flood the body with stimulation that keeps us awake. For more information, check out [this webpage](#).



Eat a healthy diet.
 Teens notoriously skip breakfast and sometimes lunch or choose unhealthy snacks and tend to have large dinners too close to bedtime. Help them by encouraging them to make healthy choices and give them healthy snack and meal options. Teens, you literally need energy from what you put into your body to get through your day! More information for parents can be found [here](#).



Practice gratitude.
 Gratitude is all about focusing on what we have, not what we don't have. Take one or two minutes out of your day to reflect on what you are thankful for, it could be something small (I had the best cup of coffee this morning!) or big (I scored the winning goal in the big game!).



Beech Brook
 HELPING CHILDREN & FAMILIES THRIVE

Tools

- Calendars**
 Writing things down ensures we don't forget.
- Time Blocking**
 Using time blocks helps identify things throughout our day that must be done and prioritize other duties within the free time that we have.
- Task List**
 A written list helps to visualize and prioritize tasks.





Holding Space with Patrice Tr...

Holding Space for your Child

Beech Brook therapist Patrice Treadwell talks about the importance of “holding space” for your children and how to do so.

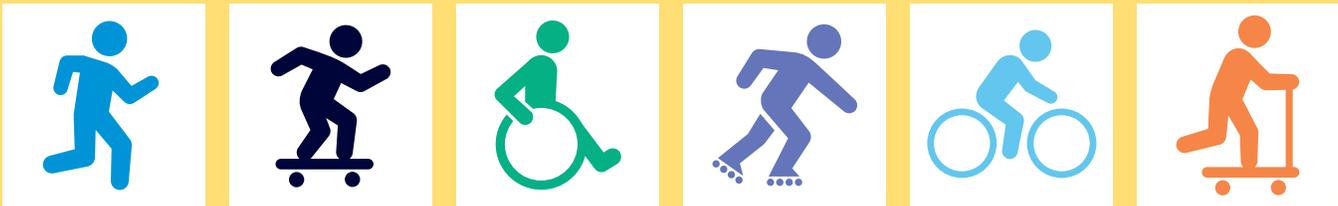


HOLDING SPACE TIP SHEET

Run, Walk, Ride or Roll

A Virtual and Mindful Experience to Benefit Beech Brook

#beechbrookmindfulmiles



Our fall event went virtual this year

The pandemic may have forced us to stay apart this year, but Beech Brook supporters still went the distance for Beech Brook! Participants ran, walked, rode or rolled to raise funds and visibility for Beech Brook's work. And in this year of tremendous anxiety and uncertainty, everyone was encouraged to practice moments of mindfulness as they logged their miles. Everyone who signed up received a Beech Brook mask, sign and a weekly newsletter with tips for mindfulness.

We are so grateful to our Emerging Leaders Board for helping to coordinate and promote the event and to our sponsors who gave their generous support.



Emerging Leaders Board Co-President Danielle Oddo taking a few mindful moments at the Chapin Forest Reservation of the Metroparks



Alex Dorman, Emerging Leaders Board member, takes his dog Delly on a walk in the city

Thank You to our Sponsors!

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CHANGE SERVICE REQUESTED

Join Us On:



Beech Brook's Mission

Helping children and families thrive by promoting healthy child development, strengthening the ability to overcome adversity and enhancing family health and stability.

Beech Brook is a contract agency of the Alcohol, Drug Addiction and Mental Health Services Board of Cuyahoga County.

Children's Art Therapy Works Featured in Virtual Display

Like just about everything else this year, the Alcohol, Drug Addiction and Mental Health Services (ADAMHS) Board display of client artwork went virtual. Whether in person or online, we were happy to have the images created by Beech Brook children featured in the exhibit. Here are a few of the works that were done by children in the School-Based and REACH programs who were participating in art therapy.

