

# Partnership provides mental health care to students



A partnership between the Center For Human Development and Holyoke Community College will establish CHD's community-based mental health services on campus at HCC to help ensure students have access to a full range of support as they pursue their education. (PHOTO COURTESY CHRIS YURKO)

The Center for Human Development recently partnered with Holyoke Community College to embark on a new, grant-funded venture to help ensure HCC students have access to a range of human services and support on campus and in the local community as they pursue their education.

Through the partnership, CHD and HCC will focus on developing clinical and wraparound services on the HCC campus to uniquely fit the needs of each student.

Building upon HCC's existing student services, the partnership will help embed CHD services on campus to help support students as they face challenges brought on not only by their academic pursuits but also in their individual lives. In addition to ensuring mental health counseling services are available to students on campus and through telehealth, the partnership will also connect students with other critical supports through CHD for a range of needs, including substance use and addiction recovery services; housing, hunger and family support; and more.

"Mental health supports, I believe, are integral for students to complete their education because as students they are voluntarily taking on more stress in service of their future success," said Elizabeth Barron, clinical director of CHD's Adult Community Clinical Services. "Any time we increase our stress, we also need to increase our support system in order to manage that stress."

The partnership is born of an HCC initiative with JED Campus launched in Octo-

ber 2020 to help the college evaluate and strengthen its mental health, substance misuse and suicide prevention programs to ensure the strongest possible mental health safety nets for students.

In November 2020, 611 HCC students responded to a Healthy Minds Study conducted by the University of Michigan for the JED Foundation, and 86% said emotional or mental difficulties have negatively affected their academic performance.

"Through this partnership with CHD and with the support and guidance from the JED Foundation, HCC will help students develop the life skills necessary to decrease the negative consequences of mental health distress, leading to increased perseverance and degree attainment," said Renee Tastad, assistant vice president of student affairs and dean of enrollment management. "HCC is known for its strong network of support services for students. This is one

more way that we have dedicated ourselves to providing the support necessary to help students overcome barriers to success."

The partnership is supporting the placement of two full-time licensed counselor positions, one to serve as a clinical coordinator and the other as a clinician, who will provide services and care coordination on campus and also collaborate with key HCC staff members to co-create systems of care, reporting, and service delivery.

In addition to mental health and substance use services, CHD also has resources to help students with challenges with housing instability, including emergency shelter and relationships with different stakeholders around housing. Plus, all CHD outpatient clinicians are able to help people access housing, and apply for subsidy and low-income housing.

In tandem with HCC's student services, CHD's own breadth of community-based services will

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help offer students unique wrap-around support to meet their needs for a range of challenges they may face — and continuously offer support so students trying to manage stressors don't feel as though their only option is to drop out.

"It's a symbiotic relationship between the student, the communities and the supports," Barron said. "While they're are committed to improving their own lives and subsequently the communities around them, there seems to me like a duty that the communities would provide support for them while they walk through that process."