

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**  
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## **NCSS' wellness coaches are difference makers during COVID-19**

By Joe Halko, NCSS Director of Community Relations

The dramatic impact that COVID-19 has had on families and our community led NCSS to transition how services are delivered. In an effort to counter this insidious virus NCSS Wellness Coaches have minimized exposure to COVID-19 for all children and families served while ensuring access to the care that they need. With a focus on health and wellbeing many of the services have been provided through videoconferencing platforms that maintain services while optimizing NCSS' number one value, safety.

NCSS Certified Wellness Coaches have received certification from the Dr. Sears Wellness Institute, an Accredited and Approved Health Coach Certification Program.

Many people today in Franklin and Grand Isle counties are suffering from chronic illnesses and are not living up to their health potential. Unhealthy diets, lack of physical activity, and inattention to mental health all play a role.

NCSS Wellness Coaches take a holistic approach to wellness, meaning that they consider the whole body and mind when educating clients about healthy living. Wellness Coaches are also able to spend time listening carefully to their clients in order to best support each individual on their unique journey.

There are numerous examples of successes working with children and families since the inception of the COVID-19 health crisis. Margaret Maley, Team Leader, Family Support & Early Childhood Resource and Heather Getty, Team Leader, Adolescent Services, recently shared what some of their staff Wellness Coaches have achieved working with clients and the community during the pandemic.

### **Physical and mental health balance**

- Providing education about COVID-19 and having discussions about how it affects both physical and mental health
- Goal Setting with children and families and then planning steps necessary to reach identified goals
- Providing education about resilience, hygiene, sleep, medication compliance, the importance of routines, exercise and its effect on mood, mental/physical health and how they affect each other
- Mindfulness activities such as breathing exercises, bullet journaling (based on a theme, for example: summer 2020 goals for mental health), journaling from prompts, yoga
- Skill building with the use of a cognitive approach by learning to notice thoughts that happen and letting them pass without judgement, using emojis to discuss emotions

- Meditation such as guided scripts, using the Headspace app, or using YouTube videos

### **Food and nutrition**

- Working with child care providers to determine local free and healthy food resources for children and families during COVID-19. Engaging in frequent discussions around meal planning for children in child care settings, specifically around the food program. Examples of this include encouraging a variety of starches to increase healthy grain consumption for children, in addition to exploring alternatives to meats
- Assisting families in accessing local food shelves and helping identify which foods fit in the red, yellow and green light domains
- Providing families with grocery store gift cards provided through the Parent Child Center of NCSS, encouraging families to seek out healthy, low cost options with longer shelf-lives
- Continually posting USDA healthy recipes on social media for nutritious snacks that parents and kids can make together at home
- Nutrition education using the Traffic Light Eating and other games from the Dr. Sears course, sharing recipes

### **Maintaining engagement**

- Working with families to discover creative ways to keep their family active and physically healthy during quarantine. Examples include: telehealth with a family while they are on a nature hike, encouraging families to engage in low cost outdoor activities such as gardening and discovering new walking paths in their town
- Providing opportunities for individuals to show off new skills such as riding a bike, running fast, drawing
- Physical activity such as Just Dance videos (through screen share), Hokey Pokey, Freeze Dance, virtual walks, yoga, assigning various exercises to letters in the alphabet and then doing those exercises based on spelling out the individuals name
- Games such as Pictionary, Simon Says, Eye Spy, Charades, and Go Fish
- Art and craft activities such as water coloring, drawing, coloring, pearling beads, providing recipes for homemade playdough

Maintaining a balance between physical and mental health during the COVID-19 pandemic has been essential for children and families to realize their potential during these uncertain times. NCSS Wellness Coaches have been able to make a difference utilizing videoconferencing platforms to ensure access to care while focusing on the health and wellbeing of children and families.

**ABOUT NORTHWESTERN COUNSELING & SUPPORT SERVICES (NCSS):** Since 1958, NCSS a private, non-profit, human services agency has been serving Franklin and Grand Isle Counties. NCSS provides intervention and support to children, adolescents, and adults with emotional and behavioral problems; a mental health diagnosis; adolescent substance use; and an intellectual disability or developmental delay. Over 600 staff members help over 4,000 people each year in 17 locations in collaboration with community partners. NCSS' 24/7/365 crisis team and mobile outreach is available to meet the needs of Franklin and Grand Isle County children, adults, and families in crisis by calling 802-524-6554 then press 1.

[www.ncssinc.org](http://www.ncssinc.org) NCSS... *we're here for you.*

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