



Agency Name: Catholic Social Services

Program Name: Family Counseling

Program Success Story:

An 11-year-old boy (“John”) had multiple medical issues including a life-shortening illness. He regularly underwent invasive medical treatments as well as frequent blood-work. Due to these procedures and in order to prevent him from contracting illnesses at school, he ended by missing weeks, even months, of school at a time (his teacher would home-school him). This led to a major difficulty reintegrating into his peer group once back at school. Students reacted in fear about his “disease”. They asked personal and sometimes rude questions, stared, and often ran away after interactions. Classmates would make plans to sit with him at lunch and then walk right by him to join another group. John had been told just to ignore the mistreatment, but the mistreatment didn’t diminish. What was happening at school was affecting John’s grades and creating depressive symptoms of great concern. His emotional stress was amplified by his sense of hopelessness in relation to being able to keep-up with school work. John had always taken pride in being an A student, and his inability to reach his standards impacted his physical health and increased his risk of relapses. His therapist advocated for him with the director of special education, so that his work-load might be modified when he was not able to attend school regularly.

Through skills building, coaching and scripting during therapy sessions that included his parents, John learned how to reconnect with other children after spending so much time alone, away from his peer group. He learned the courage to let people get to know him aside from his illnesses. He educated the other children about the nature of his illnesses and about the fact that he was not contagious. John found the courage to be himself and not to fear what might lie ahead. All this meant taking some risks, because being with people meant increased danger to his health. It was discovered, however, that the benefits of improved emotional and mental health out-weighed many of the risks, as he felt more connected to the world in which he wanted to continue to live as long as possible. John now presents as a happy and engaged child who looks forward to going to school when he can and whose health continues to improve.

This therapy would not have been available to this family, if it were not for United Way. Because of all the medical appointments and quarantines at home, the mother was not able to work. The child had a limited medical insurance for which there were very few providers and that would have required him to go to a setting of greater risk to his health. The family was able to pay only \$10 for a session due to the number of medical expenses they had and their limited income.