



**RFK  
COMMUNITY  
ALLIANCE**

Perkins and RFK Children's Action Corps:  
Growing Together

FALL/WINTER 2021

# the connector.

News from RFK Community Alliance

## CLINICIANS ARE BACK IN SCHOOLS, SUPPORTING STUDENTS THROUGH A MENTAL HEALTH CRISIS

Heading back to school in the fall often brings with it a mixture of excitement and nervousness, anticipation and uncertainty. For students dealing with mental and behavioral health challenges, either caused by or made worse by a year and a half of COVID-19 pandemic restrictions and closures, it can be especially daunting. As students and teachers go back to some Central Massachusetts schools and try to find a sense of normalcy, clinicians from The Center for Behavioral Health (previously Perkins Behavioral Health) are right there with them as they try to navigate in-school learning, regain social skills, and adjust yet again.

The number of children needing mental health services is increasing, both locally and nationally, and putting mental health first is key to helping these kids adjust. Center for Behavioral Health Clinician, Amanda Levitan, LICSW, works in several local schools. "We are seeing increased anxiety, depression, reactivity, acting out, and even anger, and understandably so - these last 18 months of online learning, isolation, and worry have taken a toll on these kids," she shared. One thing is for sure; the administration and teachers are prioritizing mental health as we work to get back to "normal." Our clinicians are working side by side with school administrators and teachers to address childrens' mental health needs.

With our clinicians back in schools, teachers are encouraging students to get help and support during school hours. And our clinicians are getting creative - with younger children, they are focusing more on activities and less on talk therapy; with teenagers and adolescents, they are helping them to be increasingly responsible for their own treatment plans, goals, and

skill-building. In therapy, these children learn skills and develop techniques to help them cope with life's stressors.

COVID-19 is recognized mostly for its physical effects on our health but now we are seeing firsthand the emotional and mental toll it is taking, especially on children. The effects of the pandemic on students are likely to be felt for years to come - making the partnership between our clinicians and our partner schools all the more important to help children navigate through these difficult times.

These children are our future - RFK Community Alliance clinicians, school administrators, teachers, parents and caregivers are all taking an active role in aiding their recovery as we recover from this pandemic, together.



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## A LETTER FROM OUR PRESIDENT & CEO

Friends,

Last fall, Perkins and Robert F. Kennedy Children's Action Corps were thrilled to become affiliated. And this fall, we are thrilled to be growing together as RFK Community Alliance. The new name carries forward the work and life of Robert F. Kennedy, who was committed to serving children and families in need. The new logo modernizes Perkins' longtime flower logo. We honor the legacy of Dr. Franklin Perkins as his name will live on, as it always has, as the name of the Doctor Franklin Perkins School. Together, the new branding represents a fresh and exciting future for us all.

While our name and logo are new, many things remain unchanged, most importantly, the programs we offer and the people we serve. RFK Community Alliance's remarkable and dedicated team members have



continued providing essential services, support, and care throughout the COVID-19 pandemic and truly are the backbone of the agency. We owe them a huge debt of gratitude for their willingness to adapt, adjust, and show up for everyone in our care.

Human services organizations are seeing unprecedented need in the communities they serve. RFK Community Alliance is no different and we are rising to the challenge. By growing together, we are better serving people and team members now and will be able to provide a wider continuum of care to more people facing complex challenges in the years ahead. I invite you to learn more about our programs, some of which are featured in this newsletter.

As always, I value your commitment to our mission. At its most basic, we are people helping people and each of you is a part of that. We couldn't do it without you.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Michael W. Ames". The signature is fluid and cursive, written in a professional but personal style.

Michael W. Ames, PhD

## ALLOW US TO REINTRODUCE OURSELVES...

# We are partners.

# We are champions of peoples' strengths.

We help each person we work with to be connected, capable, and healthy.

We are team players when it comes to care. We work with the people we serve, their families, schools, and other community partners to develop a network of support. We provide opportunities to build skills and confidence. We nurture strengths, determination, and resilience.

And we continually innovate and evaluate to bring the best in care to those we serve.

### PEOPLE SERVED

1,500+ children  
and families annually

### EMPLOYEES

550+

### SERVICE AREAS

Adoption  
Adult Services  
Behavioral Health  
Community Services  
Early Education and Care  
Education  
Youth Justice Transformation  
Youth Residential Care

[RFKCOMMUNITY.ORG](https://www.rfkcommunity.org)





## Adult Services horticultural group

### A SLOW-EASE BACK INTO THE COMMUNITY FOR ADULTS

Many of the adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities served by RFK Community Alliance Adult Services (previously Perkins Adult Services) are also vulnerable because of underlying medical conditions, making getting back to familiar routines especially challenging.

Our top priority has been – and remains – the health and wellbeing of the adults in our care. As vaccines became available and pandemic restrictions have eased, we returned to safe, outdoor, and/or smaller community activities. A horticultural group that was started at Adult Services in Clinton, continued over at the Clinton Senior Center alongside seniors this past summer. And Adult

participant Patrick, who is blind, has recently returned to playing piano every week for the Knitting Group at the Senior Center as a part of his Individual Support Plan.

“We’re not where I want to be yet, but we’ve been lucky,” says Alger, stressing that her staff and the program participants remain vigilant and are doing a really great job staying on top of safety by masking, disinfecting, and hand washing. “Despite it being hard on them, their temperature still gets taken every day and they’re much safer than the general public.”

Before the pandemic, Adult participants held several jobs and activities in the community, like Meals on Wheels, cleaning at local area businesses, grocery shopping, and more. Each job was paid and

included training, supervision, and the opportunity to use and practice valuable skills, like collaborating and socializing. It has been tough to be deprived of these activities for nearly two years, both for those in the program as well as the Clinton community that our program participants love and have missed during the pandemic.

While many social and community-based activities are paused, steps towards modified traditions are emerging for this vulnerable group – and with that, hope. They ask if they can go to Dunkin, and earlier the answer was “no, it’s not safe,” but now we can do the drive-through. We’ll order out lunch too...those types of small things make a difference.



## RFK NATIONAL RESOURCE CENTER FOR JUVENILE JUSTICE HOSTS NATIONAL SYMPOSIUM

In early September, the [RFK National Resource Center for Juvenile Justice](#) welcomed more than 300 people from 30+ states to the Transformation of Youth Justice Symposium and Training Institutes in Nashville, Tennessee. Co-sponsored by the State Justice Institute\*, the event offered participants, from judges to caseworkers to parole officers, a wealth of information and tools for improving outcomes for youth and families by improving the systems that serve them.

Chyrl Jones, Acting Administrator for the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, offered [virtual remarks](#) on the Symposium's first day, stating "I am confident you will leave this event with a clearer understanding of how to inspire

hope and provoke change within your jurisdictions so that every child has the opportunity to realize the kind of future that we dream about for our own children."

The participants were overwhelmingly positive about the experience, the knowledge gained, and especially the opportunity to gather with like-minded professionals dedicated to improving outcomes for youth across the country:

"It was so helpful to see and hear what others are doing in this field across the country. It was uplifting to know that regardless of the state, the culture, the type of county (rural, urban, big, small), the drive and dedication is there

in all these places. This work can make you weary but being around those that care about it as much as you do, was invigorating."

Currently, the RFK National Resource Center is partnering with more than twenty state and local jurisdictions across the country focusing on youth justice reform and transformation, probation/community supervision enhancements, positively impacting outcomes for dual status youth, supporting development of a comprehensive array of alternative responses to formal involvement in the youth justice system, and implementing the innovative Growth-Focused Case Management approach. To learn more, visit: [Our Work | Robert F. Kennedy National Resource Center for Juvenile Justice \(rfknrcjj.org\)](#).

\*The Transformation of Youth Justice Symposium is supported by grant number SJI-19-N-052 from the State Justice Institute. The points of view expressed during the event and in event materials do not necessarily represent the official position or policies of the State Justice Institute.



THANK YOU TO OUR DEDICATED [EXECUTIVE LEADERSHIP TEAM](#) AND [BOARD OF TRUSTEES](#)

