

# Directions

A newsletter for  
those inspired by  
Compass Mark

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Spring 2021

## Student Assistance Program Trainings Expand to Chester County and Beyond

The Student Assistance Program (SAP) is a process designed to assist parents, communities, and schools in the identification of barriers to any individual students' success. School SAP teams are typically comprised of teachers, administrators, school nurses and counselors who work together to develop and implement a plan to support the student. A Liaison Provider with mental health and substance use expertise supports that team on an ad-hoc basis for added insight and, as necessary, provide confidential one-on-one assessment with the student.

### Broader Reach through a Virtual Model

Compass Mark works with schools in Lancaster, Lebanon and now Chester County to train SAP teams and new SAP team members. With the pandemic driving so many things to a virtual model, the training increased access to many school districts across Pennsylvania, including schools in nearby Adams and York Counties and as far as Allegheny, Fayette and Washington Counties.

"Compass Mark has been leading virtual SAP trainings since April 2020

### SAP TRAINING TEAM



Deb McCoy, Bevan Allen and Joshua Mountz

to travel. Now that the virtual model has been proven, it could help to cut down on travel and allow trainers to reach more teams," she said.

**"While our priority training areas remain in Lancaster, Lebanon and Chester Counties, the pandemic has actually expanded the reach of Compass Mark's expertise."**

when the pandemic began," said Program Coordinator Deb McCoy. "While our priority training areas remain in Lancaster, Lebanon and Chester Counties, the pandemic has actually expanded the reach of Compass Mark's expertise."

Deb expects various virtual trainings and support to continue even when meetings and events can resume in-person. "Not every county has a licensed provider for SAP training, which requires trainers

### Growing into Chester County

Compass Mark's SAP training expansion into Chester County began before the COVID-19 pandemic, and the program immediately started working to build trust with schools.

"Schools are dealing with sensitive, high-stakes issues among students, so it's critical for Compass Mark to establish trust in order to provide the right level of assistance," according to Prevention

### Are you looking for prevention programs for students in your school or community?

Compass Mark is now offering the following evidence-based programs – contact us to learn more!

- CATCH My Breath
- Lions Quest
- Promoting Alternative Thinking Strategies
- Positive Action
- Project Towards No Drug Abuse
- Support for Students Exposed to Trauma

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# Community Prevention Mobilizer Using Role to Match Positive Intention to Positive Impact

Through funding from the Lancaster County Drug and Alcohol Commission, Compass Mark employs a Community Prevention Mobilizer, to provide resources and technical assistance to grassroots organizations and coalitions throughout Lancaster County. The goal of this program is to actively facilitate the growth and expansion of community-based drug prevention activities at the local level. In addition, the Community Prevention Mobilizer supports and advises various community collaborations in regard to best practices of drug and alcohol prevention.

This role is currently filled by Xavi Garcia-Molina who described it as having a seat at the table and his hands in a lot of things, making sure that organizations “can match their intentions and their impact” by applying best practices to their prevention efforts.

“It’s a unique program for many reasons, including the fact that it’s just one person,” Xavi said. “It offers a little bit of flexibility within the structure of the program and allows me to offer the most ideal support to coalitions around the county.”

When discussing the challenges that COVID-19 presented to his program, Xavi said the most obvious one is that the pandemic has resulted in increased need for the same level of resources and support.

“Because coalitions are primarily volunteer-centered and because their volunteers are often educators, social workers and healthcare professionals, they struggled with time and burnout,” he said. “Coalition work is so important to the community, especially in the face of a crisis like a pandemic and, right now, we’re seeing how fragile it is.”

As for his role, Xavi said, “I’m a community organizer who hasn’t been in the community for a year, but there have been positives.” In addition to getting more one-on-one time with coalition

leadership (via Zoom, of course), he was able to offer more depth than breadth. “I’m not at every table right now, but I can make a bigger impact with fewer groups.”

In the past year, Xavi’s work has focused heavily on racial equity and COVID-19. His program awarded five mini-grants this year.

## **The Lancaster LGBTQ+ Coalition: Homelessness Emergency Response Assistance Team (HEART)**

The Lancaster LGBTQ+ Coalition’s HEART (Homelessness Emergency Assistance and Response Team) will work with persons experiencing homelessness on the streets to help them access safe and inclusive housing and mitigate their ability to protect themselves from COVID-19 due to barriers by providing PPE and community resources.



## **Safe House Lancaster: The Everyday Activism Academy**

The Everyday Activism Academy bridges the systemic gaps that young black and brown folks experience through education, community engagement and mentorship.



## **Loft Community Partnership: Case Management Pilot Program**

Loft Community Partnership will be piloting a case management program in order to deepen the prevention services provided to participant households through assessment, referral, and integrating community connections.



## **Manheim Community Cares: Community Scavenger Hunt**

Manheim Community Cares (MCC) is seeking to provide the Manheim Community with a community wide scavenger hunt that will encourage collaboration between individuals, community resource providers and public spaces.



**building a stronger community**

**For more information about the coalitions that Compass Mark supports in Lancaster County,** please contact Bevan Allen, Director of Operations at [ballen@compassmark.org](mailto:ballen@compassmark.org).

# Family Services Advocate Finds New Way to Connect with Children & Families in Crisis Amid COVID-19 Restrictions

Around 3,500 children in Lancaster County have a parent who is incarcerated. That's 1 in 14 kids, right here in our communities. So, when the COVID-19 pandemic cut off her access to the Lancaster County Prison system, Compass Mark's Family Services Advocate Lindsey Ober was concerned about how she'd continue to connect with children and families facing stressful and uncertain circumstances.

The Family Services Advocate works to identify, support, and advocate for the unique needs and rights of children with incarcerated parents. This program helps families and caregivers connect with existing community supports and maintain healthy parent-child relationships.

"Before COVID-19, 99% of my referrals came through our local prisons because I was able to be onsite," she said. "In some cases, children are facing the incarceration of their only involved parent or even, in some unfortunate cases, of both parents.

Being able to provide immediate support and advocacy is absolutely critical."

Fortunately, another local institution stepped in to help: schools. "I credit Lancaster County schools for jumping in to make sure children were being referred to the program. We got the word out to counselors and they began driving referrals right away," Lindsey said.

After an initial decline in referrals, they jumped right back up when counselors stepped in. "It's so important that the program connects with children and caregivers as soon as possible. About 90% of the time, the family is facing an active crisis with major, immediate needs," Lindsey explained. "In one recent circumstance, both parents were incarcerated at the same time. As a result, the child was designated as a homeless youth and could have ended up in the foster system. Fortunately, through a school referral, I was able to establish guardianship with the child's grandparents."

While the program has continued to operate, Lindsey said COVID-related changes have been tough on children and families.

"We aren't able to do visits, which is obviously difficult, but we've focused on phone calls and on letter-writing and sending photos, which has been unique for the kids," Lindsey said. "In some cases, we have been given permission for video visits, which families were excited about. But, like everyone, families in our program are eager to get back to in-person visits."

"No matter what is happening in the world—including a global pandemic—children deserve to have an advocate making sure their needs are met when one or both parents become incarcerated," Lindsey said. "The past year proves that we can always find a way to make it happen."



Lindsey Ober

## Student Assistance Program... *Continued from page 1*

Specialist Josh Mountz. "Based on our success so far, we are optimistic about this opportunity to become a go-to resource for Chester County schools."

"Compass Mark is in a leadership position in this program, which I believe will be beneficial for schools in Chester County," Deb agreed. "The county's schools are wonderfully diverse, racially and socio-economically, and several have large immigrant populations. This diversity creates varying needs among students, which makes it essential for this program to be effective. Compass Mark is positioned to make that happen and excited to work with Chester County's school communities."

Another educational sector benefiting from Compass Mark's SAP expertise is cyber schools. As an advocate at the state level, Deb promotes SAP for cyber and charter schools. The pandemic's shift

## "Compass Mark is on its way to becoming the single best source of support, resources and expertise for SAP teams..."

to remote learning created an opening for Compass Mark to be even more involved.

"In a way, cyber schools had an advantage during the pandemic school closures because of their existing remote model," Deb explained. "Compass Mark was able to utilize the virtual model for team functionality evaluations, certification trainings and other technical assistance, helping cyber school SAP teams to now function at an even higher level and assist significant numbers of students."

### Looking Ahead to Fall 2021

"All of us are anticipating that referrals

will explode in the fall when kids are back to school," said Josh. "Our goal is to make sure Compass Mark's team is ready to foster and maintain strong and supportive relationships with schools, especially in our three primary counties, and also beyond as needed."

"Compass Mark is on its way to becoming the single best source of support, resources and expertise for SAP teams," Deb said. "It will be especially important in this coming school year that schools know they can readily access our SAP team's support when they need it."

# Focus on Diversity, Equity & Inclusion

## Revealing Path for Stronger, More Effective Prevention Efforts

In late 2019, Compass Mark formed an internal staff team to guide the organization's work around diversity, equity and inclusion. The team had several areas of focus: to plan opportunities for staff education on diversity-related topics; to evaluate areas of potential growth for Compass Mark's programs, policies, staff and board recruitment, and other areas; and to expand partnerships to increase awareness and access to prevention programs for diverse populations in the community.

Executive Director Eric Kennel talked about why this initiative is so important both from delivering prevention services and from an organizational perspective. "Our vision is to 'guide and empower ALL people toward healthy, fulfilling lives free from addiction,' so how do we ensure we are inviting diverse perspectives to the table in program planning? How do we provide equitable access to services? How do we assure that our team represents the communities we serve? These are just a few of the questions this team began to address," he said.

In addition, during the events of summer 2020, the diversity team gave input into drafting of a statement on racial equity. The full statement can be

found here [compassmark.org/statement-on-racial-equity/](https://compassmark.org/statement-on-racial-equity/) and ties directly to the organization's core values.

### Compass Mark strives to be:

1. **Inclusive** through creating welcoming, judgement-free environments that engage our individual differences as strengths.
2. **Resilient** by valuing the inherent potential that exists in every person and community, recognizing that the past does not determine our future.
3. **Purposeful** by asking thoughtful questions, embracing the courage to change, and pursuing innovation grounded in research and best practice.

One specific example shows how the organization's efforts are already taking shape. Each year Compass Mark provides a mini-grant opportunity to Lancaster County coalitions for prevention initiatives in the community. This year, priority was given to applications focused on diversity, equity and inclusion, and/or COVID response. Two of the award winners – the LGBTQ+ Coalition and SafeHouse Lancaster – presented projects that were uniquely focused on equity and

inclusion issues in the community.

To continue to advance the initiative around diversity, equity and inclusion, in January 2021, Compass Mark engaged with Dr. Amber Sessoms from Natural Inclinations. Dr. Sessoms is providing the staff with monthly reflection guides, encouraging team members to dig into the issues of racism, power, privilege, and other important topics.

"As a team we are all approaching these issues from different perspectives, and so our focus is on listening and being vulnerable with each other throughout the learning process," Eric said. "Dr. Sessoms has been joining us for a debrief time at our monthly staff meetings to help facilitate discussion."

In the months ahead, Compass Mark will be continuing the conversation around where changes can be applied based on the discoveries made during this process.

"We are learning together how and where we can apply important changes to our work from the perspective of diversity, equity and inclusion, which will ultimately result in stronger resources, programs and outreach," Eric said. "It's exciting to begin to see the path toward serving our communities more effectively."

## Scenes from Leaders of Future Generations

Leaders of Future Generations is a school-based prevention program for youth who exhibit leadership potential. Students explore different aspects of leadership and develop their potential to become leaders in their schools and communities. The program reduces a student's risk factors by developing individual leadership skills and strengthening personal resiliency. Students grow and become part of a strong community based on trust, respect and understanding.

*Shown here are Leaders of Future Generations students at Columbia and Manheim Township school districts.*

