



## Champions for Inclusive Communities

# Star Community

# Clatsop County, OR

The state of Oregon is lucky to have a number of Community Connections Network (CCN) teams in the area including one located in Clatsop County, Oregon that is pursuing their own unique method of providing services to children and youth with special health care needs (CYSHCN).

Clatsop County itself is a rural area of Oregon – the strikingly beautiful northwest corner of the state, right on the coast. The county’s population is estimated to be at about 37,500 in a health services catchment area of about 100 miles from Tillamook to Washington Peninsula. But the thing that perhaps describes this community the best is their willingness to go above and beyond when it comes to coordinating and providing services for CYSHCN. The team at Clatsop County’s CCN is employing a number of inspiring approaches to serving the families in their area.

### A Core Team of Families and Professionals

The Clatsop County CCN attributes much of their accomplishment to their team meetings. These meetings are held monthly and draw in a wide variety of agencies to share updates and discuss how they can work together to serve families of CYSHCN in the local community. An impressive number of professionals attend these meetings, including a coordinator, all of Clatsop County’s school nurses, a medical doctor, a psychiatric nurse practitioner, a Northwest Regional ESD behavioral specialist, and administrators from Early Intervention and Head Start. The Clatsop County CCN team also includes a representative from Clatsop Behavioral Healthcare, Clatsop Developmental Disabilities, and the CaCoon public health nurse from Clatsop County Health Department. Every team member represents a huge investment of resources and time taken from their busy work schedules.

The Clatsop County CCN Team wouldn’t function, of course, without the input of family members in addition to the professionals. Janna Smith, a former Family Liaison for CCN and mother of children with special health care needs herself, was especially involved in making sure family members were involved in as much of the team meetings as possible. Karen Brown, Community Consultant for Oregon Center for Children and Youth with Special Health Needs (OCCYSHN) says, “Janna was instrumental in encouraging the team to include parents in every aspect of the team meetings.”

Janna’s influence has helped the team realize how valuable a Family Liaison can be. Right now Mindy Poetsch, Local CCN Coordinator, is making a phenomenal effort to fill Janna’s shoes as her schedule allows until a new Family Liaison can be found. She follows up with families to ensure they are still receiving the services they need. In the words of Mindy, “a Family Liaison is a critical piece of the puzzle.”

One mother, Kelly Smith, tells of the many times Mindy has helped coordinate care for her son Dillon, who has been diagnosed with Pervasive Developmental Disorder and ADHD. At one point, Mindy even accompanied Kelly and Dillon to Dillon’s Head Start class to ask

questions and make sure Kelly was getting the answers she needed. Kelly concisely describes Mindy with a “we love her!”

The Clatsop County CCN Team also has the philosophy that they must teach and coach the parents about how to advocate for themselves and their child, and then be there to celebrate their successes. Mindy says, “We need to build their confidence – show them how important they are, show them where they are doing great, and build on their strengths.” She explains that sometimes parents feel like they are a “bad parent” if they need to ask for help. The Clatsop County CCN Team’s goal is to reassure them that they are the one constant throughout their child’s life. No medical professional can claim that role.

Along with Ms. Poetsch and the team’s medical providers (Dr. Dominique Greco and Lori Mason, Psychiatric Mental Health Nurse Practitioner), the Clatsop County CCN Team is fortunate to have Gina Kytr, Seaside School District RN, as a CCN Professional Adjunct. Gina provides an extra level of coordination between referring schools and the team’s medical providers; and between CYSHN served by Clatsop County CCN or the county school districts and specialty medical providers at Portland hospitals. She plays an important role in the team’s highly successful local trainings.

### Ensuring Every Family Has Insurance

One of OCCYSHN and CCN’s biggest goals is to ensure every family they serve has both a medical home and insurance that fits their needs.

#### What makes a Star Community?

ChampionsInC has created the Star Communities program to recognize exceptional communities.

Star Communities will show excellence in 6 Performance Measures:

- Families are partners
- A "Medical Home" provides coordinated care
- Children receive early and continuous screening
- Families have adequate funding/insurance to pay for services
- Services are organized so families can use them easily and are satisfied

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For example, one family in Clatsop County had an annual \$5,000 deductible. They established a pattern of seeing a practitioner for a little while, getting behind on the bills, and then moving to another practitioner only to start the cycle over again. The case was brought up to the Clatsop County CCN Team and the not-for-profit organization, Providence Medical Group, stepped in to pay through their Compassionate Care Provisions. That way, the family could get help with their insurance and at the same time establish a medical home in the area.

### Partnerships Influence Strong Medical Homes

The Clatsop County CCN is an effective facilitator in establishing medical homes for CYSHCN. Part of this is due to the excellent method they have for encouraging communication among agencies. When families visit CCN, one of the first things they do is sign a “Release of Information” form. This essentially gives permission for professionals who are on the family’s CCN team to view the patient’s medical and mental health records. As a result, communication amongst providers within the child’s medical home flows much more smoothly. Providers can talk to one another and share records while keeping the family’s privacy protected. Of course, there are still times when additional forms are needed or the release form doesn’t cover everything an agency needs, but in the words of Karen Brown, “this release helps everyone to be able to freely share information about the family.”

The Providence Medical Group—Seaside in Seaside, OR regularly receives referrals from the Clatsop County CCN Team about patients who may be failing to thrive in school and social settings. Lori Mason provides behavioral health services to Providence North Coast Clinic patients. Through her partnership with CCN, Lori has become acutely aware of the wide variety of community resources that are available. This, in turn, makes it easier to connect patients to those resources and to help establish their medical home. She says of the program, “I like to know what the resources are; in my field it’s not just about getting medications, but it’s also about pointing people in the right direction – knowing what other resources are available that they could benefit from.”

Clatsop County CCN also views Providence Medical Group at its Seaside Clinic as an indispensable partner in their efforts. Every year, the Providence Medical Group gives millions in reduced cost care to children, both with and without special health care needs. More than once, this organization has stepped in to lend a hand when CCN families are struggling to pay for services. CCN does its best to connect families with specialty providers who are outside of this rural area by referring families to Dial-A-Ride, which provides free transportation to and from medical, mental health, and dental appointments for Medicaid clients.

### Sensitivity to Families

The Clatsop County CCN Team addresses cultural needs when they arise. In many instances, it’s simply a matter of being sensitive to a

particular family and adjusting to how they best express their needs. Sometimes a family will be more hesitant than others to share personal information. Other times, the team addresses “culture of poverty” issues as they relate to a particular family. Whatever the situation, Clatsop County CCN makes it a point to be sensitive to the family and focus on their unique circumstance by tailoring clinics or meetings to meet the family’s preferences, for example.

### Opening the Doors to Transition

Transition to adult life is an issue that only occasionally comes up in Clatsop County’s CCN so far. A big reason for this is that most of the CCN team referrals are for children younger than high-school age. However, OCCYSHN has always encouraged the team to discuss adolescence, and adolescent education and has recently released a brochure with adolescent transition ideas. The state-level CCN program is reaching out more often to try to get high school-aged youth with special health care needs into the local clinics.

### Working Towards Even More Coordination

Many of the agencies on the Clatsop County CCN Team have developmental screening efforts underway. CaCoon Nurses, Early Intervention, public health nurses, and Head Start all have Child Find efforts. However, Mindy admits they could be more coordinated to assure that all children in the county have some level of developmental screening before they reach school age.

Lynn McConnell, Knappa School District Nurse, is especially passionate about the important link between early childhood social and emotional health and later success in school and beyond. She has kept the team focused on early childhood, and just last spring Head Start accepted an invitation to join the local Clatsop County CCN team. This is also an excellent example of how the team supports their members and works together to back their ideas. Where other groups may just sit back and let the one person with an idea do all the work, the Clatsop County CCN team makes an effort to champion the cause together.

### A Champion of a Community

Overall, the strength and size of the Clatsop County CCN team continues to be a very beneficial asset to the community. Observers or first-time participants in the meetings are quick to express their amazement at how many professionals and agency heads are able to gather at one time to work on the issues. That commitment is rare. And whether it is attributed to the rural culture of the community, the championing nature of a few key participants, or simply the fact that the system produces results for families, the Clatsop County CCN team and the community it serves are one of a kind.

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