

HOW WE HELP WHEN TRAGEDY OCCURS

As an agency, Youth Crossroads (YC) is privileged to work closely alongside people and systems to assist them in many ways, most recently as they navigate really difficult circumstances. This rings true these past 13 months but especially in the last few weeks as our community is grieving the loss of two more young people in the first two weeks of the new year.

Their deaths, coupled with the COVID-19 pandemic, complicate the grieving process for their families and friends, as well as students and staff at Morton. Throughout the year, our Associate Director of Counseling Services, Jaclyn Wallen, along with our School-Based Counseling (SBC) Team has worked alongside school administrators to think through the logistics of supporting a large school through the immediate and long-term impact of these tragedies.

Over the past year YC Staff have provided support to not only students, but also parents and school staff. We work closely with Morton support staff to provide drop in spaces (virtual and in person) for students who want to discuss their grief, process their loss and collectively mourn.

SBC Staff follow-up with students who need help beyond this immediate crisis intervention offering individual counseling and a Grief Group. YC Staff have also worked to provide in-person and virtual educational sessions for parents, providing information about mental health and supporting their youth who is struggling due to distress and / or mental health issues.

Over this past year, a new need has surfaced and YC has responded. Due to her work with the Cicero Police Department, Jaclyn Wallen has been trained and has provided Critical Incident Stress Debriefing (CISD). These CISD sessions provide a chance for individuals to talk about a trauma situation with others who were involved.

Due to the recent impact of student suicides and stress caused by the COVID pandemic, school staff and teachers have been struggling as much as our youth. By providing CISD sessions for teachers and staff who are affected by a student's death, staff are able to process their own grief and better support their grieving students.

While much of this work feels reactive, this is building on the foundation of partnership that we have with school administrators/staff to help promote a culture of social-emotional and trauma support for students. Our team has been able to help train teachers on classroom interventions, provide counseling services and implement programs to address trauma and resilience building.

Since last fall, we have also been facilitating teacher support groups at Morton West and Freedom Middle School to give school staff an outlet for talking about stress, developing better coping skills and providing opportunities for connection with one another. As an agency, we are looking for more opportunities to expand our capacity and scope to serve our community through difficult circumstances.