



Health/Education Story

More Than Educating, BPNC Helps Students Heal

School was always a bit of a struggle for Mario, a student from Brighton Park. Throughout middle school he had a tough time keeping his grades and attendance up, failing classes and missing many days. **When his friend was killed in a gang-related shooting, the trauma caused Mario's academics and social interactions to take a turn for the worse.**

Neighborhood Network **Highlights**

- ✔ Parent Mentor program was established
- ✔ Five full time counselors in six neighborhood schools.
- ✔ Expanded mental health services include the hiring of a Domestic Violence Counselor, Community-Based Family Therapist, and School-Based Counselor.
- ✔ Brighton Park schools have become sanctuary schools for families concerned about deportation; hosting 65 immigration workshops engaging nearly 3,000 community members.
- ✔ Gads Hill opened a new state-of-the-art Brighton Park Early Learning Center, providing comprehensive early childhood education for 124 children ages birth-5 years.

Recognizing his need for support, Brighton Park Neighborhood Council (BPNC), a United Way community partner, intervened to help Mario address the problems he was facing outside of school and heal from the loss of his friend.

As the lead agency of the Brighton Park Neighborhood Network, BPNC is helping local schools become places where students not just succeed academically, but personally. Their "community school" approach is helping students and their entire families access counseling, after-school classes, and job training programs.

With support from United Way of Metro Chicago, BPNC and the Neighborhood Network are able to serve more students and households in a holistic way.

For Mario, this included connecting him to an in-school counselor to help him process his feelings, as well as BPNC's violence prevention case managers to shift his trajectory away from gang-involvement.

This multi-level approach is at the heart of our Neighborhood Network Initiative's mission to build stronger households and neighborhoods. We realize that many issues individuals and families face are connected and require multiple resources to overcome.

With this wrap-around support, Mario began to regularly attend school, process his loss and improve his grades. Though his healing journey will continue, Mario's excited about what lies ahead.

At the end of the school year, Mario said he's looking forward to a successful first year of high school. ■

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