



Project SUN (Strong & Unified Network): A Family-Run Organization in Kankakee County, Illinois

Project SUN is a Family-Run Organization strengthening the behavioral System of Care across Kankakee and Iroquois Counties so that children and families can flourish. Established in 2018 through the Illinois Children’s Healthcare Foundation’s Children’s Mental Health Initiative and incorporated as an independent nonprofit in 2024, Project SUN brings together parents, caregivers, youth, providers, and community stakeholders to ensure lived experience informs local system improvement.

Peer Family Advocates with lived experience walk alongside families navigating social-emotional challenges, substance misuse, and multi-system involvement. Advocates provide support, education, and guidance so families can better understand available services and advocate effectively for their children. Project SUN also offers youth and family engagement opportunities that create safe spaces for connection among families experiencing similar challenges.

Project SUN uses the FREDLA Advocacy Model to strengthen family leadership and ensure caregivers have a meaningful role in shaping the behavioral health system. As an FRO, they regularly convene families, providers, and community partners to identify barriers and explore practical solutions that improve access to care in the Kankakee River Valley area. Project SUN also provides education and training opportunities, including Mental Health First Aid for youth, teens, and adults, as well as NAMI programs and the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention.

Project SUN’s Cultural Humility Workgroup meets monthly to help ensure Project SUN and the surrounding System of Care remains welcoming, respectful, and responsive to the families served, identifying barriers causing exclusion and practical improvements to help family voice from all backgrounds stay heard, valued, and included.

Through advocacy, convening, and education, Project SUN helps ensure that lived experience remains central to how children’s behavioral health services evolve in the region.

Project SUN is available by website, phone, or email:
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“Families have shared deep gratitude and renewed hope, knowing their children are better supported.”



Flip to read more about the impact of the ILCHF Children’s Mental Health Family-Run Organizations cohort.