



alliance of community  
assistance ministries  
of greater houston

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### **ACAM Collaborative for Counseling**

Families in need often come to area community assistance ministries (CAMs) with multiple struggles including the priority problem of the inability to provide the basic needs of food, clothing and shelter. Ministry clients are quite candid about the anxiety, depression and stress disorders that result from or are exacerbated by the constant battle to provide the minimum requirements for survival for themselves and their children. Often clients are also facing substance abuse, battering or abandonment.

The stress of situations such as unemployment, lack of food or lack of housing is overwhelming for most clients. They often must put all of their energy and focus into resolving such situations and have little time to attend to mental health issues. In addition, because CAM clients are strapped for funds to pay for immediate human needs, resources to address their mental health are out of reach.

This collaborative program provides free mental health counseling to individuals and families in need throughout the Greater Houston area. Most clients are referred after seeking emergency assistance such as food, clothing, rent/utility assistance or employment services at a local community assistance ministry (CAM), though some come for this program alone. Counseling meets needs by providing: (1) a mental health assessment and, if necessary, psychiatric referral, (2) instruction and practice for developing coping skills for stress management and presenting mental health problems, and (3) affirmation and encouragement to the client. This service also helps clients develop the skills to sustain self-sufficiency and bring an end to the pattern of surviving from one crisis to the next.

The equivalent of a full-time licensed therapist is shared among five community assistance ministries (CAMs) for the equivalent of one day each. Our mental health partners in this program are Family Services of Greater Houston, Houston Galveston Institute and Krist Samaritan Center. Our CAM partners are Humble Area Assistance Ministries, Interfaith Caring Ministries, Katy Christian Ministries, Wesley Community Center and Memorial Assistance Ministries who piloted the program for a year before the collaboration began in 2009. The four original sites are funded through a grant to ACAM from Baylor Methodist Community Health Fund (BMCHF), with services at all sites receiving support from the CAMs and the mental health providers themselves. ACAM is grateful to all of our partners for working together to make this collaboration possible, including the Greater Houston Community Foundation for their part in facilitating the BMCHF grant process.

There has been great demand for this service, and clients have expressed their appreciation at having this caring, helpful service available in their neighborhoods. Staff have shared how positive the program has been and how helpful it is for them to be able to refer clients to someone right there on site.

In addition to providing great benefits to the clients, this program is also helping the CAMs to strengthen the social service "safety net" by creating a sustainable service model and to enhance their own capacity to achieve their mission by expanding a much-needed program to the underserved members of their community. The CAMs are great sites for this service: they are trusted community resources and are known for providing compassionate help with excellence.

At the mid-point of the first year, 70% of clients reported an increase in their ability to handle problems, 70% were functioning better after counseling services and 75% of clients reported an improvement in their overall mental health. ACAM anticipates those numbers climbing further as clients continue to make progress on their journeys to health and stability.

*For more information on Baylor Methodist Community Health Fund, please [click here](#). For more information on ACAM, please [click here](#).*