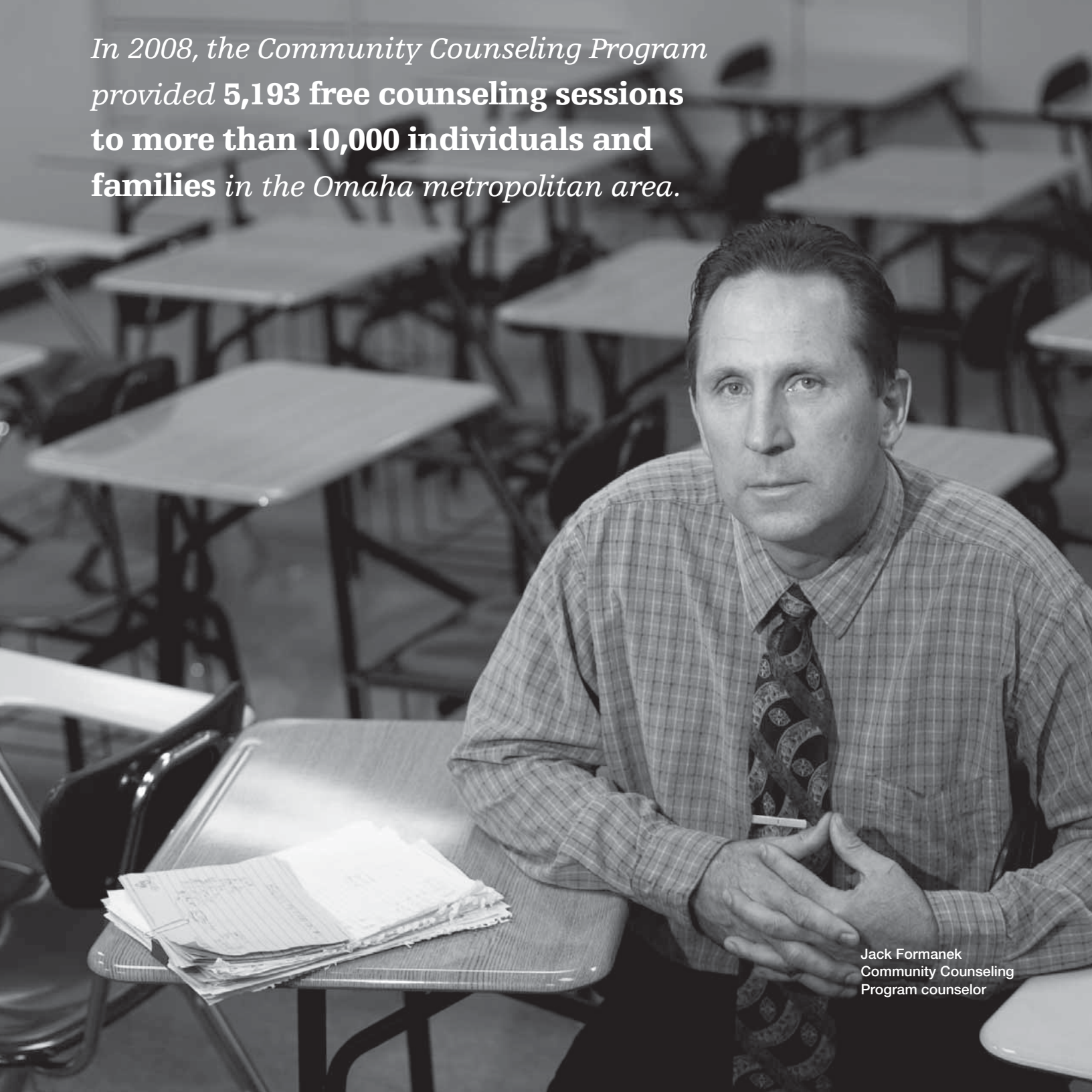


CHART

Our commitment to building a healthier community

CHART is an expression of Methodist's commitment to improving the health and well-being of the communities in which we live, work and play.

*In 2008, the Community Counseling Program provided **5,193 free counseling sessions to more than 10,000 individuals and families** in the Omaha metropolitan area.*



Jack Formanek
Community Counseling
Program counselor

Helping people through their most vulnerable times.



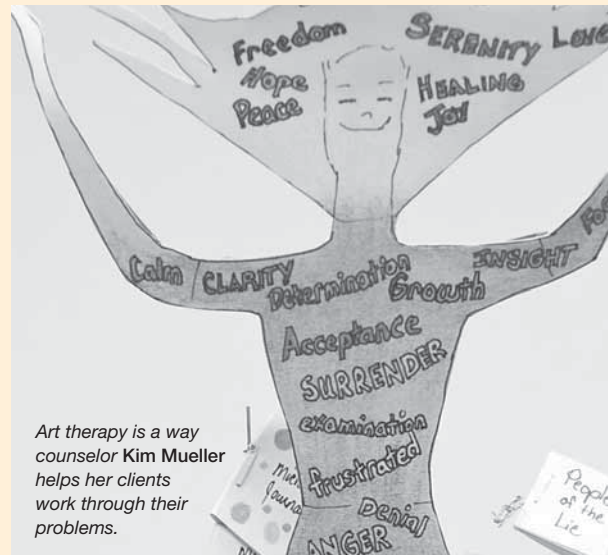
We might like to believe that mental health problems are rare here in the Midwest. They are not. Mental illness can affect anyone regardless of age, gender, education, occupation or hometown.

Research compiled by the Kaiser Family Foundation shows that suicide rates in Nebraska and Iowa surpass the national average, and more than a quarter of adult Nebraskans and Iowans report having experienced poor mental health in the past 30 days.

Left untreated, mental health issues can disrupt family life and productivity, derail school and career success, and increase homelessness, crime and the burden on local, state and federal governments.

Quality mental health care is essential to the overall health of any community. Early intervention and expanded access to treatment can help keep small problems from growing larger and address disabling, life-threatening mental health issues, such as depression and suicide.

At Methodist Health System, we are working with community partners to help meet this need, strengthen our community and reduce the burden on taxpayers. We do this through the Methodist Hospital Community Counseling Program, a unique collaboration between Methodist Hospital Foundation, Omaha Public Schools and various neighborhood churches.



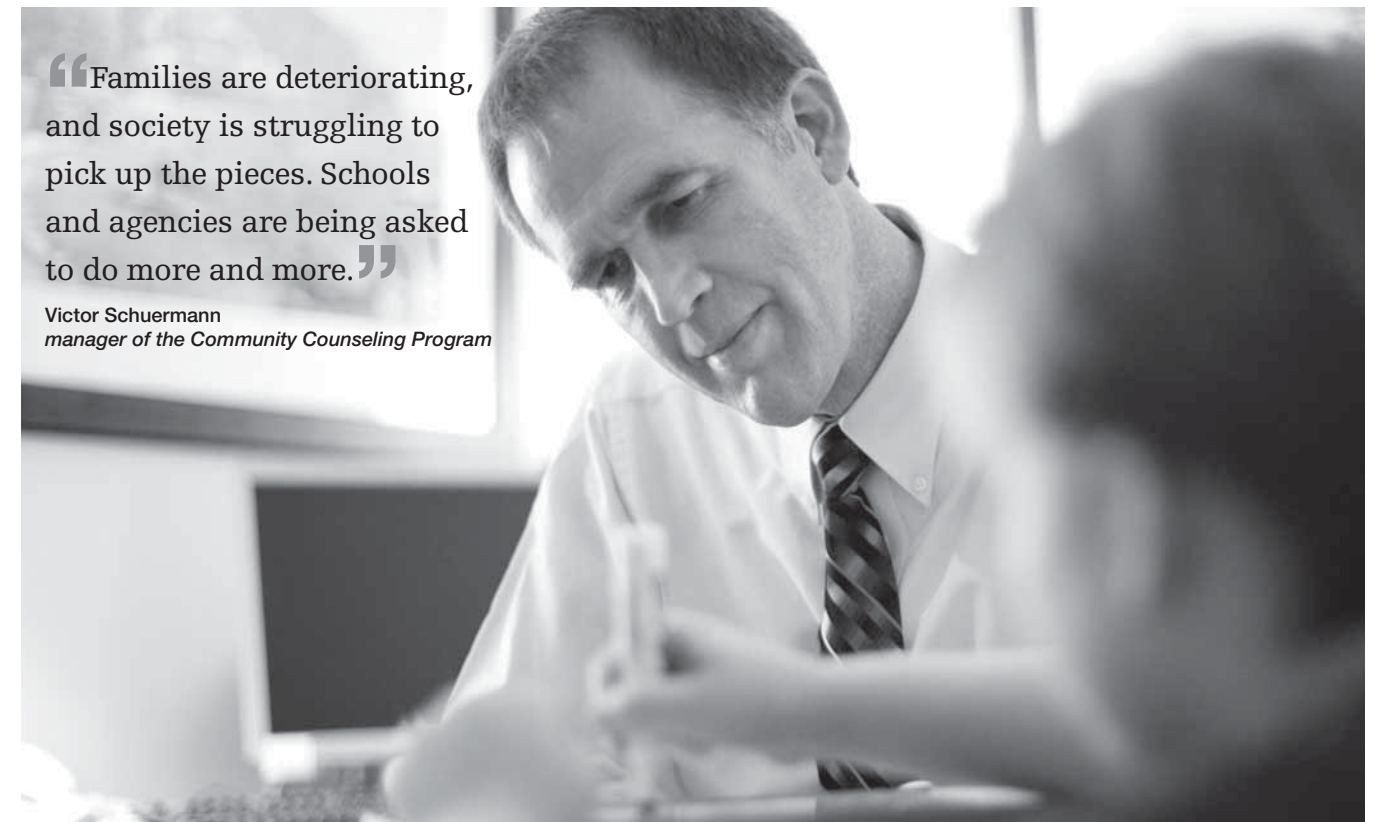
Art therapy is a way counselor Kim Mueller helps her clients work through their problems.

The program puts free, professional counseling services in the community where people live and learn. Counselors help clients through their most vulnerable times, focusing exclusively on care, not on fees or insurance coverage. People who otherwise might not have access to care can focus on getting better.

Nationally, the shortage of affordable, community-based health care is a crisis with dramatic ramifications. Locally, we are working to make a difference and offer a potential model for others to follow.

To learn more about the services Methodist Health System provides as a benefit to our community, visit www.methodistchart.com.

John M. Fraser
President and CEO
Methodist Health System



“Families are deteriorating, and society is struggling to pick up the pieces. Schools and agencies are being asked to do more and more.”

Victor Schuermann
manager of the Community Counseling Program

MENTAL HEALTH CARE: *National Crisis, Local Solution*

Methodist Hospital Community Counseling Program

By Julie Cerney

“Mental health care in America is in crisis.”

This warning was delivered by Michael J. Fitzpatrick, executive director of the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) with the release of the 2009 *Grading the States* report, NAMI’s assessment of the nation’s public mental health care system.

Overall, the nation earned a “D” for its delivery of 65 specific measures of mental health care, as did Nebraska and Iowa.

Fitzpatrick cautioned that these already-low grades may have dropped even further since the report’s release, given the economic downturn and reduced government funding for mental health care.

“Ironically,” Fitzpatrick explained, “state budget cuts occur during a time of economic crisis when mental health services are needed even more urgently than before.”

Government budgets have long been deemed insufficient to meet the need for mental health care. According to the Kaiser Family Foundation (statehealthfacts.org), per capita spending by state mental health agencies averages \$103 nationwide. Iowa spends \$100; Nebraska \$61.

Charting Progress:
10,648

Number of Omaha area adults and school children given free mental health counseling, consultation and education by the Community Counseling Program in 2008.

With government resources stretched thin, creative ways to fill gaps in mental health care services are needed. One innovative approach is the Methodist Hospital Community Counseling Program.

Unique Partnership

The Community Counseling Program makes professional counseling services available to the community at many of Omaha's schools and churches. Methodist Hospital Foundation funds the program as a benefit to the community.

The program is the result of a unique partnership between Methodist Hospital Foundation, Omaha Public Schools and neighborhood churches, according to Cynthia Peacock, president of Methodist Hospital Foundation. "We provide a team of experienced, licensed, master's-level counselors. Schools provide space for counselors to meet with students. Churches provide space for counselors to meet with students' families or other members of the community in a comfortable, neighborhood setting. Together, we provide community-based counseling services that are free, private and accessible to all."

While the full benefit to the individuals, families and schools served may be impossible to measure, the cost of similar services in the Omaha metropolitan area averages \$100 an hour. At this rate, the counseling and consultations provided free-of-charge by the Community Counseling Program topped \$660,000 in 2008 alone.

Initiated as a small pilot project in 1996, the program is largely the brainchild of the late Alva Clark, Th.D., a retired minister and former Methodist Hospital Foundation staff member. Dr. Clark saw the partnership as essential preventive care to reduce rising behavioral health problems and hospitalization of youth.

"Our vision is to provide this worthy program at strategic places in the entire community," wrote Dr. Clark, "so that every child, youth or family may have access to quality behavioral health care."

He united school and church leaders in identifying areas of greatest need while maximizing the effectiveness of every dollar spent. Gradually, he helped build a program structured and financed to endure. In 2002, Dr. Clark was named an Omaha Public Schools A+ Advocate in honor of his role in the Community Counseling Program's creation.

Today, the program that began with one counselor at one high school and one church has grown to 17 counselors at 30 sites, including all OPS middle schools and high schools, two alternative schools, nine churches and one central office location. Support from an anonymous donor in 2008 helped make the latest expansion possible.

Safety Net

"I am not aware of the existence of a similar program," said Nancy Bond, supervisor of school counseling for Omaha Public Schools. "The Community Counseling Program is a beautiful safety net for our students, their families and for our school counselors, too."



“Kids need to hear and internalize that they are valuable and good. We need to reach them in time to help them break unhealthy patterns.”

Jack Formanek
Community Counseling Program counselor

Bond said the program allows OPS counselors to concentrate more time on their students' academic achievement and career counseling needs. At the secondary level, each OPS counselor is responsible for about 250 students. Even higher ratios apply for counselors serving younger students.

"This is a wonderful partnership that offers the best of both worlds," Bond explained. "We gain more caring, supportive adults in our schools providing on-site counseling. We also have the flexibility to refer families to off-site locations in the community with no worry that financial hardship or insurance limitations will keep them from the help they need."

The breadth and depth of counseling provided, Bond added, can get to the heart of problems and help students and parents recognize and deal with difficult issues, reducing or eliminating barriers to learning.

"I have to believe the Community Counseling Program impacts achievement," Bond said, noting that for some students, the program can make the difference between staying in school and dropping out.

"So much of what we know about school success goes to that social-emotional piece, and the Community

Counseling Program speaks to the hearts of kids and families," Bond said. "Both schoolwide and communitywide, this program is a success."

Helping Youth

Recent satisfaction surveys found that of the OPS students who participated in the Community Counseling Program, 100 percent of high schoolers and 92 percent of middle schoolers "would recommend" or "probably would recommend" the program to others.

Students' comments offer a more personal insight into the program's impact:

- *I was able to open up to someone about my problems and get help on how to deal with the issues.*
- *I could see what I was doing wrong and see what to do better.*
- *My counselor listens to me when no one else does.*
- *I felt I could share anything.*
- *I felt safe.*

The list of issues kids struggle with can be a long one. Low self-esteem, loss, divorce, anger management, drugs, alcohol, gangs and other risky behaviors are topics school counselors deal with on a daily basis. "We see difficult family circumstances and behavioral problems starting very early in kids' lives," explained Community Counseling Program

Kim Mueller, a registered art therapist and Community Counseling Program counselor



counselor Jack Formanek, M.S., L.M.H.P., on board from the program's inception. "Kids need to hear and internalize that they are valuable and good. We need to reach them in time to help them break unhealthy patterns."

Victor Schuermann, M.S., L.M.F.T., L.M.H.P., manager of the Community Counseling Program, identified the breakdown of the family unit as the root cause for many of these problems.

"Families are deteriorating, and society is struggling to pick up the pieces," Schuermann said. "Schools and agencies are being asked to do more and more." According to Schuermann, the most helpful approaches recognize the chicken-and-egg nature of the problem. Regardless of which comes first, family deterioration or mental health issues, kids and families need help.

As demand for the Community Counseling Program soars, Schuermann acknowledged the challenges, including long days and late nights for the counselors on his team. They do triage, taking care of the most urgent needs first to get kids through a crisis. "When we're asked to help a child in need, I try to give the same answer," Schuermann explained. "I have room for one more."

Making an Impact

"It is wonderful to watch the Community Counseling Program grow," said Keith Johnson, D.Min., senior pastor of Saint Paul United Methodist Church. "This is a very needed and well-utilized program that is definitely making an impact."

The church welcomed the opportunity to provide space for counseling sessions, Rev. Dr. Johnson explained, and many who come there tell him they are deeply grateful for the services they could not otherwise afford. They say they enjoy the church setting, which feels warmer and more welcoming than a medical office.

"Especially in these tougher economic times, having a place in the community for families to come for counseling is great," Rev. Dr. Johnson said. "I call it a pressure release valve."

Changing & Saving Lives

Joyce Martin* is a middle-aged woman who sees a Community Counseling Program counselor at a church

in her neighborhood. She described the difference the program has made as life-changing, and, in all likelihood, life-saving.

"I knew I needed help," Martin said, after gradually withdrawing from the world, too depressed to get out of bed.

At earlier crisis points in her life, Martin had contemplated suicide and struggled to find even short-term help. This time she found the Community Counseling Program and began the long road back. Today, five years later, Martin is at ease at work and participating in social events at the church. She walks regularly, does crafts and lives her life.

"I feel so much better now," Martin said.

Ordinary People

According to the National Alliance on Mental Illness, more than 57 million Americans — one in four adults — experience a mental health disorder each year. The annual indirect cost, as estimated by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, is \$79 billion, with nearly 80 percent of the cost due to lost productivity.

Recognizing a problem exists, finding and gaining access to care, having the ability to pay, navigating insurance requirements (for those with coverage), pushing past logistical barriers and fear of potential stigma — all of these factors can keep people from necessary mental health care.

Sometimes care is needed to address a small problem. Sometimes, as in the case of Community Counseling Program client Sue Jacobs*, care is essential after a catastrophic event.

"We're just an ordinary family that went through a terrible crisis," Jacobs explained. While she was away on business, the unthinkable happened. Her pre-school

daughter, Ellen*, was sexually assaulted by a neighbor boy. "I wanted to kill someone, but I couldn't," Jacobs explained. "I had to be a mom and get my daughter the help she needed."

Suddenly, Jacobs and her husband found themselves dealing with their daughter's terror, their own rage and concern for the impact on their other children. They dealt with medical examiners, law enforcement and the legal system. The emotional roller coaster included financial worries about time away from work and cost of treatment for their daughter.

"I fought to keep it together, but I was falling apart. I'd find myself crying at stoplights," Jacobs said. "My marriage was disintegrating under the pressure and from the anger and guilt that this could happen."

For Jacobs, counseling sessions became "my safe place to fall. I could go there to work things out."

Because the counseling is free, Jacobs said, "I could get my daughter what she needed, and I didn't have to say this is too expensive, so never mind about me." Jacobs credits counselor Kim Mueller, M.S., L.M.H.P., ATR-BC, a registered art therapist, with helping her family heal.

After the assault, Jacobs said Ellen stuck to her like glue, terrified of everything and everyone. Art therapy was a nonintrusive way for the counselor to help Ellen relax and share. "Her pictures from that time are so powerful and telling," said Jacobs. "To this day, art is an invaluable part of Ellen's life. She still uses it to relax."


Jacobs emphasized that the healing was not easy, fast or complete. With professional help, she and other family members gradually began to maneuver their way through it. Now, several years later, Jacobs said that at times things feel OK. For that she thanks the Community Counseling Program.

"We are where we are now because this program is available," Jacobs said. "Somebody out there understood ordinary families. Instead of adding to our financial burden, they simply helped us." **C**

“Especially in these tougher economic times, having a place in the community for families to come for counseling is great.”

Rev. Dr. Keith Johnson
Saint Paul United Methodist Church

*Names of Methodist Hospital Community Counseling Program clients have been changed to protect their privacy.



Methodist Hospital Community Counseling

provides professional counseling services at 30 locations, including nine Omaha churches and all Omaha Public School middle schools and high schools. Services are free. Donations are accepted. **(402) 354-6891** www.bestcare.org/ccp

Individual, couple, family and group counseling

Crisis intervention and stabilization

Mental health triage and referral services

Community classes and presentations

Consultation with parents, school personnel, pastors