



*The Nonprofit Leaders Forum brings together mid-level leaders at agencies funded by the Hanover Township Mental Health Board for peer learning, partner consultations, and coaching. The 2025-2026 cohort spans mental health, substance abuse, intellectual and developmental disabilities, crisis intervention, youth services, and housing stability. At the center of each session is a simple but powerful premise: when leaders with real challenges sit across from peers who have navigated similar terrain, something more than advice happens. Connections form, resources move, and the network serving Hanover Township residents gets stronger. Four sessions in, the evidence is already clear.*

### WHERE LEADERS STARTED

The pre-forum survey conducted in November 2025 painted a clear picture of unmet potential. Partners entered with strong commitment to their own agencies but limited connection across the network. Few had regular opportunities to learn from peers or share resources outside their own walls. Partners named imposter syndrome, conflict avoidance, not knowing who to contact, and hesitancy about when or how to reach out as active barriers, not to their ambition, but to their ability to act on it.

These leaders were not lacking dedication. They were lacking connection. The forum exists precisely to close that gap.

### WHAT THE FORUM HAS MADE POSSIBLE

#### New Agency-to-Agency Connections

Within weeks of the first session, two agencies established a formal program connection to support youth services, a partnership that did not exist before the forum brought them into the same room. Two other agencies coordinated resource sharing between sessions. One agency secured a donation of supplies from another for families in need, a direct, peer-driven resource transfer that happened because forum relationships made the ask possible.

*These were not referrals made from a directory. They were relationships built in the forum and activated in the community.*

#### The Partnership Expansion Lab

Forum 3 dedicated a full segment to structured inter-agency matchmaking. Five agencies brought specific needs. One was searching for workforce development connections for youth it serves. Another needed placement connections as it expanded into a new service area. A third was looking to grow a program and needed community mentors. A fourth needed a physical location to house an expanding program. A fifth sought additional respite care options for families, and in the process, the group surfaced a significant resource gap the broader network is now aware of.

*For each need, the group generated leads, surfaced connections, and made introductions — in a single session.*

#### Cross-Agency Resource Sharing in Action

The Children's Advocacy Center convened a symposium on burnout. Four other agencies from this cohort attended. One forum partner made the introductions that made it happen. A professional development opportunity that might have reached one agency instead reached five, because the forum built the relationships that made the invitation possible.

#### A Living Map of Community Resources

Session by session, partners have built a shared understanding of what each agency offers, who it serves, and how to connect clients across the network. That knowledge, built through agency spotlights, site tours, and structured resource sharing, does not exist in any single directory. It lives in the relationships the forum creates. This is a "Community Resource Guide" being built in real time.

### PROGRAM DESIGN

For the 2025-2026 cohort, a thorough curriculum overhaul was completed before launch. Eight half-day forums rotate across partner agency host sites: leaders walk through the network, not just talk about it. Each session includes a Capacity Compass check-in, agency spotlight with site tour, Partner Consultation Hot Seat, Skills Lab, and structured resource sharing with clear goal commitments. Four individual coaching sessions per partner provide tailored support between forums.

### THE ENGINE BEHIND THE NETWORK

The inter-agency connections do not happen by accident. They are made possible by leaders who are growing in their confidence, their clarity, and their capacity to act. Four sessions in, partner consultations have addressed:

- **Translating a waitlist into a business case** — reframing a capacity problem as a data-driven staffing proposal for leadership
- **From case manager to available manager** — learning to lead by creating space rather than filling it
- **Building confidence under self-doubt** — peers providing validation and practical language for advocating upward
- **Managing staff accountability** — aligning individual development goals with program objectives so the whole team moves together

*This is what peer consultation produces, not just conversation, but clarity. Partners leave each session with committed action items and return to report back to the group.*

### THE CENTRAL FINDING: A NETWORK COMING TO LIFE

When the 2025-2026 cohort convened for the first time in November 2025, most partners did not know each other. Some knew of each other's agencies. A few had crossed paths at a conference.

Four sessions later, agencies are making warm referrals, programs are being built across organizational lines, and resources that were invisible to one agency are now flowing to clients who need them.

### THE COHORT

*Most returning agencies sent a different leader this year, reflecting a commitment to spreading leadership development within their teams. Family Service Association of Greater Elgin (FSA) joins as a new agency.*

- Ascension Center for Mental Health
- Association for Individual Development (AID)
- Centro De Información
- Children's Advocacy Center (CAC) of North and Northwest Cook County
- Community Crisis Center
- Easterseals DuPage & Fox Valley
- Ecker Center
- Family Service Association of Greater Elgin (FSA)
- Hanover Township Youth & Family Services
- Maryville Academy
- PADS of Elgin