

## Truancy Prevention

Northwest Family Services works to address truancy by removing barriers in order for students to re-engage in school.



My name is Joshua Wrolstad. As a Truancy Prevention Case Manager for Northwest Family Services, my work is to create stronger connections for students at school, provide academic support, and address barriers to education and school engagement.

I started working with Isaiah, 7<sup>th</sup> grader, to provide support on attendance and academic issues. Upon my first meeting with him, he disclosed experiencing bullying at school. He reported that there was a peer who had been saying he “chews funny” during lunch and antagonizing him on a daily basis. Being the target of bullying is a very present reality for many students, and one of the most difficult aspects of this type of targeting is that it is rarely done by one single individual. The harassment and teasing had gotten so bad that Isaiah stopped eating breakfast or lunch in the school cafeteria and started going hungry during the day.

After I notified Isaiah’s mother and the school about the repeated incidents of bullying that Isaiah had disclosed, school staff arranged a mediation session. The mediation proved useful and promising. School staff and I also put in place a procedure so that Isaiah could report any further bullying the same day. School staff on breakfast and lunch room duty were also notified of the incidents and were alert for any further bullying.

Even after the bullying had stopped, Isaiah was still avoiding the lunch room due to his concern that his peers would be “looking at him.” We worked for several weeks to find an ally with whom he could feel comfortable eating breakfast and lunch. Working very hard, Isaiah was able to find a peer who agreed to eat with him in the lunch room. This very courageous act on Isaiah’s part proved successful, and he is now starting to eat regularly in the school cafeteria.

Another goal of case management was to increase positive connection to his school and provide academic support by helping him register in afterschool programs. Isaiah was very enthusiastic about participating and began attending weekly the SUN afterschool tutoring, basketball, and cooking club. Now, since all this support has taken place, Isaiah’s attendance has improved, thus making significant progress on all of his goals.