

State Mental Health Planning Council Meeting Notes
(32 in attendance)

July 6, 2023

1. Introductions/Updates

Vesper Moore opened the meeting and reviewed the agenda.

2. Report on the Behavioral Health Help Line

Julie Hwayoung Shepherd and Eneida Anjos reviewed the Behavioral Health Help Line (BHHL). Discussed partnership with MBHP, the start of the Help Line in January and preliminary statistics of call, texts and chat volume and usage, and average call handle times and speed of answer. Will come back in September to do Q&A. Discussed service availability including numerous languages served by the BHHL, its 24/7 availability, and function of doing triage, warm handoffs, and referrals to any services people need. The presentation included a review of the process of how work is done through the BHHL. This included timeline for follow-up from BHHL staff. Discussed collaboration with other services such as 988, MCPAP, etc. Julie and Eneida asked participants to help spread the word of the BHHL and what it provides. Community Relations reps for the BHHL are available to go to communities to discuss the BHHL. Goal is to reach out to BIPOC communities and can be anywhere if requested. Incidences and concerns can be reported through the BHHL website portal.

3. Discuss Express Yourself

Emily Surabian and Paula Conrad presented Express Yourself. Express Yourself is heading into its 30th year or immersing youth into the arts, allowing for healing through the arts. Over 2500 people come to event each year that includes 300 youth. A clip of the show was played to show the SMHPC a piece of the show. The show helps keep it exciting for them. Have had guest from Blue Man Group, Stomp, etc. and have staff create a safe space for kids and guest can work together. Discussed White House visit and award received from Michelle Obama and experience for kids who could attend. Discussed long term partnerships with DMH and Wang Center as well as other organizations they have partnered with in the past. Showed another video made with Essex Tech as example of partnership and engagement. Discussed multi-disciplinary approach in terms of art (visual, performance, music, movement, etc.). Have a high staff to youth ratio to help build connections and trust. It's a combination of art therapy, performance and immersion. Work with youth ages 6 to 18. Have multiple program offerings in different settings including inpatient and various art disciplines. Youth can explore fields for possible career opportunities. Reviewed application and referral processes.

4. Discuss CYF Children's Behavioral Health Advisory Council (CBHAC)

Omar Irizarry discussed the background of CBHAC and the composition of the Council. He reviewed the roles and responsibilities of the Council and current activities. These

included acting on recommendations in areas such as investing in mental health promotion, expand access, invest in workforce, and promote collaboration among providers. Working on refining and prioritize recommendations. Currently preparing a report of the legislature on recommendations and future work for the next year.

5. Commissioner's Update

The Commissioner recognized Reva Stein from the Clubhouse Coalition as she is retiring. She also recognized Joe Vallely of DMH who is also retiring. The Commissioner could not stay due to conflicts. Bobbi or David will follow-up with the Commissioner to get her update to send to the Planning Council.

6. Legislative Update

Steve Cidlevich indicated hearings are underway, and attended insurance and mental health and substance abuse hearings. Following the insurance committee is essential in terms of coverage and appeals process. Its part of process for accessing services. The overlap of mental health and substance abuse was brought up multiple times during that committee's hearing, acknowledging DMH's attendance at the hearing. Discussed licensing and past issues with licensing delay for some due to limited staff doing the licensing work. Long term care bill appears to be stalled. Prescription drug pricing bill hasn't moved. The expansion of child care subsidies is also important to DMH clients. Legislators have been responsible to mental health and DMH issues. Process for the budget is coming along, with both branches meeting and working out differences.

7. Committee Updates

Employment: Steve LaMaster provided an update on the Employment Committee. Discussed its priority on stronger connections of departments across the state. Had a member appointed to the Commission on the Status of Person with Disabilities. Had a presentation at that committee. Steve named a few others that Committee members are involved in. Steve discussed work with MRC on collaboration with DMH on ACCS clients who want to go back to work. MRC provided an analytic updated on people served and those underserved and service entry; requested regular updates from MRC on analysis.

Housing: Adrienne Cassidy reviewed ongoing work on expanding DMH rental subsidy program and Safe Havens. Both are in the budget for review. Committee committed to peer support in housing. Work on a one-day conference focused on geographic locations and peer specialists. Had a large turnout when done in Western Mass (200 people), which shows strong interest in this. If the need is so pronounced, discussing next steps including a dedicated staff person to deal with this. Had a guest speaker at recent Committee meeting, which was attended by 52 people, on how important housing is to recovery.

Child and Family Committee: Chip Wilder discussed what the committee is trying to understand in terms of connection. Discussed exploration of how to explore and enhance family experience.

8. Other Items

Joe Vallely from DMH was recognized for his 25 years of service as he retires in mid-July.

David Tringali thanked the Planning Council for its comments on the Block Grant Application draft.