



North Alabama Mental Health Coalition

Meeting minutes for May 12, 2026

Attendees (in person):

Daniel Adamek (Little Orange Fish)
Jeremy Borrere (Our Place)
Darlene Burton (Salvation Army)
Gina Cushing (Our Place)
Donna Harris (Thrive Alabama)
Michayla Johnson (First Stop)
Michael Mathis (Youth Friendship Found.)
Julie Schenck-Brown (Huntsville Police)
Mack Yates (SVDP/VOP)

Sarah Bailey (UAH RAN)
Annie Brasseale (VOP)
Rodolfo Chavez (SVDP)
La'trisha Fletcher (DHR)
William Justin Holmes (Probate Judge's Office)
Lila King (Wellstone)
Leigh Oliver (Thrive AL)
Paula Steele (Wellstone/WES)

Randy Barbour (City of Huntsville)
Richard Browning (CID)
Kendra Crutcher
Tindra Hammett (SSCA)
Linda Howe (Just Serve)
Kathleen Leonard (ALCPC)
Mikayla Percell
Don Webster (HEMSI)

1. Welcome and Introductions – Mack Yates

Introductions are important because you need to be able find out who can help you.

Today's meeting was lightly attended because of the Navigate Conference at the VBC (conference for non-profits).

Sarah Bailey mentioned an upcoming RAN event on October 8 with Temple Grandin as the guest speaker. She noted that if you can't afford tickets, please contact her. There were flyers for the event on the table.

The following link can be used to purchase tickets: https://www.fhautism.com/shop/autism-the-way-i-see-it-meet-dr-temple-grandin-in-the-huntsville-al-area/?srsltid=AfmBOopsfq8q1URDalCWO_WWPRxRC8LuVaxdoenE9Ujcn6EPG85PnvE

Kathleen Leonard is a member of the Madison County Children's Policy Council and she expressed a need for coalition members to help with a children's needs assessment survey. She encouraged people to share the survey because the more input, the better they can plan.

Michayla Johnson from First Stop mentioned that they are having a Volunteer Appreciation event May 19th from 6 to 8 pm.

2. Coalition Updates – Daniel Adamek

Sarah said that RAN has been working with Daniel on getting a tool to help navigate resources for autism. On Saturday the general public was able to try out the new tool at a Little Orange Fish event. There has been great feedback from the event on Saturday, but also at an Autism conference and at UAH. The AI product is called ARNIE (Autism Resource Navigation and Information Explorer). It is a tool that helps you, step by step through the systems of care available in our area. Daniel mentioned that it is a key piece to what the coalition is about: working together to help the community access resources.

Kathleen explained that there is both a state and county Children's Policy Council. The council is chaired by the juvenile court judge and members from the legal community, justice community, DHR, as well others (listed on their website). Every year they do a needs assessment and prioritize the needs for children. Mental health comes out consistently as number one. Judge Demos went through assessments and concurred that mental health is a priority. The survey helps designate needs. Also, please let them know about the good work in the community that they can share.

Kathleen had a flyer with a QR code for the website to locate the survey.

Link to Madison County Children's Policy Council: www.alcpc47.com

Link to Needs Assessment survey: <https://form.jotform.com/261255252357153>

Mike Mathis with the Youth Friendship Foundation reminded us that the Caribbean Carnival 5K run and mental health awareness fair will be held this Saturday (May 16) at Big Spring Park. The run starts at 8:00 am, but the fair runs from 9:30 to 1:00 pm. The mental health fair is the highlight of the show and our coalition is one of the participants. There is still time for organizations to get a space (10 x 10 space – you have to provide your own tent, tables and chairs). Please get in touch with Mike if your organization is interesting in participating.

Mike Mathis www.qtconsulting@gmail.com

He encouraged us to come out, dress in carnival style (beads, masks, etc.) and have a good time. They are trying to remove the stigma of mental health. Rain or shine.

Paula Steele reminded us that the WES Pediatric Unit is now accepting children ages 8 to 18. They are having record breaking admissions. In March, 80 youth were admitted and in April the number was 83. On the adult side, there were 220 in March and in April, there were 227.

Don said that the ambulance transport numbers were looking good, especially since they are not having to do long transports out of town as much. They responded to 37 ODs in April and the total for the year is 133. This represents a 2-3 % decline from last year. We are still averaging 2 ½ deaths per week in Madison County.

Ricky Browning explained that Together Toward Hope was started to provide support and resources for individuals facing mental health challenges. They had a ribbon cutting in Cullman and are trying to build partnerships. They don't have a website yet, but they are on Instagram and Facebook.

Don told a story about a homeless gentleman who was first seen in February. He came to Madison with his brother, but was kicked out of the house. He called 911 a lot and usually with an emergency situation – as much as three times per day. They were taking him to the hospital a lot. There were 39 calls in March. In April, he threatened suicide. Don finally called Judge Barger. He was at the ER and left but Don finally got the sheriff's department to arrest him and put him in jail. They had a hearing with Judge Barger overseeing it all. He is in care for 150 days and he is getting help. At 151 days, they have to let him out. Don says the system does work. It is hard and takes time, but the system does work.

Kathleen mentioned that part of the needs assessment survey is the number of beds for children, whether that is enough and what age groups are impacted. She asked if we had enough beds in Madison County and what age needs the beds the most. There are only 16 beds in Madison County. She asked if there is any data that tells what we actually need and for which age(s). Paula says she will meet with Kathleen.

Daniel said Don's story, at the end of the day, is a success. The gentleman did get help, but Don says no two stories are the same.

3. Featured Presentation – State Policy & Legislative Developments: Opportunities for Coalition Alignment – Daniel Adamek and Mack Yates

Mack said we had a successful meeting in April. Most importantly, two legislators stepped forward to make the River Act a reality. We also learned that at the end of this month there will be a joint mental health task force that will meet in Montgomery to determine what will happen to mental health over the next year. The Chief of Staff of ADMH will let Mack know when the meeting will occur.

We learned about the LSA (Legislative Service Agency) who are the ones that draft bills and send them out to the stakeholders. Legislators contact the LSA if they want a bill prepared.

We also learned that there is a source of money for a 165-bed unit in both north and south Alabama for long term treatment of mental health. It hasn't been funded yet, but there is money. Unfortunately, the funding for operating costs has not been figured out, only the money for the building. A study has been commissioned to help figure out how to sustain the operating costs.

There are two major efforts that the coalition is addressing:

1. Passage of the River Act (which includes major systemic changes in how systemically mental ill navigate the procedural, criminal and legal systems in Alabama to get help). Mack encouraged people to reread minutes from the April meeting.
2. The need for additional long-term beds in North Alabama (the bed count continues to be 0).

Leigh Oliver spoke about an update since the last meeting. Representative Ross from Marshall County has placed the River Act on the table for discussion in Montgomery. LSA has reached out about making a bill. The National Shattering Silence Coalition spread word about the River Act and the Boston Globe did an article about it including comments from Tindra and Holly. The River Act is bipartisan.

Tindra mentioned that since she has been telling her story, lots of families have been reaching out to her. She spoke about Ivy Williams who is currently in Jackson County jail. Her daughter had tried to have her committed in DeKalb County. Miss Ivy took off from the hospital without anyone following up. Later she made a 911 call claiming her neighbors were stealing from her. When the police arrived, she thought they were aliens. She locked herself in and attempted to burn down the house. They broke in and took her to jail. They charged her with a felony. She has been deemed incompetent to stand trial and has refused treatment in jail. Amanda Roberts (the daughter) did a news story about the mistreatment of her mother. She is segregated because of her psychosis and that made things worse. The Sheriff of Jackson County says they aren't equipped to handle someone with her stage of mental illness. Her daughter does not want her to be released, but rather to be treated at a facility that can handle her.

Another story Tindra described was about Jahree Williams who shot a man in February 2025. His mother, Chrissy, had been begging for help. Her son had been battling mental illness since 2022. In December 2024 he was involuntarily committed, but once out, he stopped taking meds. In the River Act, Jahree would have been treated for at least 36 months. His mother saw the warning signs and tried to get help. How can you give a person who is not in their right mind a choice of whether or not to be medicated? Alabama waits to do something until a tragedy happens. Jahree walked into a gas station and killed an attendant. His mom had called and tried to get him committed, but he had the right to say no.

Mack says this is where the legal part of things overcomes the medical advice. The law does not fit serious mental illness. When a person is not capable of making a rational decision, they still let the person make the decision not to take meds.

Someone asked if conservatorship would give the parents more control over what happens. If they have conservatorship they can demand treatment. Tindra said that might work, however, parents that are struggling are never told about this option. This doesn't help if the children are old enough to be away from the home and the families don't know what is going on with their child.

Tindra talked about her son who had problems all along, but once he was 17 years old, the parents no longer had control.

Mack says he has been a conservator guardian for his son, but it hasn't helped with the legal issues.

Someone brought up the point that our society is built on order and structure and people with mental illness don't fall within that system. HIPA was supposed to allow medical providers to access medical records, so you would see a history, is still not in a place where that works, especially when you get to the court system. We need to address how to get our system with its order and structure to deal with people outside of that system.

Leigh feels like the best mental health record is the person who is with them every day. The process failed for Leigh's son. The history is something that needs to be taken into consideration instead of just the immediate situation.

Mack said you can give information to caregivers about the history of a situation; however, some caregivers still don't know the law and realize that this is allowed. Within the system of care, there are still gaps in training and education.

We need to address the situation in their early years, not just when someone is in psychosis. We need to make mental health part of learning instead of stigmatizing it.

Mack brought up that there is no legal recognition of anosognosia and that is a real problem.

5. Recap and Adjournment - Daniel Adamek

Daniel reminded us that the mission of the coalition is to come together and identify and address gaps. He encouraged everyone to look at last month's minutes.

Daniel put together a report about where the legislation and policy stand in Alabama and he will get it to us later.

Another point is that cases are sometimes outside our existing systems. We are trying to understand where the gaps are in the systems. If the gaps are outside a system, then the gaps can be insurmountable. It's not just the law, but every system of care (legal, law, etc.). Maybe in a couple of months, we could review the gaps in the systems again.

Reminder that next Tuesday is the primaries, so remember to vote

Caribbean Carnival and Mental Health Awareness Fair is this Saturday.

*Next Meeting
Tuesday June 9, 2026
11:00 am at Wellstone*