



North Alabama Mental Health Coalition
February 8, 2022

Attendees (in person):

Mike Allen (Madison City Police)	Dr. Jerome Baudry (NAMI)	Jeremy Blair (Wellstone)
Annie Brasseale (VOP)	Selena Carter (Huntsville Hospital)	Woodie Deleuil (NAMI)
La'trisha Coats Fletcher (DHR)	Amy Gillott (Decatur Morgan Hospital)	Johnny Hollingsworth (NAMI)
Sgt. Morris Holmes (Sheriff's Office)	Courtney Jeffreys (Amedisys Hospice)	Tammy Leeth (Wellstone)
Karen Petersen (Wellstone)	Mark Prescott (NAMI)	Dr. Sherrie Squyres (Huntsville Hospital)
Paula Steele (Wellstone Emer. Services)	Kim Steigerwald (Amedisys Hospice)	LaShawn Jackson Turner (NCAC)
Don Webster (HEMSI)	Jay West (DRM)	Mack Yates (SVDP/VOP)
Travis Jones (Thrive Alabama)	Melissa Caldwell (Wellstone)	Kiana Hall (Wellstone)

We also had attendees online via Zoom.

David Bailey (Chief, Madison Fire & Rescue)	Tracy Delgado (NACH)	Jennifer Geist (First Stop)
Kelly Goff (ADMH)	Marcia Obermann (Crestwood Hospital)	Letricia Ogutu (Huntsville Schools)
Wendy Reeves (Partner Drug Free)	Nikki Smith (Attorney)	Laura Edwards (Partner Drug Free)

Welcome and Introductions

Family Case Worker for AOT (Assisted Outpatient Treatment) Funded and Approved: Judge Barger

Mack announced that Judge Barger (who was not present) got approval and funding for another case worker for the AOT program. This case worker will handle the family aspects of the program: for example, where to get assistance for their family member, make them aware of NAMI and their classes, how to work with attorneys, and all of the different phases of the situation.

Statistics from the Current Crisis Center: Paula Steele

Since opening in May 2021, for the calendar year of 2021, the crisis center had over 150 admissions with only a 3% readmission rate. 35% of all admissions in 2021 were homeless. They had 35 admissions last month even though they were closed for one week for COVID and 31% of those were homeless.

Hosting a Mental Health Community Call Center: Selena Carter

Selena told us that Huntsville Hospital is trying to become more active in the education of mental health services. To that end, Selena is proposing to have a Mental Health Community Call center in March (Mental Health March Madness) or April where the public can call in with their mental health questions and get information about available resources. She needs help from coalition members to be available for phone calls for possibly 2 hours in the evening (maybe 6 – 8 pm) and maybe once a week. They would like to have help from different entities that provide different services to be available to answer community questions. If no one from your organization can be there, please send information about your services so the information can be passed on to the public. Selena provided a sign-up sheet at the meeting. Please contact her if you are able to help: Selena Carter - selena.carter@hhsys.org Selena wants to do advertising (TV and other media) as soon as possible, so please contact her so she can get everything organized.

The biggest concern they have is that the community does not know how to go through the mental health system in Huntsville, especially what options they have. Mack said he would help in any way and encouraged others to as well.

Dr. Baudry mentioned that Elizabeth Springfield is taking leave from NAMI to spend more time with family.

HEMSI: Don Webster

Don did not have any specific numbers for the meeting but mentioned that they do a lot of runs over to Decatur West as well as to Laverne, Montgomery, and Mobile. They are short staffed due to COVID and a lack of EMTs. Don mentioned that the CIT program is going well and they are going to start up again with the "One on One" program in March. The law enforcement officers are doing better at handling mental health crisis situations.

CIT Update: Johnny Hollingsworth

CIT committee will start meeting again next month at Wellstone from 10 to 11 am before the coalition meeting. A Chair is needed for the next couple of years.

Johnny met with Rep. Rex Reynolds yesterday. Johnny had gone down in January and asked for \$620,000 for six regional CIT programs across the state. Commissioner Boswell is putting \$300,000 with NAMI Alabama as the administrator. Rep. Reynolds let Johnny know that \$500,000 for the CIT programs is in the State Senate. He also told Johnny that the mental health commitment bill (which makes it easier for families to help their loved ones) has passed the public safety committee in the house.

Huntsville Police Department is still working on hiring a civilian who will head up the CIT program and will attend the coalition meetings. CIT will start back up in April. They are also going to offer 16 two day classes to local law enforcement.

Currently, everyone in the state is looking to Huntsville because of how well our CIT is performing. With this money being proposed in the state legislature, other communities will be able to have CIT programs and families will not have to come to Huntsville to get help. CIT has already been done in Tuscaloosa, Jefferson County and Mobile. Opelika, Cherokee County and Montgomery have also expressed interest in the program. The drop-off centers are really helping as well.

Top Priorities Needing Leaders: Mack Yates

Several months ago, the coalition brainstormed and came up with the top areas of mental health that need addressing. Mack stressed that Selena needs help right now, but these other areas need leaders.

- Pediatric Beds
- Medicaid Expansion
- Grants to help programs
- Recruit more pediatric psychiatrists, medical students and CRNPs
- Legislature House Bill 70
- Incentive packages to get medical students to intern in Huntsville
- Money and Mental Health Parity
- Engage with Chamber of Commerce

Mack elaborated on several of the topics.

We have the Pediatric Beds subcommittee going already. Amy has explained to the committee that they are ready to open 5 pediatric beds and then 5 more after they get the staffing issue handled.

Amy explained about an EmPATH (Emergency Psychiatric Assessment Treatment and Healing) unit that they are trying to establish. This unit will keep the patients out of the ER and they can address patients' immediate needs (such as treatment, meds and hygiene) in a more timely fashion. This is modeled after a treatment center created by Dr. Scott Zeller. It will be an observation unit with recliners and the patients will be able to move around, take showers, have at least one hot meal and start on their treatment. The goal is to move them through the system quicker. They will see a psychiatrist within an hour and get started on meds right away. The average length of stay goes from days to about 16 hours. Decatur West is a standalone hospital and does not have emergency room facilities such as a lab and radiology, but they can have an observation unit. They have the space to do this and Amy is waiting to hear from ADPH about the EmPATH unit. There would be \$861,000 savings to the hospital ERs.

The other topics do not have leaders. Mack is looking for members of the coalition to handle these items. Medicaid Expansion would need someone who would be willing to contact the legislature; although potentially frustrating, this would be very important. We need someone to pursue grants on a regular basis. Recruiting more mental health medical people to Huntsville is very important. UAB (Dr. Clinton Martin) is working to try and establish a residency program in Huntsville. Psychiatrists tend to remain in the area where they went to school, so providing internships might help us to get and retain more mental health medical people. Dr. Baudry

mentioned that UAH has a nursing program and they are starting to train psychiatric nurses. Johnny told us about nurse Tina McGuinness in Birmingham that started the nurse psychiatric training program in Alabama. She is retired now but went through CIT and would be a great resource.

Mack also wondered about why mental health issues are not treated the same as physical health issues. He suggested that someone could try and understand this issue and try to find a solution. He said all of these topics would require time and person to person visits. He is looking for people who have a passion about a topic.

Mack said he is hoping to get a leader for at least one of these topics.

Open Floor

Wendy Reeves with The Drug Free Partnership mentioned that they plan to have a town forum called Addiction Talk. It will be held on Thursday, March 3rd from 6 to 7:30 pm and will be a panel discussion about the mental health issues of the pandemic related to substance abuse. It will be on Facebook Live.

Next Meeting
Tuesday March 8, 2022
11:00 am at Wellstone