



North Alabama Mental Health Coalition April 8, 2025

Attendees (in person):

Daniel Adamek (Little Orange Fish)
Annie Brasseale (VOP)
Rudolfo Chavez (SVDP)
Amy Gillott (Decatur West)
Debbie Igou (SOS)
Keiarra Marchan (BHG Recovery)
Krista Moulton (Therapist)
Whitney Parr (Longleaf Recovery)
Jakob Shilt (VA Police)
Charity Stratton
Linda Ware (UAH RAN)
Kendall Williams (First Stop)

Jennifer Blazer (ALSP)
Darlene Burton (Salvation Army)
Roxanne Crawford (Bradford at Madison)
Tammy Goodwin (ALNG)
Tyletha Lord (ADMH)
Tealacy Mitchell (Thrive Alabama)
Leticia Ogutu (Wellstone)
Deidre A. Roberts (ADMH Autism Services)
Audrey Smith (Tree of Life)
Kendra Tatum (Madison County Schools)
Don Webster (HEMSI)
Savannah Woodall (Wellstone)

Erica Bradberry (ADMH)
Melissa Caldwell (Wellstone)
Melissa Foster (UAH)
Daelyn Houser (Wellstone)
Keith Lowhorne (Grandparents As Parents)
Tristan Morris (InVis (AI Chatbot))
Christina Pannell (Therapist)
Julie Schenck-Brown (Huntsville Police)
Paula Steele (Wellstone/WES)
Barbara Wallace (Thrive AL)
Hannah Williams (Wellstone)
Mack Yates (SVDP/VOP)

1. Welcome and Introductions – Daniel Adamek

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

2. Coalition Updates – Daniel Adamek

Audrey Smith reported on her assigned task to compile a list of support groups. She found out that there is already a list of support groups on [Alhelp.org](https://alhelp.org) through the Elm foundation. She encouraged people with support groups to sign up there instead of duplicating the information. ***(see additional information from Traci Harris below)** Someone mentioned that it is hard to put support groups on the resource page of the coalition website. Daniel says he has to figure out how to do that. There is a link to the Elm Foundation, but it is not easy to find.

Krista mentioned that Paula had presented the problem of meeting the needs of those in WES and also following through after someone is discharged. Krista said she has spread the work via email with other mental health professionals about trying to bridge that gap of resources needed. The goal is to determine how to meet the needs with the resources available.

Krista also brought up coordinating with First Stop and focusing on veteran's services. She would like First Stop to present at next month's meeting.

Melissa from the UAH College of Nursing mentioned that they have a team for the Out of the Darkness suicide walk. The walk will be on **April 27th** and is around the campus of UAH. She encouraged everyone to join. The walk is done on college campuses nationwide and is a fund raiser for the nurses.

Daniel mentioned that last Friday there was a meeting at Hudson Alpha sponsored by iXpressGenes (iXG). They have been working towards figuring out biomarkers for PTSD. On Friday they sponsored an event with members from Birmingham VA office with UAB researchers. Wellstone has purchased test kits from iXpressGenes to help with screenings for trauma conditions such as PTSD. Daniel highlighted the fact that this relationship had developed from a coalition meeting.

Someone brought up that Daniel had presented an AI chatbot at the meeting to determine social factors that might affect mental health patients.

Julie mentioned that Governor Kay Ivey signed the Houston Hunter bill, named for two Veterans who lost their battle to suicide. This will allow any Veteran, service member, first responder, or family member, as well as the public will be able to voluntarily surrender their guns while in crisis at a storage locker maintained by an FFL. They will also receive information on peer support and mental health without being penalized for the voluntary surrender, which is temporary. This is a big step for mental health in recognizing that individuals may be in crisis and need services but can go back later when they are secure. It will take about a year to get it rolled out.

Don mentioned that he needs help with a veteran with a non-honorable discharge. He is a bilateral amputee with cardiac issues. HEMSI has responded 29 times since January. Don has been unable to get any help from Veterans organizations.

The gentleman needs home health, but he doesn't qualify for it. Melissa Foster volunteered to help. She is in charge of the nursing school at UAH and is looking for opportunities for her students to get out in the community and help.

4. Featured Presentation – Grandparents as Parents (GAP), Keith Lowhorne

Keith is the founder and president of Grandparents as Parents (GAP). They are a 501 C3 organization and their mission is to support and empower grandparents, guardians, and kinship guardians (aunt, uncle, brother, sister, etc.). The government uses the term "Grand families". They use advocacy, resources, and emotional support to ensure that every child has a loving home. The number one reason grandparents are raising grandchildren is drugs. There are lots of children born addicted to drugs. Other reasons for grandparents to become parents are: incarceration, mental health problems, child abuse and neglect, disabilities, death, divorce, military assignment or abandonment.

Keith explained his own situation. His grandchildren were addicted when they were born and had to spend time in the NICU. Medicine has improved and the second grandchild did not have to stay in the hospital as long. These children are born with trauma because of the drugs in their systems.

In Alabama there are 300,000 grandfamilies (in North Alabama 60,000). Nationwide, for every 1 child raised in the foster system, 19 are being raised with grandparents. In Alabama, for every 1 in foster care, there are 85 with grandparents. Alabama is one of the top 5 in the country.

The benefits of grandfamilies are that the children are better behaved, have better mental health, stability, and they keep their cultural identity. Keith recommended an organization called Generations United (www.gu.org) to find out more about grandfamilies and related topics. He is a "Grand Voice" for the State of Alabama.

The grandfamilies challenges include: financial (usually grandparents live on a fixed income and below poverty level), health issues (the grands don't maintain their own health because they take care of their grandchildren), and housing (a national movement called a Grandfamily Village where houses are built for grandfamilies including handicap access with one floor for police and medical and one floor for case workers).

In 2020, things started coming into shape for grandfamilies. They started first with giving help with food. Now every week they give food to grandfamilies out of Keith's home. They also help with school supplies, clothes, books, and serve 1300 families for Christmas. They have served 52,000 families in North Alabama since 2020.

Daniel asked what the coalition can do to help. Mental Health is a big issue especially since it is hard to find someone who will take Medicaid. He would love to have A&M social workers come to their meetings and help. He requested that if the police arrest parents, please call the grandparents first instead of DHR. Family comes first instead of foster care. The Probate judge in Madison County helps a lot, so they are trying to get cases moved to Madison County. It costs Keith \$40,000 to adopt their 2 children (costs of attorneys & courts) and most grandparents can't afford that.

Paula wants Keith to talk to their pediatric unit. He said he would be glad to talk to anyone.

Legal **Services Alabama** is federally funded and they can do non-profit work, but adoptions are considered for profit.

*(see additional information from Jennifer Blazer of Legal Services Alabama below)

Amy sees this situation at Decatur West where the grandparents have to step in and they are clueless and need some guidance. She asked about support groups. They have one support group and would like to start a second in Decatur. Amy volunteered to provide space for a support group to meet.

Grandparents are younger than they used to be and problems like affording daycare can become an issue. Sometimes grandparents have to leave their jobs to take care of the grandchildren.

5. Directed Discussion and Gap Identification – Krista Moulton

Krista has background as a social worker, so she sees issues as a system. She thinks about how all the systems come into play when addressing an issue. All of the organizations in the room are political systems (i.e. DHR is a system). Be mindful of how we communicate with other systems; don't put blame on systems. She asked us to think about how systems are setup and they usually have written rules that are sometimes outdated. She has spent 20 years in

different fields and is concerned because why do we still have these problems? She questioned how do we mobilize to support other people. We show up at the coalition and need to be creative to solve problems. To solve these problems, we need to first, put together a strong network of people. Because we are limited to an hour meeting, we have tried to do networking with tools on the website. She suggested that members use the website to help create solutions. The ChatGPT that Daniel created is very helpful in combing through the minutes of the meetings to see problems from the past so we can see what needs to be done going forward.

She encouraged meeting attendees to show up at meetings with the mindset of a creator. Krista feels that social change is an art and have to be creative. We are not coming here to just listen, but to solve problems. We are advocates, changemakers and co-creators. What are the ingredients we need in order to make this “meal” successful? We are the “critical yeast” to make things happen. We should try to get everyone in the best situation to solve the problems addressed in our meetings.

Don mentioned that here in North Alabama we are growing so fast that we are already behind. Don brought up the example that DHR is overworked and they need more people. Someone mentioned that because we are growing, we are getting more ideas from others coming in to help us become more creative. They are expecting 500 more families to come in between now and August.

How do we develop a pipeline of services to support those in our community? We need to incentivize this in some way. The value of a coalition to bring voices together and move it to the next level so they are heard.

Melissa, as head of UAH nursing, tries to mobilizes her students as free labor so they help the community and benefit by being exposed to more situations. There are also nursing and social work students A&M. It helps the students to realize the differences of people in the community.

Krista also brought up that we need to capture data to show the need for developing new services and get funding for these services. It is a talent to look for grants to help whatever is needed.

Krista wants everyone to think about the idea of cocreating a coalition vision which will help us move forward to a collective action. She suggested that we start with the prompt “A community where every individual...”. Bring ideas of “How I see our community”. Look at the common vision and how to make it happen.

What strength and tools do we have in the room? What are the needs and what agencies can assist with this? Someone brought up the question about how to know who to call from the other agencies. Krista mentioned that we could all benefit from knowing this.

Krista suggested using the ChatGPT feature to figure out what resources would be available, however, there would not be a phone number associated with it. Daniel said a big goal would be to have contact information for each agency and keep that information about resources updated and maintained.

*Next Meeting
Tuesday May 13, 2025
11:00 am at Wellstone*

Additional information from Traci Harris at the Elm Foundation:

ALHelp.org is interfaced with CharityTracker. If an agency/organization would like to be listed on ALHelp.org they need to be a network member of CharityTracker. This FREE online software connects with other agencies through case management and collaboration. The link to request membership to the Madison County network is huntsvilleal.charitytracker.net/request

If an agency or organization is already a CharityTracker network member, services must be listed in order to appear on ALHelp.org.

Cathy Larsen, Madison County CharityTracker Administrator, is happy to answer questions, agency training, etc. She can be contacted at cathy@elmhsv.org or (256)808-5425

The ELM Foundation's website is www.elmhsv.org

Note: The ELM Foundation receives no compensation or funding for administering the Charity Tracker network software for Madison County. It is a gift of support to our outstanding community!

Additional information from Jennifer Blazer of Legal Services Alabama:

Legal Services Alabama is a non-profit civil law organization and subject to federal guidelines as to the services that can be provided that are not already provided by other agencies. Adoptions from the state foster care / dependency system are handled through the Alabama Department of Human Resources (see <https://dhr.alabama.gov/adoption/>) in which some fees can be waived or reduced. Private adoptions are handled by licensed adoption agencies or specialized private attorneys (for information about private adoption process, please see <https://www.alabar.org/news/from-the-alabama-lawyer-a-primer-on-alabama-adoptions/>) in which attorney fees may apply.