



## North Alabama Mental Health Coalition

June 13, 2023

### **Attendees (in person):**

Daniel Adamek (Little Orange Fish)  
Annie Brasseale (VOP)  
Emily Couch (River Valley)  
Kelli Glass (Wellstone)  
Kim Holder (Not One More Alabama)  
Cheryl McClendon (Wellstone/WES)  
Karen Petersen (Wellstone)  
Audrey Smith  
Paula Steele (Wellstone/WES)  
Jennifer Vandiver (Amedisys Home Health)  
David Battle (Drug Free Partnership)

Callie Bengs (UNA)  
Darlene Burton (Salvation Army)  
Woodie Deleuil (NAMI)  
Traci Harris (Elm Foundation)  
Christhna Lee (Wellstone/WES)  
Judith Moon (NAMI)  
Adina Peyton (GRAMI)  
Dustin Spires (Madison Fire)  
Asia Sticka (UAH RAN)  
Don Webster (HEMSI)

Erica Bradberry (ADMH)  
Kayron Clay (Serenity Communities)  
Tracy Doughty (Huntsville Hospital)  
Chaniece Hicks (First Stop)  
Tammy Leeth (Wellstone)  
Connie Oakley (GRAMI)  
Julie Schenck-Brown (Huntsville Police)  
Jenny Stang (Alabama Lifespan Respite)  
Robert Turner (Oxford House)  
Mack Yates (SVDP/VOP)

### **Welcome and Introductions**

Introductions are important because you need to find out who you need to talk with.

### **Accessing a CIT officer – Julie Schenck-Brown / HPD**

We are trying to create an efficient mental health system in our community. Ideally, you should call 988 when you are in a mental health crisis, but usually most people call 911. You can ask for a mental health officer when you call 911. The 911 call center now has a listing of CIT officers by precinct as well as by shift. CIT officer is the first line of defense. There are at least 2 mental health officers in every precinct and in the homeless unit. Lots of people are reluctant to call 988 because they are afraid of calling the police. Julie assured us that 988 is not associated with HPD; however, their call will be transferred to 911 if law enforcement is necessary. 988 is the first number you should call. 988 can connect you with HPD to mobilize a CIT officer or a mobile crisis team.

A question was asked about the training for HPD. Julie replied that by the end of the year, all officers will have at least 16 hours of mental health training. Officers who volunteer to do CIT will have 40 hours of training. To be a mental health officer, you have to take additional training and be approved by Judge Barger. There are 100 CIT and mental health officers (21%) in HPD. In the county, you can contact Sgt. Holmes if you have a CIT question. If you have a situation with 911, let Julie know.

The number of county CIT or mental health officers was not known at the time of the meeting.

You should call 211 when you need information or community resource referrals. 211 also has a crisis line if you just need to talk to someone and a domestic abuse responder available. All of the numbers are available 24/7.

A suggestion was made that we need to inform the public about the difference between the numbers.

A question was asked about the determinate of which officers are trained and when they get training. Officers get regular retraining sessions as mandated by the State of Alabama. A lot of the training is conducted as small classes and includes one-on-one scenarios. A CIT officer gets quarterly in-service training as well as an additional 20 CEUs per year. All officers get a one-time 16-hour training session as well as regular retraining sessions.

Mack asked if there is a campaign for 988 advertisements. The steering committee is working with Kenny Anderson to develop this. The Alabama Department of Mental Health wanted them to hold back on advertising 988 until they have sufficient staff.

Don suggested that someone address 988 funding because the Alabama bill to fund aspects of 988 died this year in the legislature. The 988 program is a nationwide program. The bill that died was supposed to add a fee onto phone charges to help with funding additional staff to run the 988 program.

### **Working together and Staying Informed – Mack Yates / SVDP / VOP**

Mack began by expressing his appreciation for Sandra Ekutu who is a case worker at Wellstone. She helped Mack's son and did a good job and was very professional. Even while his son was in the hospital, she called and checked in.

Mack also commended Paula Steele who has now gotten WES (Wellstone Emergency Services) operational and running 24/7. Paula said it was a big responsibility, and the need in our community is great. Huntsville Hospital (partners with Wellstone) has so few beds and the need for beds is great. They have raised pay for nurses four times and finally have enough to manage; however, the staff is working overtime to run facility.

A question was asked if there is anything we can do to fill the gaps. Paula needs nurses desperately and so does Huntsville Hospital. They are trying to encourage people to become nurses by letting them shadow Wellstone nurses. They have numerous interns and are holding job fairs, etc. They really need a staff that is loving, caring, and passionate about their jobs.

Mack asked if raising the salaries for nurses and other mental health workers would help. Paula wasn't sure because after having raised salaries, there are still not enough people are applying for jobs. It appears that there are just not enough nurses to go around.

Mack mentioned that we need to have a back and forth flow of information. We need to make sure we work closer together to resolve gaps in mental health services. Gaps are our business.

He doesn't want people to become personally upset when addressing gaps. He feels the cure is to have a good information flow. Let us know what we need to know to help solve the gaps. It needs to be a coordination of efforts. We are all working toward the same goal – improve the plight of the seriously mentally ill.

### **UAH / RAN (Regional Autism Network) – Asia Sticka**

Asia is the program coordinator of RAN which is located at UAH. It is a statewide program through the Alabama Department of Mental Health and is divided into 5 regions. Huntsville is in Region 1 which includes 13 Counties.

Each RAN provides these services: direct assistance, public education, professional development, and consultation. Services are free and confidential. Their services are available to families, educators, social workers and providers. They have a website - [uahran@uah.edu](mailto:uahran@uah.edu). Asia sends out a newsletter quarterly.

Although all of the programs are housed at universities, the programs are not just for university students. They go into schools and provide professional development education.

A question was asked about what direct assistance provides. Asia explained that if an individual (or parents) contacts the RAN office, she helps them with resources in the home, community, or school. Asia's specialty is behavior issues. They also help with advocacy for students in schools. They deal with all ages and can help with assessments in children as early as age 1 ½ (age 2 is the most accurate).

Someone asked if there is a long wait time to access services. Asia can see clients quickly, but it depends on the service. The wait list for diagnostic testing is 2 years and for behavioral therapy (ABA – Applied Behavioral Analysis) the wait can be up to 4 years. There is a little bit of leniency to get help sooner if the pediatrician fills out forms. The wait is not 4 years in every place; it depends on where you are. There are lots of ABA clinics; however there is a shortage of ABA therapists. Most ABA sessions are 2 – 4 hours. Behavioral therapy tends to end at 19-20 years of age, so the earlier they can get help the better.

BCBA are board certified behavioral analysts are over the ABAs. BCBAs do the behavior intervention prevention plans (BIP) and they can go into the schools.

The therapy is most affective if you can get it earlier. If someone puts a 2-year old on the wait list it could be 4 years before they are seen. If your child has issues such as they require potty assistance or biting, then they can't get into preschool. ABA therapy can help and it includes training for parents as well.

What can be done positively if they are on a long wait list? If the child needs other therapies (physical, speech, or occupational therapy) you could start on that. Parent training can be done (some online training is free). Autism Speaks has a toolkit called "The First 100 Days". This toolkit is for parents of young children in the first 100 days after they are diagnosed. The pediatrician can fill out Medicaid forms because they are the ones that diagnose autism. There are guides online to help the parent.

Someone mentioned that educating pediatricians seems like it should be a priority. Asia goes out in the community to let people know she is available. The library at UAH is open to the public and Asia has requested books and they are available there. The Huntsville public library has a resource table and information is available there.

ADMH autism services work with RAN and will also help with services. They work together.

*Next Meeting*  
*Tuesday July 11, 2023*  
*11:00 am at Wellstone*