



## North Alabama Mental Health Coalition

August 13, 2024

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

Kenny Anderson (City of Huntsville)	Kelli Arthur (VA)	Sarah Bailey (UAH RAN)
Kim Bigelow (Warrior Wellness Program)	Jennifer Blazer (ALSP)	Annie Brasseale (VOP)
Melissa Caldwell (Wellstone)	Brandy Drake (The Drug Free Partnership)	La'trisha Fletcher (DHR)
Amy Gillott (Decatur West)	Kelly Goff (ADMH)	Jeff Hastings (Ross)
Kim Holder (Not One More Alabama)	Faith Jackson (Thrive AL)	Kimberly Lamar (Drug Free Partnership)
Kati Lang (Amedisys Home Health)	Lillie Latham (RAN)	Alexis Love (Wellstone)
Cheryl McClendon (Wellstone/WES)	Cathy Miller (United Way)	Pamela Miller (UCP)
Tealacy Mitchell (Thrive Alabama)	Krista Moulton (Therapist / NAMI)	Connie Oakley (GRAMI)
Letricia Ogutu (Wellstone)	Alyssa Perry (Wellstone)	Julie Schenck-Brown (Huntsville Police)
Jakob Shilt (VA Police)	Jenny Stang (Alabama Lifespan Respite)	Paula Steele (Wellstone/WES)
Tiffany Taylor (BVAHCS)	Lakebra Walker (Alliance Health)	Don Webster (HEMSI)
Latisha Wilson (ADMH)	Mack Yates - Work (SVDP/VOP)	Julie Algie

### **Welcome and Introductions**

Introductions are important because you need to find out who is available to help you

#### **Kenny Anderson – City of Huntsville Director of the Office of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion**

Kenny plans to retire soon. He told us about his background including 20 years at the Huntsville/Madison County Mental Health Center. He worked for 12 years at the Huntsville Rehab Center and is now chairman of the board. He spent 16 years teaching at Calhoun Community College, as well as being the Dean of Humanities and Social Sciences. In April 2013 he started work for the city of Huntsville in the Office of Multicultural Affairs started by Mayor Battle. Kenny saw this appointment as an opportunity.

He told about the programs that have been supported by his office including the Back-to-school initiatives, health fairs, Civic Engagement Academy, and Jazz in the Park (his baby). For 8 years, he was a department of one. Four years ago, he hired an assistant director. Their goal is to make sure that people are represented, have a voice, and are respected across the city whoever they may be.

There is a state law that has banned DEI initiatives at the state level. A lot of educational institutions have closed their offices of DEI. A lot of people don't understand DEI. They have the wrong impression. 99.9% of us share the same DNA sequences – we are more alike than different. He encouraged us to think about what values should the community provide to increase the unity of people who are different. He pointed out that people who are different than us bring potential to our lives. We should work together to celebrate the same things and work out our differences. The strength in our abilities lies in our differences.

He encouraged us to embrace as much wisdom as you can and realize that there are smarter people than us and we are smarter for knowing the people who know what we don't know. How much more can I be by knowing others?

DEI tends to be limited to the conversation of race...only including blacks or whites. It is very polarized. He suggested that we think about broader issues than race – gender inequality, women who are abused, and still the issue of religion and no religion. This is about valuing people where they are. We can have more acceptance in life if we don't just want people to be who we are.

Kenny feels like his job is to work with people of all kinds; all levels of education, all levels of income and all levels of experience. We tend to be self-contained units and cut ourselves off from those who are different. Kenny challenges himself to be the least judgmental person. We all come from different experiences and we should embrace that.

DEI is all about connecting people where they are. His job has been to help people work together in the ways that respect their lives.

### **Hon. Claude Hundley III – Adult Drug Court**

Judge Hundley acknowledged all the good work Kenny Anderson has done. He mentioned that in the current climate it has become difficult to do the right thing because everyone is so marginalized. Things cannot work unless we all work together. He took over Adult Drug Court in 2011 (it started around 2003). Drug court has changed, but he believes that things have to be willing to change.

He makes people work together in his court. He mentioned that we need each other and when we don't work together, the ones who get lost are the people who need help.

Madison County court system has 5 treatment courts: Adult drug court, family drug court, juvenile drug court, mental health court, and veteran's court. We need a domestic violence court and a DUI court (most large cities have these). Incarceration only removes people for a while and is not solving the problem. The purpose of treatment courts is to find a solution. We can't continue to just do what we were doing. One of his biggest complaints is that things don't get done. People get lost in the cracks. There is not one family that has not been touched by drug abuse or mental illness. Community needs to address it.

Originally, the drug court wouldn't deal with mental health issues and the mental health court wouldn't deal with drug issues, so people wouldn't get help. Now Judge has taken on the cases even when people are on medication for mental health issues if he feels he can help them. This process is continuously evolving. As a growing community, we've got to be prepared to meet needs of a growing community.

On drug court team, they only deal with severely addicted people. The Diversion programs are dealing with people that have a "lower level" problem (for example first offenders). The Judge now deals with people who cannot control their addiction. People get a little bit better and they think they are all better, but the Judge tells them they are going to make a mistake. They have to be honest with the judge. If they use, they need to tell him that they did. They are going to try to figure out why they have this behavior and try to work on it. The Judge mentioned several groups that help with the treatment programs and they even have groups that transport people to treatment so they make sure they get there.

Another situation Judge is working on is getting evaluations done in person rather than on Zoom. Zoom was necessary for a time, but it is not the best way to deal with people. There are too many variables you cannot control and people were not getting a valid clinical evaluation. People were getting IOP (Intensive Outpatient Therapy) when they weren't ready.

The Judge described a capital case that he is working and the defendant needs to be evaluated. The state is 18 months behind on their evaluations and he has to be transported to the evaluation.

In severe situations, video conferencing doesn't work and he can't be tried until he is evaluated.

Currently there are 100 people active in drug court and that is all that one probation office can handle. They need more probation officers. The need is there and the community needs to meet the need.

Once every 11 weeks, he has to be a duty judge. A duty judge is on duty 24 hours/day for a week and every job, every warrant, and anything that needs to be done, goes to the duty judge.

Judge Hundley described several cases that he had been dealing with and said that these kinds of situations happen all over the county and at all economic levels. The harvest is plentiful and laborers are few, so go get more people.

At the Drug court they are trying to do the best they can. He emphasized the need for the two more courts (DUI and domestic abuse). The mental health need is there because he cannot try a person until they are evaluated.

He finished by saying that as a community that wants to evolve and grow, we have to make Huntsville a place where our children will want to live.

Mack thanked Kenny and Judge Hundley for speaking and having this group of people who care about mental illness, drug abuse and homelessness is hopeful.

*Next Meeting  
Tuesday September 10, 2024  
11:00 am at Wellstone*