



North Alabama Mental Health Coalition January 14, 2025

Attendees (in person):

Daniel Adamek (Little Orange Fish)	Kelli Arthur (VA)	Sarah Bailey (UAH RAN)
Kim Bigelow (Warrior Wellness Program)	Jennifer Burns (UAB Huntsville)	Tiara Carter (DHR)
Rudolfo Chavez (SVDP)	Jamie Collier (Longleaf Recovery)	Kera Duty (MHICM)
La'trisha Fletcher (DHR)	Amy Gillott (Decatur West)	Dawn Hannon (Wellstone)
Lakebra Harper (Alliance Health)	Traci Harris (Elm Foundation)	Jeff Hastings (Ross)
Maggie Howard (First Stop)	Debbie Igou (SOS)	Faith Jackson (Thrive AL)
Stephanie Jennings (Best Life Recovery)	Alexis Love (Wellstone)	Beth McAnally (NOMA)
Marbi McCann (Bradford Warrior)	Heather McCaulley (VA)	Aaron Mickel (Bradford)
Laurin Mitchell (Wellstone)	Tealacy Mitchell (Thrive Alabama)	Brian Moran (VFW Post 2702)
Krista Moulton (Therapist)	Leticia Ogutu (Wellstone)	Christina Pannell (Therapist)
Alyssa Perry (Wellstone)	Karen Petersen (Wellstone)	Taralyn Rowell (Wellstone)
Julie Schenck-Brown (Huntsville Police)	Jakob Shilt (VA Police)	Audrey Smith (Tree of Life)
Paula Steele (Wellstone/WES)	Linda Ware (UAH RAN)	Don Webster (HEMSI)
Kendall Williams (First Stop)	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

A group met over the break to figure out how to change the trajectory of the meetings. We only have an hour and we need to use it wisely. We will implement time constraints on the agenda topics (Krista will keep us on task) so we can respect everyone's time.

3. Review of Action Items 2024 In Review – Daniel Adamek

We haven't had an approach to capturing the action items before. We will review items that have been brought up before and look at the status of each item. An example of this is Don's "recipe" that we discussed in the past and still need to follow through. Daniel introduced an application on the website in November and suggested that everyone check the coalition website at least once a month for changes and updates. The website includes a ChatGPT application and features that allow you to search for items in the NAMHC minutes. We want to be very specific about moving those actions forward. We want to make sure that items that reoccur in the minutes get their due attention. We will have one speaker per month to connect with different members of the coalition as per our mission statement. In the past, there has not been follow through with those speakers and we want to change that.

4. Featured Presentation – Paula Steele, Director Wellstone Emergency Services

Paula had a power point presentation about what they have observed about the individuals that have come through WES. Currently they have two adult units and one pediatric unit (ages 12-18). Paula wanted to make sure everyone knows that process of individuals once they show up at the crisis center.

There are several ways to get into the crisis center: referral from the hospital, walk in the front door, or the police could bring you. You go through a security process, registration, a nurse does medical processing to make sure they can take you, and then you see a triage therapist to determine your crisis. Adults (18 – 65, or 65 with a medical clearance) go to the adult temp unit for 24 hours, get a psychiatric evaluation, see a therapist, peers, and a manager. 40% of those in the temp unit will be handled within the 24-hour period of time. The other 60% will go onto the extended unit (16 beds).

For pediatric cases, they only have the unit and not the temporary observation. They do the same as the adult unit: registration, security, and the triage therapist. Paula showed pictures of the units on the screen. They do have educational support with the home school on the pediatric unit.

They have 988 at Wellstone and they can launch the co-responders that are embedded with HPD. They follow the SAMSA practices on a federal level: someone to call (988), someone to respond (mobile crisis team) and somewhere to go (WES).

Paula had to present data to Department of Mental Health. For the adult side: 16 admissions. 90% of adults that walk in the door are anxious and half are suicidal. 70% primary diagnosis is substance abuse or a co-diagnosis of substance abuse and mental health issues. 74 kids have been admitted so far (74 beds). 80% of the children coming to WES are suicidal. 92% were expressing depression. She feels the coalition has a lot to do when we are looking at the children and their families. We need to focus on preparing them better for the world.

Paula and her team looked at the areas that they need to focus on. She wants to start measuring the self-injurer's behavior. So many kids show up with scars that indicate the pain and the depression that they are dealing with.

On the adult side, they can help with medication for the month after they see you. She is concerned about how adults without insurance or disability will be able to pay for their meds over the long term.

Social media is affecting kids and adults. A US teen spends an average of 4.8 hours per day interacting with social media (according to American Psychological Association). The impacts on their mental health have been severe. 3 hours a day of social media doubled their chances of mental health problems. One thing that is obvious is that the families are not dealing well with the stress of current social situations or with their own mental health.

One of the actionable items she feels is how do we prepare and change the course of how things are going for our young people. Where do we go from here?

Someone asked for an example of what to do. Paula said you can take away their phones and yet they can come back from school with two phones. You can turn OFF their WIFI and they can still connect to their neighbor's WIFI. There is a huge negative influence at school. Parents are not as connected as they use to be. Bullying is now done 24 hours a day. They can have apps hidden on their phones.

Someone asked if they encounter someone with a mental health crisis, where do they call? You can dial **988** or the WES (**256-705-6444**) or just show up at the front door. Veterans can press #1 after 988 and they get someone specially trained for veterans.

Another person asked if Paula had given this presentation to the schools and she said she hasn't, but the NOVA team is very connected to the schools. Reach out to Paula if you have any more questions (paula.steele@wellstone.com).

5. Directed Discussion and Gap Identification – Mack Yates

Mack suggested everyone read the history of the coalition. Mack read the mission statement (from 2015): *The North Alabama Mental Health coalition is made up of mental health stakeholders who collaborate to share knowledge, abilities, and resources to help provide effective, efficient and reliable mental health services to consumers of all ages in North Alabama so they may achieve wellness through awareness, advocacy, prevention and appropriate care.*

Mack stressed Paula's data that 80% of kids they see are suicidal was a shock to him. He feels that is not acceptable and something needs to be done.

Mack started going over the gaps that the coalition has seen. The top gap is **access to care** (one of our goals from the beginning). While this situation has improved, there is still much to do.

Another goal is **appropriate treatment in appropriate time**. Time is a big problem in getting mental health help. Again, this has improved, but there is still a lot to be done.

We also need to **change the attitude in mental health issues and eliminate stigma** through educating the community about mental health and substance abuse. The more people know and understand mental illness, the more the legislators will listen and get something done.

We need to **study the mental health laws** to bring the laws more in line with mental health needs.

One of the other goals is to **establish a long-term treatment and recovery center in North Alabama** for those with serious illness and/or substance use disorder. In this state of 5 million people, there are only 530 beds for long term mental illness and they are all in Tuscaloosa. There is Taylor/Hardin, a geriatric unit and Bryce (234 beds). That is 100 beds per million people. Chad Brooks (head of the jail) said they have no place to send anyone for long-term care.

We also recognize the need to work with Don Webster on a **“recipe” for dealing with mental health issues** that the EMTs can follow.

Another topic we need to examine is **mental health challenges of our children**.

All of these goals need an individual to make this challenge their own.

Mack asked the group for suggestions of items that need to be addressed. Don Webster asked for a directory (including pictures) of the resources available within the coalition. Captain Moran felt like starting a mental health support groups is essential. He is starting up a mental health support group for veterans of foreign wars. He feels like it should be run like AA or Narcotics Anonymous and possibly meet in churches. Mack suggested that Captain Moran spearhead the formation of the mental health support groups (Captain Moran said he is already doing this). A sheet was available for people to sign up to volunteer to help with a project that interests them. Mack said people who are not sure about leading a project, but want more information should also sign up.

Captain Moran explained that he is already working on starting up a 10-person cohort using the Veterans of Foreign Wars membership. Once he works out the details, he will be setting up support groups across the VFWs across Alabama. Krista said she would help work with him.

Daniel wanted the attendees to share information on why they attend the coalition meetings, what the value of the coalition is, and how they want to affect change in that regard. This will give us a benchmark of where we can begin to address issues.

Items that were brought up as the members of the coalition shared their concerns were:

- Latrisha Fletcher (Madison County DHR) - Meet with legislators to establish intensive facilities for youth with mental health issues and have other issues as well (lower IQs or juvenile delinquency).
- Tiara Carter (Madison County DHR) – Work on creating a budget to establish long term mental health facilities in Huntsville
- Don Webster (HEMSI) - Long term care for those with mental health issues
- Linda Ware (UAH RAN) - Access to care for neurodivergent population
- Sarah Bailey (UAH) – Also looking for neuro affirmative care providers and helping to build capacity.
- Jennifer Burns (UAB Huntsville) - Needs participants for a study on adolescent biomarkers She has developed a list of mental health resources called the “Nitch”. She asked for input from members of the coalition to include in her resource listing.
- Stephanie Jennings (Best Life Recovery) - A means to get women the meds they need when they get out of treatment and they don’t insurance.
- Faith Jackson (Thrive Alabama) - The need to have a Prescription Drug Affordability Board like other states that help place caps on the cost of prescription mental health drugs.
- Adam – Wants to volunteer to help adolescents with mental health issues
- Taralyn Rowell (Wellstone) - Need a resource book for families whose children are experiencing mental health issues.
- Dawn Hannon (Wellstone) - Safe prescription drug disposal and social media literacy with the youth.
- Traci Harris (Elm Foundation) – Education about mental health issues and supporting the coalition
- Lakebra Harper – Long term care facility and, in the short term, finding other resources within the coalition.

- Latricia Ogutu (Wellstone) - Networking with other mental health providers
- Kelli Arthur (VA) – Want to create a system for veterans in crisis
- Dan (?) (First Stop) – Wants to educate people to connect more with each other
- Kendall Williams (First Stop) – Needs help with furniture when homeless people are finally housed
- Melissa Caldwell (Wellstone) – Wants a list of community resources to pass along when needs arise, also volunteered to address organizations that need to know what is available at Wellstone
- Debbie Igou (Suicide Loss Support Group) – want training (through Department of Mental Health) to work as a mental health advocate. Waitlist for training is extremely long.
- Karen Petersen (Wellstone) – local long-term facility (many have to go out of state for help)
- Aaron Mickel (Bradford) – wants to start a Crystal Meth Anonymous (CMA) program here
- Christina Pannell (private practice) – wants to educate community about private practice availability
- Marbi McCann (Bradford) – wants to learn more about resources in the community
- Jeff Hastings (Ross) – volunteered to give educational sessions about overdose and substance abuse stigmas (ARISE) in the community
- Beth McAnally (Not One More Alabama) – starting a support group for those who have lost someone by overdose (Feb 13)
- Rudy Chavez – makes use of the resources found in the coalition to bring information to the Hispanic Community
- Audrey Smith (Tree of Life) – working with children on Medicaid (have immediate openings), and, in March, will start groups for pregnant and post partem moms. They have groups for adults and teens that are autistic and have interns that can do low-cost counseling and assessment.
- Amy Gillot (Decatur West) – They have 54 beds for children and adolescents (short term) and want to educate parents on their accountability to cut down on recidivism.
- Kim Bigelow (Warrior Wellness Program) – wants to see a legislative liaison to advocate for mental health legislation
- Juile Schenck-Brown (HPD) – wants to have follow-through on suicide threats and have mental health professionals respond to people in crisis. There needs to be more education about 988 and we need to use NAMI's reimagine crisis principles
- Cheryl McClendon (Wellstone) – long term facility and prescription help
- Jamie Collier (Longleaf Recovery) – wants to learn about local resources
- Jennifer (Longleaf Recovery) – wanted. to educate the coalition on their upcoming mental health outpatient care program
- Alyssa Perry (Wellstone) – emphasize family engagement and education
- Alexis Love (Wellstone) – concerned about housing the homeless with mental health issues
- Paula Steele (Wellstone) – medications, housing, and social media

6. Recap and Adjournment – Daniel Adamek

Daniel said he would use the minutes from the meeting to compile a list and categorize them into different areas. He encouraged people that wish to become more engaged to sign on Mack's list.

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