

Beaverhead County Mental Health Local Advisory Council 2018 Annual Activity Report

The year of 2018 brought new challenges and a different focus to the Beaverhead County Mental Health Local Advisory Council (MHLAC). Though we had goals directed at furthering our integration efforts, we found ourselves instead, by necessity, creating a strategic plan for mitigating the negative and costly impacts of the closures of the Dillon offices of the Office of Public Assistance, Western Montana Mental Health Center, Southwest Chemical Dependency Center and Job Services. Despite this, it is wonderful to note, that the community continued to progress towards a more integrative healthcare model, as evidenced in the following yearly summary.

Response to Public Service Closures –

In January we hosted DPHHS Director, Sheila Hogan in a special meeting held on the UMW campus. There were approximately 34 LAC and other concerned community members in attendance. Director Hogan responded to a long list of questions prepared by the LAC. Many of her responses were published in the following week's edition of the Dillon Tribune. In early February the Commissioners made available a small office space. To clarify what would be the best use of that space, the LAC conducted a community-wide survey during February and March to ascertain the greatest impact(s) of the closures. Then, we organized and hosted a meeting on May 9th of key decision makers to address the issues identified from the resulting survey data and establish relevant action plans and timelines. To help facilitate, we secured the services of Dennis Mohatt, Vice President for Behavioral Health at the Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education (WICHE) and Director of the Mental Health Program who has specialized in rural health delivery for more than 30 years. To make this possible, the LAC sought and found funding from the United Way and the Addictive and Mental Disorders Division of DPHHS.

Three primary goals emerged from the May 9th meeting and the LAC worked with many others in the community to accomplish all three through the remainder of the year. These goals were:

1. Host a Benefits Enrollment Fair (event took place on 7/11/18)
2. Open a resource assistance center (RAC) in Dillon to aid residents in completing or renewing online application forms for public programs (Action Inc. worker began training on 7/2 /18 and assisted the first resident on 8/1/18.)
3. Campaign to urge DPHHS to reinstate an OPA worker to provide services at the Dillon RAC at least one full day per week (led by Rep Tom Welch and Katherine Patton, this mission saw fruition on 10/ 17/18 when an OPA worker from the Butte office began serving Beaverhead residents in the new RAC.)

In addition, the LAC secured another grant through the Headwaters Healthcare Foundation to assist with daily operational expenses of the RAC. Through the fall we continued to work with the Commissioners and County Attorney, Jed Fitch, to complete an RAC User Agreement. In December, the numbers of residents seeking assistance increased to the point that it was necessary to contract with a tech support independent contractor to provide back up. On average, each Wednesday the OPA worker assists 16 residents and 8-10 additional county residents come for other needs. The LAC will continue to provide operational management for the RAC until, at least, June 30, 2019 as we await the outcome of the 2019 legislative session.

Committee Activities –

The ACE Taskforce worked fervently to increase awareness regarding Adverse Childhood Experiences, resiliency and suicide prevention to families, organizations, and businesses. Since last year they have trained our local Forest Service staff, the local office of the BLM, 100% of the front office and nursing staff at Barrett Hospital and Health care, local church congregations, and the administrators, teachers, and students in our local schools, as well as hosted several outside speakers and films.

The Criminal Justice Taskforce did not meet, as such, however there was much work done by Sheriff Frank Kluesner and his staff towards a 2019 Crisis Intervention Training (CIT) for local law enforcement and other first responders. This training will accommodate 40 residents and is now scheduled to occur March 11-15, 2019 on UMW's campus. Lyn Ankleman (WMMHC), Bill Knox (Sheriff's Dept.) and Heidi Gefle, (UMW) are also taking lead roles. Jed Fitch, county attorney, attended our meeting in October and expressed a concern over the number of cases he handles in which persons with mental illness are evaluated as needing treatment yet are unable to get it, which results in an on-going cycle of repeat arrests. It is hoped that from the group of people who participate in CIT there will be new energy focused on behavioral health needs within the local criminal justice system.

The Mental Health Crisis Committee likewise did not meet, as such, during 2018 but the chair, Jenny Given, was able to give first hand reports of the increase in the use of the hospital emergency department following all the public service office closures. "Response to crisis" took a new form, as the LAC attempted, in part, to address the dilemma of failure to access medication or attain needed treatment secondary to lapses in healthcare insurance programs through the opening of the RAC. Again, it is hoped some of the tasks of this committee will, in the future, be addressed via the team that grows out of the CIT. In addition, the LAC formally acknowledged the relationship between crisis and the stigma against the mentally ill in our community. After much thought and discussion it was decided that our best hope of changing culture was to focus on increased and widespread education primarily through the work of the ACE taskforce and the new ROCC program.

The Summit Planning Committee hosted another wonderful 2-day educational meeting on the UMW campus in 2018. There were 90 participants and a total of \$6,764.68 was raised for the LAC. The keynote speaker this year was Olympic basketball champion, Chamique Holdsclaw who told of her personal experience with mental illness. Other speakers included Dr. Judy Cameron: *Helping Children Build a Resilient Brain and Impact of Life and Experiences on Brain Development: The Brain Architecture Game*, Jerry Girard, LCPC & LAC: *"I Got This!" - A Solution Focused Resilience Workshop*, Mary Morgan, LCSW: *You Matter - Integrating Self-Care Into Your Practice*, Melainya Ryan, LCPC & E-RYT: *Raising Consciousness - Meditation & Mindfulness Workshop*, Dr. Dawn Cureton: *How to Use Psychological Testing Reports to Guide and Enhance Therapeutic Interventions*, and Vikki Howard, PhD & Erin Butts, MSW: *Everyday Strategies to Strengthen Resilience*. Participant feedback was very positive and the group elected to host another similar event in 2019.

Universal Screening Promotion is an on-going goal supported by the entire council. Though the council could not give the topic much direct focus, this year the Barrett Hospital and Healthcare organization reported tremendous progress. They more than doubled the number of adults seeing a primary care provider that completed a depression screen. Other amazing achievements towards integration by Dillon's two main medical providers, BHH and the Community Health Center, are:

- the number of BHH patients being treated via tele-psychiatry services has increased 44% over 2017
- BHH has cut their psychiatric emergency response time 38% as 40% of those in need of evaluations are now provided by tele-med
- CHC added their first full time behavioral health provider to compliment their other part-time providers, which enable them to accept outside referrals.
- the CHC is collaborating with our local substance abuse prevention program, BetheChange406, to manage a five-year grant award targeting youth substance abuse.
- and both CHC and BHH now have primary care staff that regularly participates in Project ECO out of the Billings Psychiatric Clinic, which provides cutting edge consultation.

It is hoped that the LAC can encourage and assist both BHH and CHC in creating and attaining new visions for integration progress for 2019.

The **Howard Gaines Community Service Award committee** was very busy with three nominations: Pam Mussard, Valerie Coulter and Lynn Weltzien. This year's winner was Lynn Weltzien. This award was presented September 13th at the Big Sky Behavioral Health Summit.

It was determined that **The Public Relations Committee** was really an entity of the Summit committee, not the council as a whole, so our chair took on and achieved the goals of creating a logo and a web presence for the LAC. However, as we have no web master, every committee must remember to continuously update its material on the webpage in 2019, and beyond.

A new committee for our new **Resilient Oriented Community Champion (ROCC) project** was developed in 2018. This committee will oversee the development of a multi-course curriculum through which already existing local organizations can achieve certification. This is an effort to bring mental health awareness to every local citizen through the employers, clubs, church or other groups that they already participate in. Patagonia volunteered to serve as a pilot project for the program and its employees were trained in mindfulness. Other groups, which have had the basic ACE training, will be targeted in 2019 for ROCC status. The LAC applied for and was granted the November Great Harvest Bake Day Sale fundraiser specifically for the ROCC project, and possibly other causes. The sale was held November 13-15th and the proceeds were \$10,907.49.

Collaborations –

In May the LAC voted to support a **Community Health Worker program** to assist Senior Citizens. Angela Bangs and Valerie Coulter coordinated a series of informational gatherings, or focus groups, to identify the top needs and gaps in service the elderly face. The LAC agreed to support this endeavor with limited financial aid for refreshments.

The LAC is investigating the possibility of creating a **National Alliance Mental Illness (NAMI)** chapter in Dillon. Katherine Patton has been in contact with NAMI state Executive Director Matt Kuntz and invited him to a future LAC meeting to talk about organizing a local group, explain the benefits of NAMI statewide, and their advocacy during legislative sessions. Until he is able to visit us in person, we will stay in touch via email.

This year rather than collaborating with the UMW Outreach Department for their annual Behavioral Health Camp, they requested instead our assistance in offering scholarships for an **Applied Suicide Intervention Skills Training (ASIST)**. This is a two-day interactive workshop in suicide first aid at UMW on January 30-31, 2019. The LAC agreed to sponsor ten scholarships at \$30.00 each.

During the year the LAC was intrigued to follow and support the progress of the Behavioral Health **Peer Support** Specialist Certification in Montana. The AHEC is in partnership with SWMTCHC, the health center in Missoula, and the university systems of both U of M, and MSU in developing and implementing this certification program. They want to have a peer support program with easy access to smaller communities. Our LAC is interested in collaborating by supporting UMW, should it play a role, and providing scholarships for local residents.

We continued our collaboration with the **BeTheChange406 Coalition** led by substance abuse prevention specialist, Kim Martinell. In 2018, this group was awarded a five-year \$500,000.00 Drug Free Community (DFC) grant. The purpose of this grant is *“to implement prevention and intervention strategies that will foster a culture of health for youth and families in Beaverhead County and support life-long choices free of substance use and abuse.”* Several representatives from the LAC serve as chair or sector leaders in this project, which has garnered a great deal of community-wide support. Two members from the LAC will attend training in DC in February 2019.

Through our earlier relationship with Dennis Mohatt from WICHE, a representative from our LAC was asked in December to sit on the Advisory Board for the **Mountain Plains Mental Health Technology Transfer Center (MHTTC)** project. This project is funded through a SAMSHA grant to WICHE and the University of North Dakota. The goal of this project is to develop and disseminate new or existing evidence-based practices to mental health providers across a six state region. By being “at the table” we can hopefully ensure that Beaverhead County, and the state of Montana in general, benefits from this project by attaining cutting edge, technical aids more quickly.

Visibility and Budget –

It has been noted that our visibility across the region and our financial status were both greatly increased during the year 2018. The greater visibility may be due to a combination of our assertive interactions on a state level in response to the public service closures and our successful organization of three region-wide summits in three years. For whatever reason, we are now receiving inquiries from other communities, both in and out of state, on how to build a strong LAC. Regarding the budget, we began fiscal year ‘17-18 with a cash balance of \$6463.00 and concluded it in June 2018 with \$13, 241.21. Our year-end cash balance is \$37,926.65. This increase is the result of attaining one grant, two large donations and hosting profitable conferences.

Respectfully submitted by Lynn M. Weltzien, LCSW
Beaverhead Mental health Local Advisory Council Chair, 2016-18