

**Mental Health Sub-Committee**  
**April 20, 2022**

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**Present:** Brian Hart, Melissa Stafford, Jennifer Emery, Heather Holmes, Anthony Alvernaz, Michael Appleby, Sara Herforth, Jamie Driscoll

**Excused:** Emily Lopez, Lori Murphy, Rebecca Robertshaw

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**Minutes:**

Approved without changes.

**Introductions:**

**Suicide Prevention Updates – Brian Hart:**

The Walk-A-Mile Event is a few weeks away at Eldridge Park – May 7<sup>th</sup> at 11am. Pre-registration will close at noon this Friday. As of right now there are 375 registered. For those who miss the pre-registration, they can register the day of the event starting at 9am. Jennifer is still looking for volunteers. Those who pre-register will receive t-shirts and lunch tickets. PDR will be doing the food this year, because our long-time caterer Rocky, lost all of his equipment in a fire at the County Fair Grounds. There will also be Ed's Heads porta potties available as the City is saying the bathrooms will not be open at the park. Vitamin L from Ithaca will not be performing as the pandemic has devastated their group, and they are unable to teach the new members the songs. They will be giving out trophies to the largest team in retail, the largest team for the school districts, and the largest team in community-based organizations.

**Director of Community Services report - Brian Hart:**

- **Changes at St. Joe's** – Kate Lewis has left and Kyle Dramer is now the Director of the BSU and New Dawn.
- **EPC CRISIS Respite** – After many months of being closed, the Children's Youth Respite has opened back up at EPC.
- **Local Plan:** Brian emailed the committee members a list of items to prioritize, and the number one item was Workforce issues. We need to expand our efforts and be proactive. We need to connect with high schools to promote the field, because waiting for a college intern is too late. They need to modify Civil Service. Just because someone can score high on a civil service exam does not mean they are qualified.

The number two item was Youth Services. We need to train staff to appropriately work with youth. We need to address/connect with the youth as early as possible. There is a wait list everywhere across the State. The workforce working with youth has decreased and the demand for youth services has increased. Family Services is looking at the possibility of opening up a youth facility, but not sure how they are going to staff it. We need

mentorship programs to work with the youth. Brian stated that there is a program in our community that is being under-utilized called YAP – Youth Advocate Program. We need to look at this program and others in our community. A committee member stated that AspireHopeNY has a wait list for their Youth Program.

The third item was Emergent need of Services. We need to look at how long individuals are staying in services versus their actual need for services. We need to evaluate on a regular basis. It is always a challenge, but we need to get individuals toward a lower need for services so they are not dependent on the services. The waitlists are now being triaged, as the need has increased while the staff have decreased. There are individuals which much more chronic needs. Bail Reform and the decrease in beds are making it much more difficult to provide services and there is not easy access to mental health services. A committee member stated that they are unable to meet the mental health needs at the Shelter. The current CRISIS team is exhausted. Brian stated that there was a CRISIS Apartment through Arbor Development. In two years, only one person utilized it, as they were not getting referrals. There was funding provided for it, but it had to be re-appropriated due to under usage. A committee member stated that there is a need for intensive support systems. Some individuals need to be supervised 24 hours a day because they could be dangerous. They need to be better at assessing and treating. It seems like the most challenging cases get turned away multiple times. There needs to be better dialog on medical necessity to do pick-up orders. It depends on who is working and how the care transcends. Even with the best plans there is still struggles.

The fourth item was Housing, as we need more supportive housing. We need more beds as they are always full. There have been issues at the homeless shelter as they have been seeing more individuals with mental health issues utilizing the shelter. Catholic Charities has opened up a temporary warming station that is not licensed by the State. There will be changes going forward. They were having problems with difficult individuals, and finding them housing, as landlords are doing background checks. Landlords are still saying no, even if individuals have wrap around services. There are some individuals who once they get into the program, they are not willing to engage in services and destroy property. It was stated that why not take a progress approach to the housing shortage and have agencies become landlords. The housing would need to be unlicensed as there is no OMH funding. It was also stated that once an individual is a housing program, that agencies should come together and have clients sign permission forms that other agencies can stop by for a visit to see how they are doing if they are there working with another client that is housed in the same building. The agencies and the individual would need to agree, in order for that to happen. There is concern with not having a good support system as there is no mental health openings. There are some individuals who refuse the help, and they have the right to choose, but it also needs to be explained to them appropriately so that they understand. They all need to be hearing the same thing, on reminding them to do well, get support services. In the LaFrance Housing project, there are expectations, and the individuals who live in these apartments need to meet them or they cannot live there. The last

year has been much better and the individuals are given a very clear understanding of what is expected of them.

Brian stated that Transportation for medical and mental health appointments was on our 2021 local plan and asked the committee members if they wanted to keep it on this year's plan. Committee members agreed to keep it on the local plan as it continues to be a needed resource in our community.

Brian stated that Inpatient Treatment Services for co-occurring mental health and substance abuse was on our 2021 local plan and asked the committee members if they wanted to keep it on this year's plan. Committee members agreed to keep it on the local plan as this is a needed service in our community.

Brian stated that on last year's local plan there was a need to align policy and procedures with all agencies so they are consistent with OASAS guidelines. Committee members agreed to keep it on this local plan as this is needed.

Brian stated that Tele-medicine was on our 2021 local plan and asked the committee members if they wanted to keep it on this year's plan. Committee members stated that tele-medicine was going very well in the mental health field and is not needed on the local plan this year. OPWDD is the ones having issues as they have to do it in licensed settings (in office), and this makes it very restrictive in NYS.

A committee member stated that we need a "Step-Down" from the BSU. There are patients that are stable in the hospital setting, but still need a support system when they are discharged. Brian stated that when he used to work in a hospital setting they never discharged anyone to the homeless shelter. We need to convince the hospital not to discharge to the shelter as this is not safe discharge planning.

**Sharing by Community Members:**

- No one had anything to share.

**The next meeting is scheduled for June 15, 2022 via ZOOM.**