

## HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES COMMITTEE

May 18, 2021

Present: Legislators Andrea Moroughan, Richard Chartrand, Greg Kulzer, Phil Hathway, and Lisa Virkler.

Others: Legislators Larry Dolhof, Jerry King, Tom Osborne, Ian Gilbert and Ron Burns; County Manager Ryan Piche; County Atty. Joan McNichol; Treasurer Eric Virkler; and Human Resource Director Caitlyn Smith; and Information Technology Director Conner Biolsi.

Committee Chair Legislator Moroughan called the meeting at 2:38 p.m.

Legislator Virkler made a motion to accept the minutes from 4/20/2021 as recorded, seconded by Legislator Hathway and carried.

**Mental Health discussion** – Panelists: Community Services Director Patricia Fralick, Transitional Living Services Executive Director Maureen Cean, Behavioral Health & Wellness Clinic Director Melanie Saber, and South Lewis Central School Homeschool Community Coordinator Melanie Bush.

Community Services Director Patricia Fralick announced that May is Mental Health Month and thanked the committee for facilitating this discussion. The pandemic has certainly played a part in the mental health of our community as well as the services and the way they are provided over the past year. Public Health has been monitoring and collecting data of the mental health situation in the county from various outside agencies over the course of the pandemic. Acknowledgement was given to the panelist who not only provide mental health services for the community during work hours but also give on their own time.

Legislator Hathway asked what effects covid-19 has had on mental health in the community, Maureen responded that recent national census bureau information from December 2020 shows more than 56% of 18- to 24-year-olds acknowledged having had anxiety or depression symptoms last year; 49% of 25 to 49-year-olds; 39% of 50 to 64-year-olds; and 29% of 65 and older. It is difficult to show what the actual impact is in Lewis County because there are many people who don't seek out services.

Legislator Dolhof asked for clarification on the statistical data Maureen presented, she responded that it was a national survey done in December 2020 for adults 18 years and older through the Census Bureau asking questions about experiencing symptoms of anxiety and depression as a result of the pandemic. Legislator Dolhof questioned what the baseline would have been before the pandemic, Maureen was unable to provide those statistics at this time but offered to follow-up with them later in the week. Legislator Dolhof stated that he was curious what the difference would be as younger adults have traditionally dealt with anxiety and depression more than older adults. Melanie Saber stated that in 2019 the Behavior Health & Wellness Clinic had 344 crisis calls/walk-ins compared to 448 in 2020, roughly a 25% increase.

County Manager Ryan Piche asked the panelists to walk through the process someone needs to go through in order to obtain services for any type of mental health issue, for example someone

at home who is struggling and realizes they need to get help. Melanie Saber responded that anyone utilize the services 24/7. During the day they can call or walk-in and will be transferred to a licensed clinician, after normal business hours someone is on call to answer the hotline. If the individual is already a client, they are connected with their clinician directly and if it is a non-client, they are able to handle the situation and get the person set up with a referral to a licensed clinician.

Ryan questioned the wait time between the actual crisis and getting in to see a licensed clinician or other services needed. Melanie responded that currently there is no wait list and depending on the urgency appointments can be expedited due to having more staff available. Melanie responded to Legislator Dolhof's question about someone who attempted suicide by explaining that usually a case like that is being referred to them by a hospital discharge and they will have an appointment within 1 to 5 days to start services. The assessment process is ongoing throughout treatment and services, but after the initial appointment a safety plan is in place.

Legislator Dolhof questioned how quickly someone who is severely depressed could call and be seen by a clinician, Melanie responded that it depends on the type of urgency, an appointment would be either scheduled with an intake coordinator or a licensed clinician. The moment the call is made crisis services would be provided immediately over the phone or in the case of a walk-in, with a staff member. In the case of someone who is actively suicidal a pick-up order would be issued depending on the location of the person. Someone with a parent/guardian or in school could be taken by the parent/guardian to Samaritan without law enforcement presence as long as they are in a situation where they are able to be watched 24/7. Normally, a pick-up order is processed by law enforcement, which is typically avoided if possible, for younger kids as not to frighten them.

Legislator Moroughan voiced her heartfelt sympathies for those who have lost loved ones to suicide. Some individuals show signs of wanting to hurt themselves while others just take their own lives without any indication. Melanie stated that those are the individuals who typically are not reaching out for services and therefore everyone is unaware of the situation. During an intake evaluation someone can still get flagged as high risk even if they aren't actively threatening suicide, depending on if the clinician feels they are a danger to themselves. Maureen Cean explained the impulse factor, which typically happens with younger adults, because their ability to act upon impulses is greater as they see their world as much smaller, so small things seem much more significant.

County Attorney Joan McNichol questioned the education side of mental health issues, asking if there are signs or behaviors to be watching for in young adults that parents could be taught to look for. Melanie Saber talked about the Suicide Prevention Coalition offering QPR trainings in schools to train teachers or aides to notice things like grades slipping or kids who start skipping school or practices. Melanie Bush stated that schools are a great place because you have people at all levels having eyes on kids all day. This allows staff to pick up on little changes in behavior. Melanie has worked to reach out to the community in her district to help people recognize signs. The signs of depression can look so different depending on the purpose, this is why asking questions is so vital to being able to get someone the help they need. Schools have been able to collaborate with many outside local mental health agencies to get training and education on mental health issues.

Many times, one issue might arise that allows for a home visit which sheds light on other home life issues that need to be addressed. Melanie Bush will be completely trained before the end of the school year and is hopeful to be able to have summer training sessions for South Lewis Central School teachers to train them in more areas of mental health. There will also be health & wellness summer school opportunities for kids which is an important aspect of creating better mental health. Legislator Chartrand asked for clarification on what QPR stood for, Melanie Saber responded that it stands for Question, Persuade and Refer.

Ryan asked for clarification on what happens after a pick-up order gets issued, Melanie Saber responded that law enforcement transfers the individual to Samaritan or Utica, if they are a client there is follow up and tracking and if they aren't a client the hospital will proceed with the evaluation to determine if they need to be admitted or if they will be released. If they are admitted, then released there will be paperwork sent back for follow up which usually happens within a few days. There is a high-risk list so all staff are aware of these individuals in case they call in with issues, there are roughly 20 high risk out of 897 clients (this encompasses both Jefferson and Lewis Counties).

Legislator Moroughan questioned if an individual is 19 years old does their guardian still get contacted, Melanie answered no, they work directly with the individual. Legislator Osborne questioned if every pick-up order was referred back to Behavioral Health & Wellness, Melanie Saber responded that the individual has a choice of what agency they would like to get services from.

Legislator Virkler asked what would be something that is needed right now to help with mental health needs in the county, Pat Fralick explained the planning process. The annual service plan is developed by what the current needs of the county are which is solicited from all agencies involved every year and submitted annually. The most common barriers to treatment are unreliable or inconsistent transportation, workforce (retaining qualified professionally), and substance abuse disorders. It guides treatment plans and outlines what our needs are in case of additional funding, which has yet to be seen. There are many other issues that exasperate mental health issues like lack of food, housing, poverty, medical care access. There are many regulatory requirements that are posed on agencies which are conflictual and don't make sense.

Maureen Cean discussed funding and how organizations like TLS have to work within the confines of state funding in order to offer services. This year the state has made a robust budget, which should help solve wage compression, and housing issues. Pat Fralick discussed the stigma attached to mental health issues, which is a huge issue in society but something that needs to be talked about and addressed. She gave an example of being at a Farmers Market with a table full of handouts and promotional items and only two people took items, because most people were embarrassed. It is proven that there are mental health issues in our community but very few people will come forward to talk about it.

Maureen Cean stated that high speed internet would help significantly especially to allow access virtual appointments. These virtual appointments have been successful as some people are able to make the appointments this way and are more comfortable with being in their own homes and surroundings. Melanie Bush stated that this worked well with school aged children as well for those who were issued school hot spots.

Ashley Waite, Public Health Director stated that suicide prevention is one focus of her Department but with the pandemic it has made it difficult to put the required effort but as things slow down it should get easier. The effects of the pandemic are still not fully realized and this needs to be watched closely. Social Services Commissioner Jennifer Jones reported that there has been an increase in child protection reports, they are about a month ahead of where they normally are this time of year. Increased anxiety and depression in adults was evident throughout the pandemic according to her case workers who continued home visits. There was further discussion on all the different services that allow DSS staff to watch for the signs of depression and anxiety with their clients.

Pat Fralick stated that the Office of Mental Health continues to take beds every year from places like Samaritan, which in turn requires more individuals to sit in the ER for days waiting for a bed in a psychiatric ward. Trying to anticipate a crisis or a gap is the hardest thing to do but is what each organization does every year, with little funding.

Ryan further explained the states idea to close mental health beds for youth as to avoid institutionalizing them. Maureen Cean went on to explain the constraints of what Medicaid funding will cover, which adds another level of difficulty.

#### **Youth Employment Program** – Social Services Commissioner Jenny Jones

Jenny Jones began by stating that each year Social Services is awarded funding for employment opportunities for youth. She explained that there are three forms of Youth Employment: Summer Youth Employment Program which is for 14 to 20-year-olds and is an income qualified program; WIOA program which includes in-school youth and is usually 1 or 2 kids, the out of school youth is 18 to 24-year-olds with barrier to employment qualifications; Pratt Northam Programs, Workship Program and Careers Here Program which are designed for undergraduates to get summer employment in the field they are studying. These programs are advertised over social media and on different websites. The Careers Here Program is designed by Pratt Northam and administered by Social Services. There are currently 11 females enrolled and 3 males, they make minimum wage and are from all over the state. Jenny went on to give an example of a youth who was an intern for the hospital through the Career Here Program and has now come back to the hospital after finishing their degree.

The following dockets were reviewed:

1. Resolution amending Compensation Plan of the County of Lewis with reference to Lewis County General Hospital to create one (1) Full-Time Purchasing Agent position and one (1) Part-Time Stores Clerk position. *LCGH CEO Jerry Cayer gave a brief explanation that the Part-time Stores Clerk was because there were previously two casual employees, one of which was unreliable and the other who recently got done so this is just combining those two positions into one part-time position. The full-time Purchasing Agent is to alleviate some of the workload for the comptroller who was trying to handle it.*  
AYE   5   NAY   0
2. Resolution authorizing agreements between Public Health and various Agency Contractors and Independent Contractor who provide services to the Preschool Special Education

Program at rates set and approved by the New York State Education Department, for the period beginning July 1, 2021 and will renew annually.

AYE 5 NAY 0

3. Resolution authorizing acceptance of Temporary Assistance for Needy Families allocation of \$25,000.00 for non-residential domestic violence services and agreement between Lewis County Department of Social Services and Lewis County Opportunities, Inc. as service provider under the plan.

AYE 5 NAY 0

4. Resolution to appropriate funds for Careers Here Program for BOCES students or in-college students during the summer of 2021 at an hourly rate of \$12.50, with funds provided by the Pratt-Northam Foundation.

AYE 5 NAY 0

At 3:45 p.m. Legislator Virkler made a motion to adjourn the Health & Human Services Committee meeting, seconded by Legislator Chartrand and carried.

At 3:46 p.m. Legislator Virkler made a motion to enter executive session with the full board on a potential liability matter and labor negotiations, seconded by Legislator Kulzer and carried.

At 4:45 p.m. Legislator Chartrand made a motion to enter regular session, seconded by Legislator Gilbert and carried. There being no other business to come forward Legislator Chartrand made a motion to adjourn, seconded by Legislator Osborne and carried.

Respectfully submitted,  
Cassandra Moser, Clerk of the Board