

HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES COMMITTEE
February 15, 2022

Present: Lisa Virkler, Chair; Richard Chartrand, Ron Burns, and Jeffrey Nellenback. Andrea Moroughan, Vice-Chair was absent.

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

Committee Chair Legislator Virkler called the meeting at 2:00 p.m.

Legislator Chartrand made a motion to accept the minutes from January 18, 2022 as recorded, seconded by Legislator Nellenback and carried.

Mental Health Video previews – Tyler Kellogg

Tyler Kellogg reminded everyone that he and his associate worked on videos for the county about masking and social distancing in December of 2020, and then about encouraging people to get the vaccine in the Spring of 2021. This third project was about getting genuine information on mental health issues for different groups of the public. Interviews were done by Anna Platz, who was absolutely wonderful, John Waterhouse, Kimberley Cavanaugh, Erin Monnat, and Alex Barrett, Lynette & Joe Bush. The most popular video in the spring was the one with Joe Bush and it had just shy of 50,000 interactions just on the counties Facebook page alone.

This project had three focuses: that you are not alone; there are resources available; and if you are struggling, it can get better. If you are going through a mental health crisis these can seem unachievable. Through all three projects there have been 20 interviews conducted; 16 of the videos were for Facebook; 10 of those have been released so far; and 6 are being delivered today; with the 10 videos released so far there have been 89,400 interactions.

Tyler then showed the videos of Anna Platz, John Waterhouse, and Kim Cavanaugh. Each video showed a different perspective on mental health issues and encouraged everyone to reach out for help. Tyler then presented further options for other media packages. The interview with Lynette and Joe Bush was powerful as she had lost her brother 9 years ago to suicide. Erin Monnat's video with Alex Barrett, both counselors at Beaver River Central School, was great. Tyler commented on the immense time it takes to edit each interview from 45 minutes down to 5 minutes.

There was discussion on what direction to go forward in. Legislator Virkler suggested that the county put another \$5,000 towards from the Community Services budget towards other videos for Facebook and maybe a few television spots. Legislator Nellenback voiced that he had lost his son to suicide, and he felt this was money well spent. The rest of the committee agreed. Ryan concluded by stating that he would work with Tyler on moving this forward and have him give another update in a few months.

Lewis County Traumatic Loss Team – Anna Platz, Public Health Deputy Director

Anna Platz began by explaining that the Lewis County Traumatic Loss Team is in charge of postvention. This group was established in 2018. Postvention is an organized response in the aftermath of a suicide to accomplish any one or more of the following: to facilitate the healing of individuals from the grief and distress of suicide loss; and to mitigate other negative effects of exposure to suicide to prevent suicide among people who are at high risk after exposure to suicide. The team is trained to respond to a suicide loss but have expanded their scope to other sudden or traumatic losses and recognize that these types of losses can also be very challenging for survivors.

The Lewis County Traumatic Loss Team (TLT) is a collaborative effort of volunteers available to provide supportive services to agencies, businesses, families and/or individuals in Lewis County who have experienced a suicide or sudden/traumatic loss. The TLT firmly believes that individuals are resilient and that if offered support, interventions and /or information, most individuals affected by a traumatic loss can heal without formal counseling or interventions.

The TLT is typically notified and able to respond within 24-72 hours of the incident. Additional follow up beyond any initial response may also be provided, depending on the circumstance. A response may happen in person, over the phone, electronically or through any combination. The TLT is on call seven days a week throughout the year. Any member of the community may call (315) 376-9735 to invite a response by the team. Activation begins with a discussion between the person requesting support and the on-call team member to determine the specific level of response. The TLT does not provide therapy or clinical interventions.

The background of the Lewis County TLT began in March 2017 with NYS Coalition Infrastructure funding. On May 30, 2017 several team members went to a seminar called Pillars of Postvention (Part 1) with Garra Lloyd Lester, Director of NYS Suicide Prevention Community Initiatives (SPCNY). On June 20, 2017 the Pillars of Postvention (Part 2) was attended. April 19, 2018 was the orientation of the Trauma Response Team and debriefing with Garra Lloyd Lester. June 12, 2018 was the formal launch of Lewis County Community Crisis Response Team. December 2021 the team was rebranded to Lewis County Traumatic Loss Team.

The Team consists of 9 members who dealt with 27 calls in 2021. Out of those 27 calls there were 16 activations. Community Outreach done in 2021 consisted of Press conferences, website launch, informational meetings and presentations, business card distribution, letter to large employers, Facebook page launch, and annual letter to partners. The funding of this organization comes from various sources. The money is used to buy art supplies and activity books for young children, books about loss for older individuals, advertising on the radio, tissues, journals, water to bring to a response, lanyard for Team members for identification, and post cards. In 2022, the Lewis County Budget appropriated some money for professional development, new team members training, advertising and other community outreach, and supplies.

The current community partners of this organization are: Lewis County District Attorney's Office; Lewis County Sheriff's Office; Lewis County Health System; Lewis County School & Carthage School; and Lewis County First Responders. Anna Platz concluded her presentation by offering business cards for legislators to take with them and hand out.

Covid-19 update – Anna Platz, Public Health Deputy Director

Anna Platz updated the committee that since the second week in January at the peak of Covid-19 with 639 cases we continue to trend down and are at 94 cases. Hospitalizations have remained very stable; we were at 11 but are now down to 6. Unfortunately, there was one new death to report today.

Booster Vaccination Mandate impact – Jerry Cayer, Lewis County Hospital System CEO

Jerry Cayer began by sharing a graph that shows there is still active transmission going on. This means that there are still patients in the hospital who have Covid-19 and there are 5 staff in isolation. In January there were 16 days where the ER was on diversion, and so far 2 days in February. Even though there is headway being made there is tremendous stress on providers of health services due to the number of patients receiving services and the number of staff available to deliver those services.

The current positivity rate is 9.2% for Lewis County, 8.1% for the North Country, and 3% for New York State. In Lewis County 51.3% of the residents are fully vaccinated, however the health system workers need to have three doses in order to be considered full vaccinated according to Article 28, everyone else just needs two. The Hospital is working with HANYS and IHA on this mandate. There are 37 facilities in Central New York, which incorporates the 7 counties of the North Country, that have a total of 27,308 non-boosted employees out of a total employee population of 73,515. That equates to 37% of the employees are not boosted even though 100% of these facilities offer the booster vaccine. The deadline for employees to have their booster vaccine is Monday, February 28th.

The number of hospital positions that are vacant have increased by over 27% since last year. Nurses seem to be the hardest positions to fill, which is causes major problems for services. The LCHS has 609 members, which is made up of employees and the PLLC which employs the physicians, and contracted staff. Out of the 609, 410 have received their covid-19 vaccination. There are currently 199 members without their booster dose. There are 130 members who will be required to have their booster dose by June, and 69 members who are required to have the booster by Monday, February 21st. Overall to date, due to mandates, we have lost 49 members, 34 through resignations and 15 terminations.

Jerry shared some information with HANYS & IHA in regard to how these mandates are impacting local hospitals which was sent on to the second floor in Albany. There is a letter that was received asking the hospital CEO to co-sign as part of the IHA to then be forwarded on. The hospital has already paused maternity and will now have to think about what other services might be at risk if more employees resign.

Legislator Virkler stated that the vaccine and booster are safe and effective, but she does know of colleagues who are ready to leave because of the continued mandates. Jerry responded to Legislator Virkler that he doesn't know if the letter will change anything, everyone has vaccination fatigue at this point. Ryan mentioned that he wasn't sure if NYSAC was working with HANYS on this but would check in with someone.

Ryan briefly mentioned that there is a potential home for Social Services, Office For the Aging and Community Services during the renovation project. More details will be discussed in executive session later.

The following dockets were reviewed:

1. Appropriating funds in the Public Health Department in the amount of \$1,000,000.00 from NYS Grant for continued pandemic response.
AYE 4 NAY 0

2. Authorizing Agreement between Jefferson-Lewis BOCES and Lewis County Public Health Agency for Reimbursement of Staff Time Engaged in Covid Screening and Testing in Schools.
AYE 4 NAY 0

3. Appointing Members Lisa Peebles and Cassie Forbus to the Lewis County Youth Bureau Advisory Board.
AYE 4 NAY 0

4. Appointing Student Representative Isaac Gibson of South Lewis Central School to the Lewis County Youth Bureau Advisory Board.
AYE 4 NAY 0

5. Appropriating Funds in the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act accounts in the amount of \$25,000.00 for Adult and Dislocated Worker programs.
AYE 4 NAY 0

Motions:

1. Legislator Virkler made a motion to authorize Public Health Director, Ashley Waite to refill one (1) full-time Administrative Assistant position effective immediately, seconded by Legislator Nellenback and carried.

2. Legislator Virkler made a motion to authorize Social Services Commissioner, Jennifer Jones to refill one (1) full-time Case Aider position effective immediately, seconded by Legislator Chartrand and carried.

Legislator Virkler asked for a moment of silence for reflection and prayer on behalf of a county employee who is not doing well in the hospital.

There being no other business to come before the committee, Legislator Chartrand made a motion to adjourn at 3:13 p.m., seconded by Legislator Nellenback and carried.

Respectfully submitted,
Cassandra Moser, Clerk of the Board