



**Tompkins County
COMMUNITY MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES BOARD**

**Tompkins County Whole Health
201 East Green Street
Ithaca, New York 14850-5635**

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Sheila McEnergy, Vice Chair

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Mental Health Subcommittee

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Developmental Disabilities Subcommittee

Jacob Parker Carver, Chair
Substance Use Subcommittee

**Tompkins County Community Mental Health Services Board
55 Brown Road, Ithaca NY 14850
Monday, September 9, 2024, 5:30 p.m. Meeting Minutes**

Minutes Approved
October 7, 2024

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCkpJNVbpLLbEbhoDbTIEgSQ>

Present: Jan Lynch; Larry Roberts (Zoom); Stu Bergman; Travis Winter; Jessica Conner, PsyD (Zoom); Howard Reid; and Alaina Zapf, PsyD.

Excused: Sheila McEnergy; Mary Hutchens; Sally McConnell-Ginet; Nicole Zulu, PhD; Dr. Auguste Duplan; Khaki Wunderlich; Anna Tamis, PhD; and Deb Barber

Legislature: Randy Brown

Guests: Liddy Bargar, Humans Services Coalition; Heather Bradley-Geary, Vecino Group; Danielle Harrington, Tompkins Community Action; Brian Coleman, St. John’s Community Services; Mike Ellis, The Learning Web; and Anthony Paolangeli, The Learning Web; and Jeanine Westcott, Racker

Staff: Harmony Ayers Friedlander, DCS; and Karan Palazzo, LGU Administrative Assistant

The meeting was called to order at 5:30 p.m. by Ms. Lynch. Introductions were made. A quorum was not met and the July 1, 2024, minutes could not be approved.

Privilege of the Floor & Announcements: Mr. Roberts gave compliments to the organizers of the Youth Mental Health and Wellness event held at the Tompkins County Public Library this past Saturday. The next Mental Health Subcommittee meeting on October 15th will include retiring Clinical Director, Susan Spicer who will reflect on her career at Tompkins County Mental Health and offer ideas for its future.

Cayuga Health System’s Partnership with Arnot Health/Centralis - Justin Runke, Chief Administrative Officer and General Counsel of Cayuga Health System and Julie Steele, Assistant Vice President of Behavioral Health Service Lines gave a presentation on their new affiliation with Arnot Health/Centralis and how this affiliation will improve care for individuals in Tompkins County who receive mental hygiene services (substance use, developmental disabilities, and mental health).

Cayuga Health Systems (CHS) - Ms. Steele gave an overview of CHS which comprises Cayuga Medical Center (CMC), Schuyler Hospital, Cayuga Medical Associates (CMA), Cayuga Addiction Recovery Services (CARS), Visiting Nurse Service VNS, Cayuga Health Transport, and the Cancer Resource Center serving Tompkins, Schuyler, and Cortland Counties. CHS employs 2800 individuals of which 425 are providers and operate an inpatient behavioral health services unit with 20 beds for adults and 6 beds for adolescents.

CMA's outpatient group practice oversees the integrated behavioral health program which is available to patients who have a primary care physician in one of their seven CMA practices and currently operational in 6 of the 7.

- Organizing community-wide efforts to prevent and end homelessness by monitoring data
- Funding not-for-profit agencies that work to end homelessness through permanent supportive housing; funding is also brought in through CoC, a mechanism through which HUD dollars come into the communities
- Promoting access to supportive services and housing, primarily through the coordinated entry system

She shared data on the number of individuals served in emergency shelters, the percentage of positive exits to permanent housing, and the average length of stay in emergency shelters. In 2023, 599 people entered emergency

Commissioner's Report/Updates - NYS Director, Brian Coleman shared that they are contracted by Tompkins County to operate the homeless shelter. They also operate the friendship center, a daytime drop-in center, and a food pantry at the shelter.

Plans to start or end any services in the next year – Serenity House, a residence for the sober living program will open next month. They are looking to provide outpatient substance use services as they seek approval to provide Medicaid waiver services to individuals with traumatic brain injury as well as services for individuals who qualify for nursing home transition and diversion waiver services, and to offer services for individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities. They do not intend to end any services.

Challenges – Accessing mental health and substance use services; hiring a clinical case manager position; individuals who have pets; limited storage for individual's personal belongings; and providing an adequate level of care for shelter guests.

Ideas to Overcome Challenges – Communicating and collaborating with other agency providers to help provide additional resources.

Tompkins Community Action (TCA)

Executive Director, Danielle Harrington shared that they are an anti-poverty nonprofit that responds to community needs as they change. Core programs include an emergency food pantry program, an early Head Start program, an early education program, and a voucher rental assistance program (Section 8). The waiting list is very long but there is a homeless preference if unhoused when applying. They have 135 supportive housing units that serve people experiencing homelessness. They use the Continuum of Care (CoC) coordinated entry system and weave in the "Housing First" philosophy and the harm reduction approach to maximize impact and provide individualized services. Each client is assigned a staff coordinator to navigate services based on the resident's needs.

Plans to start or end any services in the next year – There are no intentions of ending any programs. They are in the midst of their community needs assessment and preparing their strategic plan for the next few years.

Challenges – Not enough substance use treatments or mental health supports; residents that are vulnerable to victimization after securing housing; community perception of individuals living in poverty; and stigmas of the unhoused/homeless.

Ideas to Overcome Challenges – Strengthen community partnerships, look outside of the box, program evaluation and improvement, survey clients, staff wellness, and ongoing staff training, and make public the positive success stories in the press and on social media platforms.

Vecino Group

Executive Director, Heather Bradley-Geary shared that the Vecino Group is a national supportive housing developer building homes to help end homelessness. In partnership with Tompkins Community Action in Ithaca, they designed Asteri with dedicated 40 units to folks experiencing chronic homelessness and for persons with physical/developmental challenges; Ithaca Arthaus has dedicated 40 units to transition-aged youth experiencing homelessness. Overall, Vecino

ends homelessness for about 750 households annually across the nation, but more housing units are needed with services to help people stay housed in permanent housing

Most of their housing is integrated, between affordable housing and units to serve folks exiting different populations of homelessness. Asteri and Arthaus are funded through low-income housing tax credits and 4% bonds through Housing Community Renewal (HCR). They do not have 100% permanent housing in Ithaca.

Plans to start or end any services in the next year – There are no plans to end any services.

Challenges – Serving folks who experience chronic homelessness and the stigma that exists around homelessness.

Ideas to Overcome Challenges – Educate the community on what it means to be homeless and what it means to exit homelessness; creating more units; and allowing people to transition out of homelessness.

The Learning Web

Director of Youth Outreach, Anthony Paolangeli shared that they serve homeless youths (16- 24 years of age who can stay for 12 to 18 months. Their housing programs include 16 permanent and 9 transition supportive housing and 7 ESHI units. They provide case management for youths and mental health services for those who are experiencing homelessness including couch surfers. They serve about 90 youths annually and provide case management services focused on youth employment, addressing physical and mental health needs, addiction recovery services, parenting programs, and life skills.

Clinical Social Worker, Mike Ellis shared that The Learning Web provides no barrier to mental health services for youth who are engaged in their programs. Their model provides 14 hours of mental health services, training, and support for the Learning Web staff on different mental health topics. He has a caseload of 16-20 youths between the ages of 18-25 where he focuses on basic self-care, life skills, and mental health issues that challenge getting housing or remaining housed.

Plans to start or end any services in the next year – Their permanent supportive housing recently started, and they have no plans to end any services.

Challenges – Lack of a youth shelter, difficulty finding housing for youth with no rental history, Ithaca's rental market, stigmas associated with homelessness, easy access to psychiatry, and the effectiveness of the current model in providing mental health support.

Ideas to Overcome Challenges – A low-barrier rental assistance program, and more housing.

Q&A

Mr. Coleman of the St. John's Community Shelter spoke on the domestic violence question. Their intake process evaluates and assesses the best placement option for each individual based on listening to their story. The shelter utilizes many hotel partners across the community/county to make the best placement for their well-being as well as connect them to advocacy centers, therapy, and legal avenues keeping wraparound support.

What are the gaps in mental health and substance use services that are not accessible and creating significant problems? Mr. Paolangeli said that youth face challenges with trauma from law enforcement, medical centers, insurance issues, lengthy wait times, or non-existent communication for intakes or psychiatric services. St. John's assists in rebuilding confidence in systems and will attend their first intake meetings.

What kind of education would help the community understand homelessness better? Ms. Bargar emphasized the importance of using critical thinking skills to counter negative stereotypes and the role of information in reducing stigma. Promoting positive and successful stories is also helpful.

Final Thoughts and Suggestions

Dr. Jessica Conner discusses the challenges of sharing success stories and the need for positive narratives to counteract negative perceptions.

Ms. Lynch suggests having structured conversations about addressing the needs of people with complex needs and the importance of community education.

Mr. Roberts suggests having structured conversations about addressing the needs of people with complex needs and the importance of connecting them with appropriate services.

Ms. Lynch thanked the expert panelists for their time to share such valuable information on better understanding the problem of homelessness as it relates to those who have mental health issues, substance use disorders, or developmental disabilities in our county.

The meeting was adjourned at 7:00 p.m.

**The Next Community Mental Health Services Board Meeting is
Monday, November 4, 2024, at 5:30 pm.**