



Tompkins County COMMUNITY MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES BOARD

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

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**Mental Health Subcommittee
Via Zoom
October 17, 2023, @ 1:00 pm
Meeting Minutes**

**Minutes Approved
11.21.23**

Present: Larry Roberts; Dan Doyle; Jessica Conner; Mary Hutchens; and Tracy Decker

Excused: Mary Orsaio; Jan Lynch; and Ed Bergman

Guests Present: Briggs Seekins, Challenge; Judi McGee, Unity House; Roy Murdough; St. John’s; Myrah Dolson, ADC; Susan Tabrizi; and Ben Komor

Staff Present: Harmony Ayers-Friedlander, DCS; and Karan Palazzo, LGU AA TCWH

The meeting was called to order at 1:04 p.m. by Larry. Introductions were made. The September 19, 2023 minutes, could not be approved as a quorum was not met.

Privilege of the Floor & Announcements: None.

Discussions:

Surgeon General’s Report on Loneliness and Its Impact on Mental Health – Mary and Larry provided their highlights from the report.

Mary’s highlights:

- Acknowledge and prioritize social connection as a health priority
- Health and Mental Health Professionals be provided formal training on the significant connections
- Integrate social connection into patient care

Minutes Approved 2/13.24

Mary asked, What should the role of this Mental Health Subcommittee (MHS) be in understanding loneliness?

Jessica shared that Cayuga Health System has initiated more social needs screenings at every medical appointment, but private medical offices could benefit from learning effective ways to address loneliness. She believes that the MHS could be instrumental in that process.

Larry’s Highlights:

- The Surgeon General puts out advisories like this, it is considered a major public health issue **needing** to be addressed.
- Noticeable decline in satisfactory connections to others, institutions, people, and the community over the past 50 years.
- Research showed that loneliness has the same impact on health as smoking 15 cigarettes a day including diseases such as high blood pressure, depression, and mental health problems. Loneliness is a factor even for people working.

A discussion of how agencies address loneliness and social isolation in the community and rural settings.

Dan was concerned about the stigma of admitting loneliness and suggested behavioral questions be asked to gather data on social connections.

Larry said that the Zero Suicide effort looks to reduce/normalize the conversation about suicide as this discussion on loneliness hopes to do the same, reduce loneliness and the cause of loneliness. MHS can help find available resources and how that impacts people's sense of well-being and connection.

Harmony added that the Zero Suicide model is designed for healthcare providers looking at best practices in how to address it at a systems approach including developing safety plans and identifying available supports collectively in the community. She stressed the need for mental health professionals to get more training on suicide and providing support.

A lengthy discussion of a comprehensive easily accessible brochure/pamphlet of available resources and support groups. Harmony referred to The Tompkins County Mental Health website page to find a great source of information for mental health resources.

Ben shared his very positive experience with PROS. He found the program extremely helpful with the paradigm of treating people who have mental health issues in a safe, open, and liberal environment. He believes that psychiatrists explicitly tell patients that medication is only a part of the treatment. The support of good friends/family and treating them as equals with incentives might be effective in bringing people together to reduce loneliness and isolating themselves.

Harmony suggested partnering with Zero Suicide Coalition to create a resource for healthcare professionals and the public.

Deputy Commissioner's Report: - Harmony reported on the soon-to-be-available RFPs on the Office of Mental Health website.

Rehabilitation Support Services (RSS), the largest nonprofit organization, received approval for 70 units of Empire State Supportive Housing Initiative (ESSHI) units of housing for people in Tompkins County with 50 % dedicated to those with serious mental illness. The remaining 50% of the units will be for chronically homeless, domestic violence housing needs. They have also been approved by OMH for congregate treatment apartments through Medicaid for restorative supportive services. It is hoped that another RFP will be put out for the remaining beds.

A regional Request for Proposals (RFP) for **Safe Options Support (SOS) Critical Time Intervention (CTI) Teams** is an intensive case management model for people discharged from the hospital to get immediate wraparound support to help secure those first appointments. Statistics show that those initial appointments are crucial in stabilizing the essential needs including housing and treatment supports.

OMH also sent out a Request for Proposals (RFP) for **Housing First** that doesn't require a mental health diagnosis and includes people who are currently homeless and have a mental health disorder, substance use disorder, or medical or developmental disorder.

Harmony responded to a question regarding the consideration for TCMH to be a certified community behavioral health clinic. TCMH does not have both the required OASAS and OMH licenses for Article 31 and Article 32 clinics, which makes TCMH ineligible.

Collaboration with the Other Subcommittees on the Workforce Shortage: The Developmental Disabilities, Mental Health, and Substance Use subcommittees chairs and co-chairs will meet shortly on how and what data to collect and how to process the data once received.

The County and City are working together to develop a crisis alternative response plan, which will include someone unarmed who will accompany law enforcement in a vehicle for certain calls while adding mental health supports. This effort is part of the reimagining of public safety work that began after the murder of George Floyd.

Agenda Topics:

- Meeting with school district representatives on mental health needs and gaps
- Update of St. Johns
- LGBTQ youth mental health needs
- ACES Update (Children Services)
- Brochure of resources

The meeting was adjourned @ 2:15 p.m.