Tompkins County COMMUNITY MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES BOARD

Tompkins County Whole Health 201 East Green Street Ithaca, New York 14850-5421

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Mental Health Subcommittee Meeting Via Zoom January 20, 2025 @ 1:00 – 2:30 p.m. Meeting Minutes

Minutes Approved April 15, 2025

Present: Mary Hutchens; Tracy Decker; Ben Komor; and Susan Tabrizi

Excused: Larry Roberts; Jessica Conner.

Unexcused:

<u>Guests Present</u>: Briggs Seekins, Challenge; Judi Magee, Unity House; Roy Murdough, St. Johns' Community Service; Amanda Howlett, Catholic Charities; Jenny Miller, MHA; Diane Olden, MHA; Ashleigh Warrender, MHA; Thom Delara; and Jason Hungerford, NAMI

Staff Present: Harmony Ayers-Friedlander, DCS; Rich Shaw, TCWH Dual Recovery Coordinator; and Jen Forte, TCWH;

The meeting was called to order at 1:04 pm. Introductions were made. Tracy moved to approve November 19, 2024, minutes, second by Susan; all were in favor.

Privilege of the Floor & Announcements: None.

Peer Services Updates

<u>Tompkins County Whole Health Mental Health Clinic</u> – Jennifer Forte discussed the role of peers in supplementing clinical services at the clinic, including providing emotional support, engaging hard-to-reach individuals, and providing a unique dynamic through their personal experiences, drawing on their own lived experiences, reviewing coping skills, and safety plans.

Peers:

- > Supplement clinical services by seeing clients bi-weekly, especially for high-risk clients who may need more frequent support.
- > Engage with hard-to-reach community members and provide outreach to individuals who missed hospital discharge appointments.
- Provide emotional support, reviewing coping skills and safety plans with clients.
- > Offer a unique dynamic due to their personal experiences that clients may not have with their clinicians.
- > See clients more frequently, even daily if needed, to provide additional support.

With peers seeing clients more often than clinicians, it helps fill gaps when clinicians' schedules are full. Jennifer also mentioned the intention to use peers for pre-admission outreach to the community, particularly for those who struggle with the idea of engaging with services at the Mental Health clinic. Jennifer stated that the peers have been a great addition in the brief period they've been in the clinic. The peers are valuable in supplementing clinical services.

- The clinic serves children, teenagers, and youth up to 26 years old.
- The clinic has a peer dedicated to working more closely with the children and youth team, which serves individuals 21 and younger, sometimes up to 26 depending on their developmental needs.
- The clinic pushes into many public schools in the area, including Trumansburg, Dryden, DeWitt Middle School, and Ithaca High School. This allows students to receive services at their school during the school day, making it more convenient for them and their families.
- The decision for a young person to receive services at the clinic is often based on patient/family choice, as people get to choose the organization, they want to receive services from.

<u>NAMI</u> – Jason Hungerford, the Executive Director of the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) Finger Lakes, discussed the organization's mission and services. He highlighted that NAMI is the largest grassroots mental health organization in the nation, serving Tompkins and Cortland counties. The organization provides classes, educational programming, support groups, a helpline, hospital programs, and outreach events. Jason also mentioned that 1 in 5 adults experience mental illness each year, and suicide is the second leading cause of death for people aged 10 to 34. He detailed three NAMI signature programs: Family to Family, NAMI Basics, and NAMI Home Front, which cater to different needs and situations. Additionally, he mentioned the organization's support groups, community education, and a helpline that offers peer support, information, resource referrals, and assistance.

All of the support groups follow a structured model to ensure participants have an opportunity to be heard and get what they need from the sessions. The groups are offered at no cost and facilitated by specially trained facilitators using the NAMI National Support Group model.

- General family support group Open to family members, caregivers, and loved ones of individuals living with mental illness.
- Spouse and partner support group For individuals with a spouse or partner who has a mental health diagnosis.
- Psychosis support group For caregivers of loved ones who have experienced psychosis as part of their mental health journey.

Jason provided some facts on mental illness: One in five adults experience mental illness each year; One in 20 have a serious mental illness; One in six youth experience a mental health disorder each year; 50% of all lifetime mental illness begins by age 14, and 75% by age 25; Suicide is the second leading cause of death for people aged 10 to 34, with over 48,000 suicide deaths in 2021.

Jason discussed the organization's advocacy efforts, with a focus on community education and support. He highlighted the Overwatch Peer Support program, a free, confidential, community-based interagency initiative that provides peer support to first responders and their families. He also mentioned the Crisis Intervention Team (CIT) program, with NAMI Finger Lakes having representation on the Cornell CIT Steering Committee. Jason noted the need for a crisis stabilization center for people in crisis situations and the importance of proper CIT implementation with all stakeholders involved. The Tompkins County Sheriff's Office has effectively implemented the CIT program, but expansion is still needed. It is important for a community to know what gaps exist in the community. He also mentioned the partnership with a company to develop a mobile app for the Overwatch Peer Support program.

Jason provides background on the CIT program in Tompkins County, NY, mentioning its voluntary nature and the involvement of local law enforcement agencies. Tompkins County Sheriff's Office has implemented a dedicated officer and clinician team for mental health crises, de-escalating situations, and ensuring safety.

Harmony added that this subcommittee is interested in finding ways to support, expand, and improve CIT training for officers and has identified in its local services plan to enhance communication with local law enforcement regarding the experiences of people who have a mental health crisis. The community will get a crisis stabilization center in 2026 through Cayuga Health Services. A second CARE Team started recently and operates Monday—Friday during the day. After-hours are covered by the Mobile Crisis Team (MCT). Harmony noted a few gaps during Jason's presentation, which included the lack of a crisis stabilization center, inconsistent implementation of CIT across jurisdictions, ensuring that smaller municipalities receive CIT training, and the need for peer support specifically for first responders.

Mental Health Association: Jenny Miller from the Mental Health Association (MHA) presented on the MHA's programs, highlighting their peer support and advocacy, family support services, justice services, psychosocial services, and community education initiatives. She also mentioned that all MHA staff are certified peer specialists or provisional, working on full peer certification through the Academy of Peer Services certification.

Peer support includes emotional support, advocacy work, goal setting, and using various programs like the New York State Program, Mental Health Community Partners, Care Path, and Rap.

MHA's Justice Services Highlights:

- 1. Program Expansion Justice services expanded over the past year from 1 full-time person in the program to 2 full-time staff. Allowing their presence from just City Court into County Court and the Family Treatment Court.
- 2. High utilization and impact The program currently serves over 30 participants, indicating it is a highly utilized service.
 - The program has had positive outcomes, including improved participant mental health, reduced recidivism, diversion from the criminal justice system, and increased public safety.
 - Funding and growth The expansion of the justice services was enabled by the Mental Health Association receiving grant funding from the Park Foundation, allowing them to bring on the additional full-time staff member, Katie, who has 8 years of experience as a Serpa (Specialized Engagement and Recovery Assistant).
- 3. Importance of the services Provide on-site support and one-on-one services for individuals involved in the criminal justice system.

Family Support Program: Focuses on providing navigation, resilience-building, and wellness support to caregivers and youth/young adults up to age 21, utilizing specialized state programs and working to expand into the family treatment court.

Family Support Program Highlights

- For caregivers and the children/young adults up to age 21.
- Provides systems navigation, family resilience, caregiver self-care, and whole family wellness.
- The programs utilized include Mental Health Community Partners and Care Path, which are programs of the New York State Office of Mental Health.
- The program recently hired Diane Olden, a retired community health nurse with over 30 years of experience working with families in Tompkins County. She is working to expand the program's involvement with the family treatment court.
- The program is looking to hire a family peer advocate who can obtain the full family advocate certification
- Diane will lay the foundation as the program coordinator, while they work to bring on a family peer advocate to further enhance services.

Future goals center on securing a new location, enhancing senior and specialized support services, developing new programming, and ensuring the organization remains a safe and inclusive space for the community.

<u>Deputy Commissioner's Report</u> – Harmony discussed Governor Hochul's State of the State address, focusing on mental health topics. The Governor aims to strengthen the mental hygiene law, particularly concerning involuntary commitment for those at risk of harming themselves due to homelessness and lack of basic needs. She also wants to enhance Assisted Outpatient Treatment (AOT) orders by standardizing voluntary plans and increasing staffing levels. The Governor plans to expand peer support services, establish hospital-based bridger programs, and add street medicine and psychiatry to SOS teams. She also intends to develop more clubhouse programs, especially for youth, and increase teen mental health training. Lastly, she will work on landmark reforms for insurance coverage and better coordinate with grassroots entities for community-driven programming.

- 1. Addressing gaps in the mental hygiene law: The governor wants to strengthen the law to better address situations where individuals are at significant risk of harm due to being unhoused, lacking basic needs, and being too ill to meet those needs themselves.
- 2. Strengthening Kendra's Law: The governor plans to find ways to strengthen the assisted outpatient treatment (AOT) orders, including creating an "enhanced voluntary service" option.
- 3. Expanding peer support services: The governor is interested in expanding peer-led programs, including intensive support engagement teams (inset teams) and peer bridger programs in hospitals.
- 4. Enhancing crisis response: The governor aims to integrate street medicine and street psychiatry components into the existing Safe Option Supports (SOS) teams.
- 5. Developing more clubhouse programs: A focus will be placed on expanding the number of clubhouse programs, particularly for youth.
- 6. Improving youth mental health: Initiatives include expanding teen mental health first aid training and establishing clinical assessment hubs to evaluate and treat the complex needs of young people comprehensively.
- 7. Strengthening insurance coverage: The governor will work to enhance compliance and oversight of insurance companies to ensure parity in coverage for mental health and medical care.

The meeting adjourned at 2:30 pm.