

**Sitka Advancing Our Community
Clinical/Behavioral Health Committee
April 10, 2007**

Bob George (SCPS); Mike Lande (SCPS); Marilyn Lande (SEARHC); Erin Andrews (YAS); Christine Dembinsky (YAS); Aryeh Levinson (SEARHC)

Introduction

This is a subcommittee of the Advancing Our Community coalition. The behavioral health committee met fairly regularly in 2005-2006, but has been on hiatus for a year. The committee has been reconvened on request of one of the committee members, to review the continuum of care and continue to work together.

Review

This committee had developed a services grid – an at-a-glance look at the mental/behavioral services being provided in Sitka and where there are gaps. Committee members were each given a copy of the grid, invited to study it further after this meeting, and advise the facilitators of any revisions.

Another previous action of this committee was to engage in a dialogue about areas of community need. The committee named 6 areas of focus:

AOC focus (things this committee identified as important needs, but beyond the ability of this committee to address by itself); these ideas were presented to AOC last year, but the general coalition didn't pick up anything to pursue at that time

- Respite care
- Need to work more closely with Native service providers
- Need more foster parents

New programs needed

- Community mental health advocate service
- Foster parents program (recruitment/training)
- Parent mentors
- Host families for MEHS students that have behavior issues
- Respite care systems (programmatic approaches)

Public education

- Education about accessing mental health services (reduces stigma) – SEARHC has had radio campaign “it’s okay to get help”

Clinical

- Clarify each agency’s parameters of services (accomplished through the grid)
- Duplication of services (also in the grid)
- Set maximum time from first call to Tx – standardizing across the community (the committee agreed on a standard last year, but not on how to monitor or enforce that standard)

In Progress

- Connecting clients to other community programs and healthy activities

- For example, at the Town Meeting held in February, YAS/Hanson House asked for summer programs and activities – Community Schools has programs and scholarships available

Behavioral Health Staff/System Issues

- Employee wellness (care for caregivers) – especially for YAS
- Combined staff training opportunities
- Direct service staff training and retention

Someone mentioned that he just found out about a training being held today at SEARHC, but the SEARHC representatives at this meeting didn't know much about it either – this illustrates the point that, in general, dissemination of information is an issue, not only among agencies, but also among the departments in large organizations like SEARHC. The group seemed to agree that having centralized mailing lists would be helpful – one that services the various SEARHC departments, combined with or separate from one that goes to a broader community distribution. AOC could be the central location, but for that to work, all organizations first need to start sending information to AOC to distribute, and AOC (through this committee) needs to compile the inclusive mailing list.

Other things coming from past committee notes that have been raised as concerns:

- Access and environmental issues (child care and transportation)
- Access to psychiatric care
- Intention to involve private practitioners
- Ex parte

Discussion about future directions

Connections with SJ and UAS

Matthew mentions that he's had an idea to address the ongoing concern of attracting and retaining qualified staff to Sitka – David Dobler at SJ has been open and interested in addressing emerging needs in community. Perhaps, if this group wanted to focus on that, AOC could hold a round table with SJ and UAS about looking into the future to attract staff through their programs and housing availability. Agencies have had more difficulty hiring at the salary levels they offer because the cost of living is so high. But there may be possibilities of other partnerships, where housing is provided to residential program managers, students work for an agency in conjunction with a master's degree program, etc. The committee agrees that this would be a helpful direction to move, and Matthew offers to talk with Felix (affordable housing coordinator) and Dr. Dobler.

Foster Care, Respite Care, Resource Families

While looking at the lists of needs/gaps, the committee put their attention on the topics of foster care, respite care, emergency beds, temporary housing for MEHS students, and potential involvement of OCS. The group is interested in talking with OCS about working together toward better foster care in Sitka, and how AOC could support efforts to move in that direction. Respite care was mentioned as a related issue – that there are frequently kids in crisis who don't need hospitalization but do need a place to stay, potentially with resources and support available to them there. There was some discussion about a housing proposal YAS might be working on that could address these concerns; Erin and Christine

weren't completely sure where that proposal is at, but they believe it is *not* progressing at this time.

Matthew reports that he has had conversations with people at the State recently, and his impression is that the State doesn't want to fund stand-alone facilities anymore. They're looking to have a network of resource families that can provide some respite, and possibly therapeutic services for kids with a continuum of needs. There's another system in Ketch getting attention – their model is to hire families as resource families that provide ancillary services. OCS sees them as model of how the state can pay agencies that then pay families to provide care.

The group decided to make this the topic of their next meeting, and invite a larger group of people to participate. The discussion could include creating a network of resource families, partnering with housing possibilities to attract young families into the network (even from outside Sitka) that provide care/services to kids in need, and how to care for both clients and the families. Matthew offered to contact both Maybelle Filler and Deborah Downs from OCS to attend the next meeting, as well as someone from YAS who can speak to their housing proposal, maybe someone from the Ketchikan program that was mentioned (or Christine may be able to speak to their program), and STA. The group spoke specifically about the absence of STA at this meeting, and expressed hope that specific meeting topics would be helpful to bringing them to the table. Committee members also agreed to call people personally to invite them to the next meeting.

Depending on the schedules of OCS representatives, this committee will try to meet again in the next couple of weeks.