

LPSCC Mental Health Subcommittee Forensic Peer Support Proposal

Overview

The Mental Health Subcommittee of the Local Public Safety Coordinating Council (LPSCC) has analyzed the complex issues involved in serving individuals with mental illness who are booked into the jail. We have identified Forensic Peer Support Specialists as a critical component missing from our system of services.

Need for Forensic Peer Specialists

Multnomah County's jails incarcerate a large number of individuals who have mental illness at various levels of severity. A Multnomah County Corrections Health survey of all 3,211 arrestees booked between August 1, 2012 and September 30, 2012 determined that 24.5% (785) had a PSYCH indicator.¹ According to U.S. Department of Justice research, nationally, 56% of State prisoners, 45% of Federal prisoners, and 64% of jail inmates were identified as having a recent history or symptoms of a mental health problem.²

Engaging individuals with a mental illness whose lives intersect with the criminal justice system (many of whom struggle with substance abuse issues and have significant medical concerns) is a challenge in our community. We believe it is critical that we improve our efforts to engage these individuals while they are in custody or otherwise involved in the criminal justice system in order to connect them to more appropriate public health services before they become a greater risk to themselves or others.

There is evidence that Peer Support Specialists in forensic settings reduce recidivism. A federally-funded pilot program in Ohio from 2008 to 2010, operated by the Center of Vocational Alternatives (COVA) in Columbus, employed a certified Forensic Peer Specialist and a Vocational Counselor to provide counseling and support for inmates in six Ohio prisons both pre- and post-release. Of the 165 participants, the pilot showed a remarkable 3% recidivism rate in contrast to the 50% recidivism rate in the general population.³

Given the complex challenges of jail-diversion efforts for individuals with mental illness, a growing number of states and local authorities are turning to Forensic Peer Specialists to help address the needs of this population.⁴ Pennsylvania has a state-wide Forensic Peer Support Specialist Program which certifies participants to provide peer support to individuals with

¹ Multnomah County Sheriff's Office, Planning & Research Unit in conjunction with Multnomah County Health Department, Corrections Health Division, 2012.

² Bureau of Justice Statistics, September, 2006.

³ The Key Assistance Report, November 8, 2011.

⁴ Center for Behavioral Health Services & Criminal Justice Research, Policy Brief, June, 2011

mental health issues who are involved in the criminal justice system. Leaders of this program suggest: “Peer support specialists have a unique ability to effectively support the individual and help them get the resources they need to navigate the criminal justice system and successfully re-enter the community. It all goes back to recovery principles: remembering that the individual is asking for what they need⁵.”

Goals of Multnomah Forensic Peer Support Specialists

With Forensic Peer Support Specialists in place on the Forensic Diversion team, we expect that the following outcomes will be achieved:

- Increased engagement of this population in treatment services;
- Decreased recidivism among this population;
- Enhanced public safety in our community; and
- Greater quality of life and recovery for individuals struggling with mental illness who intersect with public safety system.

Multnomah Forensic Peer Support Program Description

We propose that Forensic Peer Support Specialists be integrated into the Multnomah County Mental Health and Addiction Services Division Forensic Diversion team. We believe that Peer Specialists, having lived through the experience of having a mental illness, and using strengths-based and person-centered approaches, will successfully engage and support individuals in treatment that will improve outcomes.

Specifically, we propose the addition of 3.0 FTE of peer staff, to include a 1.0 Program Coordinator and 2.0 Forensic Peer Support Specialists. Upon receiving referrals from Forensic Diversion staff, the team would work with individuals both in the community and in the jails to engage them in the constellation of social services needed to address their many and complex issues.

Job responsibilities for Forensic Peer staff would include, but not be limited to:

- Connecting participants to community supports, such as behavioral health providers, housing, benefits, other assistance;
- Educating participants regarding value of various systems of care and encouraging communication with providers and other community supports;
- Helping participants overcome the dual stigmas of mental illness and involvement in the criminal justice system;
- Escorting participants to community appointments and helping participants navigate the various provider systems;
- Engaging participants through group and individual counseling; and
- Sharing their experiences in recovery and acting as a positive role model for program participants.

⁵ The Key Assistance Report, November 8, 2011.

Requirements for Forensic Peer Support Specialists would include that each be certified as a Peer Support Specialist by the State of Oregon, and that each would participate in additional training regarding the complexities of providing support to the forensic population.

Cost

We anticipate that the cost of the project would total \$165,000; inclusive of salary, benefits, administrative and indirect costs, training, and a 10% research component.

Additionally, we recognize that this proposal could impact the daily jail operations of the Multnomah County Sheriff's Office, and therefore recommend that Multnomah County DCFS and MCSO work closely to ensure that these issues are addressed by maximizing the use of less staff-intensive access points such as professional visits rather than contact visits.

We are grateful for the opportunity to present this proposal. We feel strongly that including Forensic Peer Support Specialists on the Forensic Diversion team will substantially improve our collective diversion efforts.

Respectfully submitted by:

Local Public Safety Coordinating Council
Mental Health Subcommittee