

**COMMUNITY ALLIANCE OF SARASOTA COUNTY**  
**SUBSTANCE ABUSE AND MENTAL HEALTH STAKEHOLDERS'**  
**CONSORTIUM**

**October 11, 2004**

Members Present:

Bill Little, Chair	Don Ottinger
Ken Alexander	Lisa Phillips
Sgt. Deborah Bowman	Mark Porter
Tim Dutton	Debbie Spellman
Cathy Emmett	Stewart Stearns
Phil Gorelick	Jerry Thompson
Sally Graham	Davis Tornabene (for Elliott
Kathryn Shea (for Peter Howard)	Metcalfe)
Dale Lux	

Others Present:

Judge Robert Bennett, Jr.	Susan Nunnally
Catherine Clouse	Bob Piper
Kevin Gooding	Rev. Skip Ritter
Debbie Horst	

Staff Present:

Jamie Mahadeo	Pauline Tracy
Chip Taylor	James Schulz

**Criminal Justice Commission – Creating Systems Linkages**

Bill Little introduced Judge Bob Bennett, who described some of the issues that will be addressed by the newly formed Criminal Justice Commission that he chairs. He discussed the work being conducted by the County's consultant, David Bennett who was engaged to review and make recommendations for improvement of criminal justice processes in Sarasota County.

As a result of this study, the Board of County Commissioners approved an expansion of the existing Pre-trial Services Program to a 24/7 operation that assists in diverting individuals charged with misdemeanors from formal criminal justice processes. The program now has office space in the jail to improve response time, as well as an office at the R. L. Anderson building to serve residents who live in the southern part of the county.

Judge Bennett's presentation addressed the issue of individuals with mental health and/or substance abuse issues who are released into the community without receiving appropriate treatment. The Commission feels that there should be programs offered in the community that have the ability and capacity to deal directly with such issues.

Judge Bennett highlighted a glitch in the state statutes that will only allow a judge to refer someone to the Department of Children and Families if they are charged with a felony. Increasing numbers of misdemeanants are being sent back into the community without treatment because of this mandate. The Judge estimated that he sees from two to twelve individuals per day that fit in this category. He also referenced the fact that a number of Baker Act and Marchman Act misdemeanants are currently languishing in jail rather than receiving appropriate treatment. These individuals will most likely be re-arrested, shortly after their release, starting the cycle over again.

The questions Judge Bennett posed are: Are there programs in the community able to deal with the problems presented by these individuals? Do these programs have the capacity necessary to deal with the volume of offenders to be diverted from the criminal justice system? These questions will be tackled by the Criminal Justice Commission with the help of community organizations.

In response, Bill Little established a Substance Abuse and Mental Health Stakeholders' Consortium/Criminal Justice Commission Sub-committee with the following members:

Christine Cauffield-Coastal Behavioral Healthcare  
Debbie Spellman-Department of Children and Families  
Dave Beesley-First Step of Sarasota  
Tobey Hockett-Public Defender's Office  
Debbie Horst-Sarasota County Housing and Community Development  
Ken Alexander-Sarasota Memorial Hospital  
Major Kevin Gooding-Sarasota County Sheriff's Office  
Don Ottinger-community representative

It was suggested that this subcommittee should look at best practices from other counties to see how they have addressed these issues before creating a new process. The potential for a regional approach to this issue was also discussed.

### **Approval of Mission/Vision Statements**

The following mission statement was approved unanimously:

*Develop and implement a strategic plan for the community which will improve and enhance the delivery of substance abuse and mental health services for citizens of Sarasota County.*

The following vision statement was approved unanimously:

*Sarasota County is a community where:*

- *State-of-the-art mental health and substance abuse services are provided to consumers in an integrated system that helps assure efficient use of resources and optimal outcomes for those consumers.*
- *Funders, providers and consumers work collaboratively to address the needs of the community.*

### **Review of Mental Health Legislative Proposals**

Chip Taylor presented two legislative proposals which were approved by the Community Alliance's Legislative Advocacy Committee and will be presented to the Executive Committee on October 13. The two proposals are:

- Developing an Integrated System of Care for Children and their Families with Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder
- Establishment of a Mobile Crisis Response Unit in Sarasota County

The Consortium voted unanimously to support these proposals when presented to the Community Alliance.

Discussion ensued regarding the problem Judge Bennett surfaced of referring misdemeanants to the Department of Children and Families for treatment. Many thought a change in this legislation should be a third recommendation. However, it was the consensus of the Consortium members that this issue be developed further before presenting it for action.

### **Coordination of Post-Disaster Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services**

One of the lessons learned during the recent hurricane recovery efforts was that there is a need for crisis intervention for up to a year after a disaster for those directly impacted and for the staff who assisted during the recovery efforts. Mental health and substance abuse specialists report that they have seen problems just begin to surface for some. First Step of Sarasota received FEMA funding to hire more 2-person teams to provide case management, outreach and counseling to victims of the disasters. The committee discussed the need for a post-disaster mental health and substance abuse plan and the need for a committee to be formed to address this issue. Lisa Phillips, Reverend Ritter and Dave Beesley volunteered to be a part of the committee.

## **Community Mental Health Planning**

Tim Dutton, SCOPE, introduced Catherine Clouse of his office who distributed a handout outlining potential approaches the committee has for developing a community mental health plan. The Planning Subcommittee met several times to discuss a community plan and to review the DCF Regional plan. The DCF plan provides a good start and a format or template that can be used as a foundation. Kathryn Shea stated the Children's Mental Health Planning Committee was also working on a plan to address the 0 to 5 population first but will also develop a plan for the older children. Lisa Phillips stated she is working on a plan for the City of North Port which will combine data already collected from existing reports such as the SCOPE Mental Health Study. It was decided that since a lot of background work has already been done, we should proceed to plan development rather than looking at the process.

Discussion ensued regarding the need to understand that a community plan is a long-term commitment by the community to solve problems. Establishing a stable funding base for services was also discussed, but our first task will be to determine what is currently available and agree on the outcomes that need to be achieved.

The committee agreed there is a need for a part-time or full-time coordinator who will work with the Consortium and its committees to ensure the plan is developed. Discussions are currently underway with several funders to establish this position. Further information will be provided to the committee at a later date.

James Schulz announced that the next CIT class will occur November 1 through November 5.

David Bennett, who has been hired by Sarasota County to develop a Criminal Justice Plan, will provide an update to the Board of County Commissioners on October 26 at 1:30. All members of the Consortium are invited to attend this presentation.

***The next meeting of the Consortium and the Planning Subcommittee will be announced at a later date.***