



December 2008

MENTAL HEALTH ASSOCIATION OF THE NEW RIVER VALLEY, INC.

Working to make *mental health matter* in the New River Valley

Did you know?

Nearly two-thirds of all people with diagnosable mental disorders do not seek treatment. Stigma surrounding the receipt of mental health treatment is among the many barriers that discourage people from seeking treatment. Concern about stigma appears to be heightened in rural areas in relation to larger towns or cities.

-Mental Health: A Report of the Surgeon General (1999)

Persons with serious mental illnesses are four times more likely to be victims of violent crime than the general population.

-Teplin, et al, Archives of General Psychiatry (2005)

Community Healing After Tragedy: Outreach and Education

The Mental Health Association of the New River Valley (MHA) is one of several organizations that provided immediate and ongoing community support in response to the Virginia Tech Tragedy. The Mental Health Association has assisted more than 1,000 individuals through services offered under the auspices of the Center for Community Healing After Tragedy (CHAT).

CHAT, a partnership with New River Valley Community Services and the New River Valley Community Disaster Response Coalition, was created to coordinate the vast community outreach, education and clinical services that were necessary following the Tragedy. Our community healing and recovery efforts were funded by individual donations and the United Way of Montgomery, Radford

and Floyd's United in Caring Fund.



For local public safety personnel (police, fire and rescue), CHAT conducted a variety of psycho-educational presentations, solicited donations from regional business to provide public safety personnel with a free night out, coordinated "ride alongs" with mental health professionals and law enforcement officers, and held a family barbecue at Claytor Lake State Park.

For local clergy, CHAT coordinated several workshops on the grief practices of non-dominant cultures, conducted trainings to help local congregations develop their own disaster spiritual care response teams, and provided them with brochures, handouts and other resources on grief and trauma.

Local caregivers were invited to a local retreat to promote healing and wellness that was sponsored by CHAT. Additionally, several workshops were convened on the identification and proper response to grief and trauma in older adults. Finally, a tremendous amount of work was completed, through a Special Needs Workgroup, to craft an Emergency Response Plan for older adults and mobility restricted individuals.

Pro Bono Counseling Program Update - Kay's Story

Kay has been a client of the Pro Bono Counseling Program since January 2008. She was referred to the program by the Department of Social Services and Community Action. She called because she was undergoing chemotherapy treatment for cancer and hoped to talk with a female counselor who had lived with the disease.

Unknown to the pro bono clinic staff, the counselor that was matched with Kay turned out to be a cancer survivor. Kay stated, "I needed someone who could assure me that I could survive." Her counselor Josie was the perfect person. "I was scared and fearful but Josie helped me face my fears."

Since she started counseling, Kay said that she has learned to "take care of herself and finally believes that she is to be respected and cared for - [that] her worth is important." Her counselor helped her to set goals and feel good about herself even under bad conditions. Kay added, "I have children at home and I knew I shouldn't burden

them with what I was feeling - just knowing that I had Josie to talk to helped me to keep it together until our next session."

Kay stated that the best part of the pro bono program is "everything - especially the cost." She knows that she could never have afforded to pay out of pocket for a private counselor. The pro bono counselors are "unsung heroes." Anyone who is thinking about getting counseling "shouldn't pass up the opportunity be-

cause of pride or fear - even after just a couple of sessions you WILL see a difference."

Kay is thankful for everyone who has continued to help her and admits that although her future is uncertain she believes that her counselor and the Pro Bono Counseling Program have given her HOPE!

Kay is one of hundreds of individuals served annually by this program that utilizes the services of local volunteer mental health professionals.

Jail Diversion Programs for Persons with Mental Illness

The interface between the mental health and criminal justice systems is characterized by the Sequential Intercept Model (SIM). The SIM outlines five "points of interception" where an intervention can occur to prevent individuals with mental illness from entering or falling deeper into the criminal justice system.



The Mental Health Association's two jail diversion programs, the Crisis Intervention Team (CIT) Program and the Bridge Program, address the first two points in this sequence. CIT is a pre-booking jail diversion program which aims to improve interactions between law en-

forcement officers and individuals with mental illness in crisis. When responding to a call of this nature, the CIT Officer's goal is to resolve the matter calmly and peacefully, linking consumers in crisis with community care when appropriate. This first intercept is the only point at which a person with mental illness can be diverted completely out of the criminal justice system and into treatment, without further criminal justice involvement.

The Bridge Program represents the next step in the SIM as it is a post-booking, pre-trial diversion program. The Bridge Program identifies individuals with mental illness or co-occurring mental illness and substance use disorders at the earliest possible time after their arrest and, with their consent and a judge's approval, provides them with an innovative system of community-based treatment and services. A partner program with CIT, the Bridge Pro-

gram's goals focus on serving clients who might otherwise languish in our jails without appropriate mental health treatment and providing community supports intended to reduce recidivism and promote public safety.

Both programs have made enormous strides over the past year. We have expanded our training and technical assistance capabilities working with localities throughout Virginia to develop and sustain their own CIT Programs. In all, the NRV-CIT training faculty have conducted eleven 40-hour trainings for patrol officers. These trainings have resulted in 118 certified NRV officers, representing all 14 NRV law enforcement agencies and 97 trained officers from other Virginia localities.

It has been an exciting time for the Bridge Program, as well. The Bridge Program opened its doors to its first client in March 2007. Since that time, we have



received 397 referrals and 64 individuals have been successfully diverted and enrolled into the program. While this may not sound like a lot, a similar program in California referred 180 candidates over a period of three YEARS and had a TOTAL enrollment of 37. In addition to some tremendous therapeutic and public safety outcomes, the program has saved the Commonwealth of Virginia, by diverting these individuals out of our two local jails, approximately \$300,000.

The Mental Health Association, in collaboration with our partners throughout the New River Valley, has taken a lead on rural jail diversion programming. As these programs highlight, we are steadfast in our efforts to decriminalize persons with serious mental illnesses and to be models for our nation.

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The Mental Health Association of the New River Valley, Inc. is a private, non-profit organization dedicated to equitable access to appropriate mental health treatment, the promotion of mental health, and the prevention of mental illness.

The Mental Health Association of the New River Valley is proud to be a partner agency of the United Way of Montgomery, Radford & Floyd. The Pro Bono Counseling Program is a member clinic of the Free Clinic Consortium of the New River Valley.



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