



MENTAL HEALTH FOCUS GROUP

2/19/04

A focus group comprised of health professionals in Los Angeles County was brought together by the LA Coalition to End Hunger & Homelessness to provide recommendations to Bring LA Home – 10 year plan to end homelessness. This report is intended to serve as recommendations which will be submitted to be considered for the draft plan.

This is the second of three (3) focus groups to be convened in February 2004. The attendees for the mental health focus group were: Jim Allen – Dept. of Mental Health, Celina Alvarez – Lamp Community, Robin Conerly – LA Homeless Services Authority, Liz Cravens – Lamp Community, Benita DeFrank – City of Pomona, Paul Gore – LA Free Clinic, Dora Leong Gallo – A Community of Friends, John Maceri – Ocean Park Community Center, Jim Preis – Mental Health Advocacy Services, Gilbert Saldade – Tri City Mental Health, Nic Stefanidis – Children’s Hospital LA, Marvin Southard – Department of Mental Health, Dorene Toutant – A Community of Friends, Bruce Turner – Northeast Valley Health Clinic/Cornerstone, Lou Anne White – Ocean Park Community Center.

The following is a summary:

Location: 520 S. Virgil, LA, CA 90020

Time: 10:00 a.m. – 12 p.m.

Date: February 19, 2004

Subject	Comments
AB 2034	<p><u>Problem:</u> When funding comes directly from the state to a provider, the provider can structure the program and integrate services according to the needs of the community. However, when the funds come through the County, there are far more restrictions and bureaucracy that leads to programs not being able to provide services that the community needs.</p> <p><u>Rec:</u> Cut bureaucratic red tape at the <i>County</i> level so providers who get the funding can provide integrated services needed by the communities they serve. .</p> <p><u>Rec:</u> More funding for AB2034 to address youth (18-24) issues such as early and periodic screening diagnosis and treatment (EPSDT).</p> <p><u>Rec:</u> Housing must be linked with care – increase funding to provide housing so the support services will be effective.</p>
Community Accountability	<p><u>Rec:</u> Cities with zoning laws prevent affordable housing and shelters from being built must be held accountable and zoning laws need to change.</p> <p><u>Rec:</u> Consolidated plans must reflect the needs of the community. In order for cities to implement what their consolidated plan states, there must be incentives to build affordable housing and have penalties for not doing what the Plan says.</p>

<i>Cultural Competency and Spirituality</i>	<u>Rec:</u> Programs need to address different cultural groups to be effective in providing services. This also translates into providing care with spirituality as an aspect as well. In order to treat the whole person, providers need to not be afraid to provide services around issues of spirituality.
<i>Dedicated Homeless Liaison</i>	<u>Rec:</u> Each large county department should have a designated staff – a homeless services liaison - to deal with homeless issues. For example: DPSS, DMH, DCFS.
<i>Federal Legislation Change and Enforcement of Existing Laws</i>	<p><u>Rec:</u> Just as there is a Freedom of Religion Act which does not allow zoning laws to prevent a religious institution from becoming a part of a community, there must be a federal law that does the same for special needs housing so communities are mandated to accept their fair share.</p> <p><u>Rec:</u> Enforce current Fair Housing Laws.</p>
<i>Foster Care Re-design</i>	<u>Rec:</u> Take an active role in the foster care re-design so that services can be integrated and current gaps are addressed and corrected.
<i>Funding</i>	<u>Rec:</u> Federal law change - SAMHSA funds need to flow to the community – through one door – not through a bureaucracy.
<i>Health Delivery System Dilemma</i>	<p><u>Problem:</u> A health delivery system problem exists in LA County because the Dept. of Mental Health only provides mental health services – however, approximately 70% have co-occurring disorders. Lack of integration of services has resulted in gaps in the entire County.</p> <p><u>Rec:</u> <i>Integrate</i> mental health and substance abuse services. Allow mental health and substance abuse to be provided in one place as a treatment option. Coordinating the services is not working anymore.</p> <p><u>Rec:</u> Promote the Institute of Co-occurring Disorders (consortium of Dept. of Mental Health, Dept. of Health Services, and Dept. Children & Family Services) – a new project intended to integrate systems. The Institute promotes competency in issues beyond mental health services.</p>
<i>Housing First</i>	<p><u>Rec:</u> Pursue housing first model in LA by having more flexible funding guidelines to create more housing.</p> <p><u>Rec:</u> Create more affordable permanent housing.</p>
<i>Information Management System</i>	<u>Rec:</u> Implement an information management system so there is dialogue between systems and providers. This will streamline service delivery to the client because the necessary information on past treatment, application to the Social Security Administration, etc. will be apparent. Many times service providers are unaware of past treatment and benefits application until a much later date, prolonging the absence of benefits.
<i>Integration of Services and Funding</i>	<u>Rec:</u> Integrate systems of care and funding so the services are truly integrated and funding does not dictate how services are provided.

<i>Money Management</i>	<p><u>Rec:</u> Limited money management will engage more people – “Rent First”. For example: rent and utilities are paid every month by the payee and the rest of the money is used however the client chooses. This way the person remains housed and will make the choice to use the remainder of their money how they choose. Private, for profit as well as non-profit companies are currently doing this type of money management.</p>
<i>New Models</i>	<p><u>Rec:</u> Co-Occurring Disorders Institute- Combination of crisis intervention with detox services. This will keep people out of the emergency rooms who have little or no need for medical services – they just need crisis intervention for mental health issues and/or detox services. It is a drop-in center with a “home like setting”, 24/7, medical treatment if needed, food available, looks like a day treatment facility – moving away from the medical model. These centers should be spread out through LA County – at least 16 centers.</p>
<i>NIMBY and Zoning</i>	<p><u>Problem:</u> Cities must be accountable for their residents with special needs therefore; NIMBY must be addressed by updating zoning laws to allow buildings, shelters, apartments, etc. to be built so there is enough housing.</p> <p><u>Rec:</u> Update zoning laws to counter NIMBY.</p>
<i>Outreach</i>	<p><u>Rec:</u> “Service First” refers to increase in outreach teams across the County and not just police first to deal with homeless encampments, individuals and people in their cars. This needs to be collaboration between law enforcement, service providers, fire department, County departments, etc.</p> <p><u>Rec:</u> Outreach teams need to be trained and supported with connections to the community so they know where to be able to send people who need help.</p>
<i>Paradigm Shift</i>	<p><u>Rec:</u> The idea that there is an “all or nothing” system will continue to lead to gaps in service. Programs and funding streams need to look beyond what exists now and promote different models that will serve different populations. Such as, harm reduction models, safe havens, permanent housing, permanent supportive housing, etc. and adjust funding to be more flexible to co-occurring disorders.</p>
<i>Police Code Expansion</i>	<p><u>Rec:</u> Create a subset of 5150 police code for individuals who need to be taken to a detox or crisis intervention facility – such as the proposed centers created by the Co-Occurring Disorders Institute. This will alleviate pressure in emergency rooms so the beds will be freed up to treat other emergencies.</p>
<i>Replicate Models that Work</i>	<p><u>Rec:</u> Replicate collaborative models with high degree of integration of services. For example, the Skid Row Collaborative with Lamp, Skid Row Housing Trust, etc.</p> <p><u>Rec:</u> Fund prevention programs that work with families so they can take part in parenting classes, further their education, etc.– a similar program in Texas has shown success.</p>
<i>SSI Change</i>	<p><u>Problem:</u> Currently artificial barriers exist that prevent people from getting the benefits they need based on “primary” or “secondary” disorders. We cannot continue to give priority to types of disorders because funding dictates this – the entire person needs to be treated –</p> <p><u>Rec:</u> Change federal law to remove the artificial barriers so there is an increase in the number of people who can receive SSI.</p> <p><u>Rec:</u> There needs to be clear, step by step information on how to apply for SSI. DPSS</p>

	needs to have an “SSI Academy” to prevent premature application of people on GR which often leads to denial of benefits. GR recipients need to be encouraged to hook up to services prior to application of SSI.
<i>Training</i>	<p><u>Rec:</u> Training to increase expertise in mental health and substance abuse is crucial in an integration model that helps keep people housed. In addition to front line case management staff, <i>peer advocates, property managers, and custodial/janitorial staff need to be trained on the issues to be fully integrated.</i> Property managers hold the key to an individual staying housed or being evicted, therefore they need to be trained in the cyclical nature of mental illness and substance abuse.</p> <p><u>Rec:</u> Large systems within the County must have better communication between each other particularly, concerning new policies that affect people trying to access services and benefits. Better training of county employees to increase their knowledge of new and existing programs so they can be effective in serving the population.</p> <p><u>Rec:</u> More training for LAPD/Sheriffs around homeless issues. Input to LAPD for consent decree.</p>
<i>Transportation</i>	<u>Rec:</u> Transportation resources need to be expanded throughout the County. Subsidies, vans, etc must be made available to everyone and not just seniors and people with disabilities.
<i>Youth Discharge Planning</i>	<u>Rec:</u> Youth coming out of juv. Justice must be hooked up with mental health services.