



The Bell

MHA AND AURORA FAMILY SERVICES PILOT NEW VISITING THERAPIST PROGRAM



Mental Health America of Wisconsin (MHA) and Aurora Family Services (AFS) are piloting a new visiting therapist program for MHA’s Invisible Children’s Program (ICP). AFS’s collaboration with MHA will add significant value since ICP families typically do not have an identified therapist when they come into the program – or if they do, any therapy they may receive is most likely individual therapy, rather than working with the entire family unit.

The AFS Visiting Therapist, Jill Marie Wilson, a Marriage & Family Therapist with AFS, will work directly with families participating in the ICP with an emphasis on family reunification – keeping families together and avoiding placing kids in the foster care system whenever possible. Ms. Wilson will also work on preventing child abuse and neglect in families where a mental illness is present by focusing on child health and well-being. Most recently, Ms. Wilson has been working as a psychotherapist at AFS. Prior to that position, she worked for AFS as a Sexual Assault Nurse Examiner Manager, and at Aurora Medical Center as the Geriatric Services Manager.

Shockingly, only 38% of families in the Bureau of Milwaukee County Child Welfare indicate acceptable levels of permanency and stability. The most recent CQI Service Review Report conducted by the Bureau of Milwaukee County and Child Welfare states that stability, permanency, and family engagement are severely lagging indicators that are of significant concern for Bureau and Child Welfare System. 32% of children are at some level of behavioral risk to themselves and 42% are a behavioral risk to others.

“Together, MHA and AFS want to see these results change. Our goal is to strengthen and build systems for connection, communication and support within the family to reduce isolation, augment opportunities for positive parent and child interaction, and increase awareness of the effects of mental illness of the family,” said Kristina Finnel, Director of Programs for MHA of Wisconsin.

This new program also wants to address the mental health concerns of youth within the context of their family; enhance the quality of life by improving their emotional and behavioral functioning at home, school and other areas of life; and finally, to increase the capacity of the provider network to effectively work with youth as part of a family system.

The AFS Visiting Therapist will be on-site at MHA working 20 hours per week responding to children and families in real-time to assess each family’s needs and subsequently provide direct mental health counseling, support and advocacy services to support healthy living.

“Having an on-site, real-time therapist working with the ICP is so important to the well-being of our families. This is something our team has wanted to do for quite some time,” said Finnel. “Ms. Wilson will be able to offer personal, family therapy in a non-threatening environment where they already have existing relationships and they feel safe and engaged.”

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CUTS TO MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES COULD HAVE BEEN WORSE, BUT STILL ARE IN JEOPARDY

Mental health services experienced few direct cuts in state funding during this year's state budget deliberations. However, cuts in state revenue to counties could result in reductions in mental health services as counties work on their budgets for 2010.

The good news is that the Legislature expanded mental health benefits under Medicaid by adding a new psychosocial rehabilitation benefit using county funds to draw down federal revenue. The Legislature also added a new benefit for Screening, Brief Intervention, Referral and Treatment for substance abuse in primary care settings. And a variety of measures will improve treatment of offenders with mental illnesses who are incarcerated in Wisconsin prisons and will facilitate reintegration of these individuals into the community.

However, one of the big hits counties will take is a new requirement that they

pay the state share (about 40%) of the cost of youth and older adults who are admitted under Medicaid to the state Mental Health Institutes (counties are already required to pay the full cost for adults age 22-64). While creating a disincentive for use of the Institutes has some value, the lack of hospital beds in the community, as well as the limited community-based services for youth with emotional disturbances will place the counties at considerable risk. MHA and other advocacy groups will be encouraging counties to develop community-based options for youth, such as wraparound programs, to reduce the need for inpatient stays.

There were also direct reductions in state aids to counties through youth aids and shared revenues. Each county will weight these cuts as part of their larger budget deliberations. Mental health advocates will need to be active at the county level to ensure that counties

make smart changes in response to these cuts (like creating new alternatives rather than just cutting budgets).

Two other pieces of legislation were included in the budget bill that should enhance access to services. First, social workers and related master's level professionals will now be allowed to be independently reimbursed by Medicaid and private providers. This should allow more of these individuals to participate as providers. Secondly, the Legislature added a new mandate to private insurance for coverage of autism treatment.

For more details and any new advocacy materials that may be produced go to: www.mhawisconsin.org/Content/current_bills.asp.

MHA'S SHEL GROSS TO SERVE ON NEW REGIONAL POLICY COUNCIL

Mental Health America's national office recently announced that Shel Gross, Director of Public Policy for Mental Health America of Wisconsin, is one of 10 policy leaders from around the country selected to serve on a new Regional Policy Council designed to strengthen its state advocacy work.

Gross will work with MHA's Advocacy and State Policy Department and Mental Health America's Board and Public Policy Committee to strengthen

relationships with and between affiliates, and communicate with the national office and affiliates regarding policy priorities, advocacy activities, and technical assistance and training needs.

"Shel Gross's policy experience and knowledge will be an incredible asset to the work of the Council," said David Shern, President and CEO of Mental Health America's national office. "We know that our strength as an organization is in the wonderful work our affiliates

are doing around the country, and we hope the Regional Policy Council will be a vehicle for sharing and promising programs, policies and strategies being utilized to bring about positive change."

Gross joined MHA in 2000 as the Director of Public Policy, working out of our Madison office near the state capitol. He will be the representative for Region 5 which encompasses WI, IL, IN, MI, OH and MN.

MHA CONTINUES STRONG FOCUS ON SUICIDE PREVENTION

Since the release of the Wisconsin Suicide Prevention Strategy in 2002, a lot of people and groups have done an incredible amount of work to increase suicide prevention activities in Wisconsin. There are many local coalitions leading community efforts, individual schools implementing suicide prevention programs, training events, resources and a statewide coalition—the Suicide Prevention Initiative or SPI. Through its role as administrator of both a state and federal grant focusing on youth suicide prevention, MHA has been at the forefront of these efforts.

In April of this year, MHA, along with many partners from the SPI, including HOPES (Helping Others Prevent and Educate about Suicide) and the state Depts. of Health Services and Public Instruction, conducted a two-day summit titled *Piecing Together an Infrastructure for Suicide Prevention*. According to Shel Gross, MHA's Director of Public Policy, "over the past five years Wisconsin has developed a lot of confidence in our ability to develop and support local coalitions and identify key resources to support these efforts.

In the United States, it is estimated that someone dies by suicide every 16 minutes and that someone makes a suicide attempt every minute.

The goal of the summit was to identify how best to take what we have learned and use it to create a comprehensive approach to suicide prevention in Wisconsin." The summit helped Wisconsin form priority areas for suicide prevention including enhanced state and local leadership, increased public awareness; enhancing networking across state departments and coalitions; and increasing access to services with the ultimate goal remaining the reduction of suicides in Wisconsin.

Recognizing the 20% of all suicides are by veterans, MHA was also a sponsor of the *Wisconsin Warrior Summit* in October, a conference for mental health professionals, veterans and their families. The summit is part of the Wisconsin Warrior Project, a collaborative effort

designed to engage veterans groups and community organizations in learning about mental health and other issues facing veterans and their families and providing direction in continuing to disseminate this information to the larger community.

Suicide is the second leading cause of death among Wisconsin youth age 10-24 and the fourth leading cause of death among people age 25-64.

"The summit was an initial step in an overall effort to help veterans and their families as they return from war. Our goal is to keep veterans connected and help them make the transition from war to peace both mentally and emotionally," said Steve Simon, President & CEO for MHA.

The event was co-sponsored by the Milwaukee Mental Health Task Force, Dryhootch —a peer support group for veterans, NAMI, Disability Rights Wisconsin, Easter Seals Disability Services and the Veterans Administration.

MHA STAFF AND VOLUNTEER ANNOUNCEMENTS

Mental Health America of Wisconsin (MHA) would like to announce some staff changes and welcome some new additions to the MHA team.

Beth Lappen, formerly a Family Advocate for MHA's Invisible Children's Program, has accepted the position of Program Manager for the Strong Families Healthy Homes Program. In her new position, Beth will oversee both the Invisible Children's Program and the Specialized Family Resource Center. Beth has a variety of experience in the mental health field, a great work ethic, natural leadership skills and a passion for her work. She graduated from the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee with an M.A. in Social Work.

Jill Marie Wilson, a Marriage & Family Therapist with Aurora Family Services (AFS), will be working as a visiting therapist in MHA's the Invisible Children's Program. This is part of a new pilot project between MHA and AFS with the goal of strengthening program quality and having a vital resource available for families. The goal is to increase family stability, permanency, emotional behavioral functioning and family engagement. Most recently, Ms. Wilson has been working as a psychotherapist at AFS. Prior to that position, she worked for AFS as a Sexual Assault Nurse Examiner Manager, and at Aurora Medical Center as the Geriatric Services Manager.

Michelle Doneis has joined MHA as an Intern. Ms. Doneis, will be working alongside the Family Advocates for MHA's Invisible Children's Program.

She will have direct contact with the families and will be transitioning into more independent work with the clients such as home visits. She graduated from Cardinal Stritch University in Milwaukee with a Bachelor of Science degree in Human Services Management.

Dawn Johanneck and **Sarah Brunner** have both joined MHA as Interns. Ms. Johanneck and Ms. Brunner will be working with clients in MHA's Invisible Children's Program by assisting them with every-day tasks and skill building such as grocery shopping, school meetings or household duties. They are both bachelor students at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee.

All Interns will be working in MHA's Specialized Family Resource Center conducting or leading support groups for clients and their families.

2010-2011 MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLNESS RESOURCE GUIDE NOW AVAILABLE

Mental Health America of Wisconsin's (MHA) 2010-2011 Mental Health and Wellness Resource Guide for Milwaukee County is now available! The guide is offered in a print version, as well as a downloadable, online version from our web site.

The guide contains a listing of community mental health services; support and crisis lines; advocacy services; youth and

family resources; a new Spanish-speaking resources section; and more. The guide is a valuable resource for schools; law enforcement agencies; health care providers; community organizations; and individuals.

For a copy of the guide, contact us at 414-276-3122, or visit our web site at www.mhawisconsin.org.

Visit MHA's web site at www.mhawisconsin.org

GO GREEN! START GETTING THE BELL VIA EMAIL

we officially offered the newsletter in an online version. Because we received such a great response and had many members sign up for the online version on our web site, we've decided to scale back the print versions of our newsletters for 2010. In 2010, we will have two print versions of *The Bell* (also available online to those who already signed up for that option) and two versions that will only be available as an e-newsletter. Beginning in 2011, we will only be offering an online version of *The Bell*.

MHA will continue to publish *The Bell* on a quarterly basis, but like many organizations, we are moving towards more electronic methods of communication. So don't miss any Mental Health America news-subscribe to receive the e-version of *The Bell* on our web site at www.mhawisconsin.org.

FOR THE LATEST INFORMATION ABOUT MHA PLEASE VISIT OUR WEB SITE AT WWW.MHAWISCONSIN.ORG

The Bell

The Bell is a quarterly publication that provides resources and information related to mental health issues. *The Bell* furthers our mission to promote mental health, prevent mental disorders, and achieve victory over mental illness through advocacy, education, information and support.

Comments and suggestions are always welcome. Contact Danielle Lennie at Mental Health America of Wisconsin (MHA) at (414) 276-3122.

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For more information on mental health issues, visit our web site at www.mhawisconsin.org



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