news from the

Department of Community and Human Services

October 2013 Volume 15, Issue 3

Boards & Commissions

The following boards and commissions provide oversight and guidance to programs of the Department:

Alexandria Community Policy Management Team

Alexandria Community Services Board

Children, Youth & Families Collaborative Commission

Commission on Aging

Commission on Employment

Commission for Women

Economic Opportunities Commission

Social Services Advisory Board

Workforce Investment Board

A Caring Community Promoting Respect, Recovery, Hope

Lectures Offer Mental Health Through Life Stages

Fifty years after the United States took the dramatic step of closing ineffective state mental health institutions and sending patients back to their communities to be treated at local mental health centers, not all communities are prepared to help the people needing treatment.

As Dr. Michael Gilmore, Executive Director of the Community Services Board, pointed out in the "Community Conversation," the first in a series of mental health presentations and discussions held at the Beatly Library in October marking the 50th anniversary of the Community Mental Health Act, many services are still unavailable to people with serious mental illness and often their condition results in incarceration or homelessness.

The career of Gilmore, also the Director of the Department of Community and Human Services, paralleled the transition from institutions to community services. Over the years, he came to realize how prevalent mental illness is in our society.

He decried the lack of funding for mental health care, the political currents that often determine how and where treatment is delivered, and the oft-used standard "are we getting the outcomes for the cost?" Gilmore encouraged the audience to find ways to make Alexandria a more supportive city for residents with mental health conditions.

Other presentations by DCHS staff explored mental health at various stages in life. "Teaching Pre-School Children Confidence and Resilience;" "Youth Mental Illness and Risky Behavior;" "Addressing Mental Health in the Workplace," and "Helping Older Adults Stay Mentally Strong and Resilient."

Connie Juntunen, Director of Community Support Services, spoke to the business community about Mental Health First Aid (pg. 4). Parents, with children in tow, ***(right)*** attended preschool therapist Gidget Fields' workshop/play group on providing support, encouragement and guidance to enable children to develop emotionally. (See The Difference that Makes a Difference, pg. 4.)

Tricia Bassing, Chief of Child Behavioral Health and Youth Development, offered advice for helping youth develop coping skills to navigate the challenging years from adolescence to adulthood. "It's never too early and never too late to have conversations about mental health and risky behaviors," Bassing instructed.

To build good youth mental health and prevent risky behaviors, adults can do the following with the young people in their lives:

- Provide them with hope for a future.
- Teach them skills.
- Get other adults involved in their lives (mentors, professional help when needed).
- Give them a voice.
- Provide them with opportunities to give back and be involved in positive activities.

Finally, psychologist Russell Hunter offered suggestions for older adults to stay healthy and mentally sound. Healthy diet, exercise, social interaction and mentally stimulating activities promote healthy aging. To maintain resilience, he encouraged people to:

- Let go of past regrets and guilt.
- Focus on today. Do something you enjoy.
- Sleep well for better mood, concentration and memory.
- See doctors regularly and seek mental health care when needed.

And, most important, for cognitive health, focus on what you are doing in the moment. Don't multi-task.

Recovery Month Celebrated: Stories of Courage and Determination

On September 25, community partners in Northern Virginia came together at the Lee Center in Alexandria to celebrate Recovery Month by showcasing people in recovery and local talents. The recovery month event also addressed reducing stigma and educating the public.

The Substance Abuse Prevention Coalition of Alexandria (SAPCA), Alexandria's Mental Health HOPE Campaign, Friends of the Alexandria Mental Health Center, the Alexandria Department of Community and Human Services and Virginia's Substance Abuse Addiction Recovery Alliance sponsored the celebration. Dr. Michael Gilmore, Director of the Department of Community and Human Services welcomed attendees and kicked off the festivities. Senator George Barker, the keynote speaker, talked about making health care accessible for Virginia families and the need to expand Medicaid.

The audience of over 150 youth and adults heard from speakers in recovery who described their battle with alcohol and drug addiction, and the many different ways they entered recovery. Those in recovery celebrated with family and friends as they enjoyed barbecue, festivities, and live music.

Allen Lomax, above right, Chair of the Partnership for a Healthier Alexandria and the Substance Abuse Prevention Coalition of Alexandria, shares a laugh with (from left) Shelly Morgan, SAPCA vice-chair; Lisette Torres, coordinator of the Alexandria Campaign on Adolescent Pregnancy and Noraine Buttar , SAPCA coordinator. At right, Svandis Geirsdottir, residential detox counselor, hangs a leaf on the hope tree.

Keeping At-Risk Children in Community, Saving Millions of Dollars

In 2008, the Alexandria Community Policy and Management Team (ACPMT) created changes to better meet the mental health needs of Alexandria's children and contain costs. The team developed a family-centered policy and focused resources on preparing staff to deliver flexible, individualized services to develop a collaborative, merged system of high quality care.

The changes support the ongoing goals of bringing Alexandria's children home from residential treatment facilities; preventing children from leaving the community; strengthening existing and developing new community resources; and maintaining services within the budgeted allocation.

During fiscal year 2013, a 55 percent discharge rate from congregate care was achieved. Residential and group home placements were used for shorter periods and focused on assessment and diagnosis to support community-based care. Additionally, the Youth Review Team, comprised of clinical supervisory staff, guided placement decisions for high-risk children and families. The Community Wraparound Team provided needs assessments, wraparound services and intensive care coordination for high-risk children and families. The revised Family Assessment Planning Team (FAPT) process continued to review, recommend and monitor the most effective services for children and families.

Collaborative regional planning for a crisis stabilization program resulted in the Northern Virginia region receiving a state grant and policy and management team members worked with Best Practice Court Officers, Guardians ad litem and judges on expanding ways of keeping children in the community and transitioning children back into the community.

Additionally, Child Welfare staff worked to divert children from foster care through a variety of family strengthening initiatives while carefully ensuring safety. The result was a steady decline of children in foster care from 215 children in care at the end of FY 06 to an all-time low of 83 children in FY13 (61% reduction).

Over the past five years Alexandria has proven that its strategies are effective and it is viewed as a leader in the Commonwealth. Alexandria has saved 2.5 million dollars in five years (FY08 to FY13). Prior to FY 08, expenditures increased each year, often exceeding the budget and requiring supplemental funding.

New Lease on Life Initiative Recognized by General Assembly

A New Lease on Life, an innovative, collaborative effort among the Alexandria Community Services Board, the Arlington Community Services Board (CSB), and Alexandria Neighborhood Health Services, Inc., was recognized by the General Assembly with a resolution expressing admiration for the organizations' commitment to serving those in need.

Since its inception in 2010, A New Lease on Life has significantly improved the health of uninsured persons with serious mental illness (SMI) by co-locating primary care services onsite at mental health centers. The Arlington and Alexandria CSBs estimate that approximately 62 percent of clients with SMI have untreated, chronic diseases, such as high blood pressure, diabetes, and chronic lung disease, that are often caused by the very medicines that control the symptoms of mental illness and can result in a life span shortened by as much as 25 years.

But, for all the challenges to patients and health care providers, Alexandria reported that 64 percent of patients with hypertension reached blood pressure reading goals after six months of care, while 53 percent of those with diabetes reached HGBA1c goals.

From left: Mike Gilmore, DCHS Director and Alexandria CSB Executive Director , Masharia Holman, Alexandria CSB Chair, Delegate Rob Krupicka, State Senator Barbara Favola.

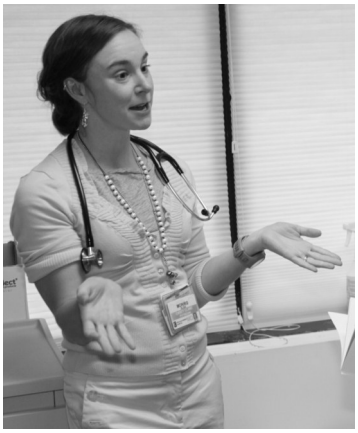
The resolution recognizes the executive directors of the CSBs and Alexandria Neighborhood Health Services for providing outstanding leadership to the New Lease on Life.

Also commended were Drs. Elizabeth Giese and Elise Morris and their staffs for the skilled, compassionate, and professional care given to their patients, resulting in enhanced doctor-patient relationships and improved health care for a traditionally underserved population.

Therapist, Doctor Give City Man New Lease on Life

Mr. F, an Alexandria resident who is receiving treatment for schizophrenia through the City's mental health services, routinely meets with his psychiatrist, but he had not seen a physician in years. Recently, therapist Dana Woolfolk, encouraged Mr. F to see Dr. Elise Morris, a physician with the New Lease on Life initiative who provides primary care two days a week at the mental health center. A routine blood test revealed that Mr. F was anemic, which prompted Dr. Morris to request a colonoscopy.

The client scheduled the procedure, but didn't go. When Woolfolk found out, he asked Mr. F for permission to re-schedule the appointment. However, the day before the next appointment, three months later, Mr. F. called Woolfolk to request that he reschedule the appointment again because Mr. F. forgot his instructions and took the blood thinner that he had been told to discontinue five days before the procedure. Woolfolk again contacted the gastroenterologist's office and scheduled an appointment. This time, he called Mr. F two weeks in advance and again six days in advance. When Mr. F couldn't be reached, Woolfolk went to his home to remind him not to take his blood thinner. Then Woolfolk called him again one day before the procedure and reviewed the instructions for prepping. The day of, Woolfolk drove him to the hospital and helped him register. He waited with him then remained in the waiting room until Mr. F was in recovery.



ANLOL physician Elise Morris.

The test revealed a cancerous mass. When Dr. Morris was informed, she immediately referred Mr. F to an oncologist. Mr. F was admitted for surgery the next day.

The tumor was removed and Mr. F is recuperating. Had Dr. Morris not been suspicious about the anemia and had Woolfolk not been persistent in getting Mr. F to have the colonoscopy, Mr. F may have learned of the tumor too late to save his life.

Join us for the 20th Annual Walk to Fight Breast Cancer on Saturday, October 26, at 8 a.m. Walkers can choose from a 1.5K/3.5K/5K walk or run, and the Walk route is accessible to wheelchairs and strollers. The Walk will begin and end at the Patent and Trademark Office, located at 600 Dulany Street in Alexandria. Registration and details at www.alexcancerwalk.com.

The Walk TO FIGHT BREAST CANCER

Department of Community & Human Services
2525 Mount Vernon Avenue
Alexandria, VA 22314

MHFA Classes Filling Quickly

In response to public demand, sessions of the Mental Health First Aid training are being offered, and people are enrolling for 2014 classes.

The training demonstrates the initial help given to a person showing signs of mental illness or a mental health crisis. The eight-hour course teaches risk factors, warning signs and symptoms of mental health and substance use disorders; the effects of the illnesses and an overview of treatments; and a five-step action plan for helping someone with symptoms. Each session is two four-hour classes. Youth courses are available for adults responding to a youth in crisis.

Visit alexandriava.gov/DCHS for class dates and registration. Attendees of the full eight-hour course will receive a three-year certification in MHFA. To learn more about MHFA, visit mentalhealthfirstaid.org.

The Difference That Makes a Difference

Continued from page 1.

Thirty years of research have shown that children who have a secure attachment with at least one adult caregiver:

- Enjoy more happiness with parents
- Turn to parents for help when in trouble
- Are more independent and self-starting
- Have a built-in ability to sooth themselves
- Are able to solve problems with friends
- Know that most problems will have an answer
- Trust that good things will come
- Trust the people they love
- Know how to be kind to others
- Have healthy relationships
- Feel less anger
- Are more cooperative
- Have higher self-esteem

To make comments or suggestions for story ideas, or to receive this newsletter by email, contact Jennifer Cohen at 703.746.3484 or jennifer.cohen@alexandriava.gov.

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