

Times-Standard

Mental health service providers, consumers share insight in MHSA forum

Donna Tam/The Times-Standard

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In 2003, Eureka resident Nancy "Lady Hawk" Harrison found herself in the middle of a nervous breakdown after experiencing insomnia and succumbing to the stress of running her own restaurant.

For the years that followed, Harrison, said she's had to battle depression and institutionalization, and she overcame a psychotic breakdown two years ago.

Harrison said she wouldn't have been able to do it without the support of the county's Comprehensive Community Treatment (CCT) program, which provides individualized community-based and peer support, and the Hope Center, a supportive space for people with mental illness.

"It totally changed my life," she said at a community forum on mental health services last week. "I lost my whole family when I got sick, and now my people at the hope center and at the CCT program, they're my family now."

Mental health service consumers like Harrison were able to talk about their experience at a forum hosted by the state's Mental Health Services Oversight and Accountability Commission's Client and Family Leadership Committee (CFLC).

The committee was gathering input from the community to gage the implementation of services through the Mental Health Services Act (MHSA) in Humboldt County. This is the third community forum the committee has ever held, and more are scheduled throughout the state.

The MHSA -- also known as Proposition 63, which was passed by voters in 2004 -- takes a

1 percent tax from the personal income of millionaires to fund a range of prevention, early intervention and other service needs.

In Humboldt County, the act has funded several programs including CCT, the Hope Center and peer support specialists.

The committee's Commissioner Chair Eduardo Vega said the MSHA is a stakeholder-driven process.

"It's been a very innovative program in the sense that across the state, every county and community were required to pull together," he said.

Vega said Thursday's forum was very informative, and he was encouraged by the turnout.

Many consumers spoke up about their stories and how case workers, support staff and volunteers have helped them avoid hospitalization and move forward with their lives. Several family members talked about how services are now recognizing the inclusion and support of family members.

"What was really good to hear was the collaboration between county service and family members and consumer advocates and how people felt there was a real connection to open process," Vega said after

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the meeting.

He said some of the more innovative programs presented by the county included those focusing on transitional age youth, efforts to lessen stigma and discrimination, and involvement with law enforcement.

Department of Health and Human Services Director Phil Crandall said he was encouraged to see consumers responding positively to the county's programs.

"I was impressed how well the consumers were able to represent their perspectives and their stories about how the Mental Health Services Act has made significant and qualitative difference in their lives," Crandall said after the meeting. "I certainly saw that they were empowered and I saw a lot of hope for recovery in their stories."

With the state cutting funding for mental health services every year, the county relies on MHSA funds to help with prevention and early intervention programs. The county has been working on integrated programs that help families learn health and wellness practices, so children can benefit early on.

Crandall said the situation with state funding seems to be getting worse.

"Mental health services have been subject to the evisceration of core services over the past few years and certainly that hasn't lessened in this year's budget," he said. "And the county is faced with less resources and certainly continued high need, and so in Humboldt, and other counties I'm sure, our approach has been to work very carefully to use every dollar as effectively as possible."

Marianne Pennekamp, a member of the Humboldt County Mental Health Board, said the programs created and supported by MHSA have been vital to helping people overcome mental health by building partnerships with services and family members.

"It's a huge shift in the whole community in terms of hope and trust," she told the committee Thursday.

Pennekamp said the community's continuing goal is to remove stigma from people with mental illnesses.

"We really have come a long way and we have a long way to go," she said.

For more information on mental health services:

HCTAYC Main Office

134 D St., Suite 101

Eureka

476-2260

www.humboldtyouth.org/

Humboldt County Mental Health Office of Patients' Rights

Public Health Building

529 I St., Eureka

476-4948 or 268-2183

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Humboldt County DHHS, Mental Health Branch

1711 3rd St. Eureka (children, youth and family)

268-2800

720 Wood Street, Eureka (adult)

268-2945

<http://co.humboldt.ca.us/HHS/MHB/>

Hope Center

2933 H St., Eureka

441-3723

Source: Humboldt County Transitional Age Youth
Collaboration

Donna Tam can be reached at 441-0532 or
dtam@times-standard.com.

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