



COUNTY OF HUNTERDON NEW JERSEY

HUMAN SERVICES ADVISORY COUNCIL LOCAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON ALCOHOLISM & DRUG ABUSE YOUTH SERVICES COMMISSION MENTAL HEALTH BOARD



REFERENCE:

- ☐ Council
- ☐ Mental Health
- ☐ Youth
- ☐ Disability Services
- ☒ Substance Abuse
- ☐ Transportation

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Approved May 11, 2022

COUNTY ALLIANCE STEERING SUBCOMMITTEE

Wednesday, January 12, 2022 3:30 p.m.
Via Webex

MEMBERS PRESENT

C. Honthy J. Griffith
V. Miller R. Neiber
C. Montelius

STAFF

M. O'Reilly
A. DeLuca
Commissioner S. Van Doren
M. Sweeney

GUESTS

I. CONVENE: OPEN PUBLIC MEETING STATEMENT:

"This meeting is being held in accordance with the provisions of the Open Public Meetings Act, N.J.S.A. 10:4-6 – 10:4-21. Notice of this meeting has been provided in the Hunterdon County Democrat and the Courier News. A public notice announcing this meeting has also been placed in the lobbies of the Hunterdon County Department of Human Services, the first floor of the Main Street County Complex, 71 Main Street Building #1, Flemington, NJ; the first floor of the Route 12 County Complex, Building #3, 314 State Route 12, Flemington, NJ and County Clerk's Office."

C. Honthy opened the meeting of CASS at 3:30 p.m. with the reading of the Open Public Meetings Statement.

Introductions were made by committee members.

II. MINUTES:

R. Neiber made a motion and C. Honthy seconded to approve the minutes of November 10, 2021. There were no abstentions. All were in favor.

- III. PRESENTATION: EAP Michael Sweeney to present on Hunterdon County Drug Court – A. DeLuca invited M. Sweeney to begin his presentation. M. Sweeney indicated he has been with the Hunterdon County Prosecutor's Office for little over a decade and had been in law enforcement between New York and New Jersey for about 29 years. A majority of that time has been spent prosecuting narcotics type cases. He worked in New York City District Attorney's Office and in suburban offices, as well as in Hunterdon County. He had seen the prosecution side from big city to suburban areas to small rural communities such as here. He has a very good basis for speaking about what goes on in the courtroom of the communities especially in Hunterdon County; what is done with individuals who have substance use disorders. He noted R. Neiber asked to talk about was

formally known as drug court.

Drug court is an official court program that is run by the administrative offices of the courts. The name was recently changed to recovery court that had been discussed for a while. He conveyed he is seeing the new name used in the courtrooms.

M. Sweeney asked how much knowledge and understanding the committee had regarding recovery court so he may properly educate the participants. Most agreed their understanding was somewhat in-between. The progression of charges and involvement may or may not be was discussed more during the LACADA meetings. He wants to ensure everyone understood the full fundamental understanding of the term drug court. It is a court sentence. Someone is sentenced to a term of drug court. It may also be referred to as special probation. It used to be a term of five years, which was the maximum term of probation, but it had all types of special conditions. A lot of State funding that allows individuals once sentenced into this program, to receive access to treatment facilities that they would not be able to access if they were trying on their own. He explained when someone is sentenced; they plead guilty and they are sentenced; instead of a jail sentence, a prison sentence or regular probation, a judge will hand out a sentence of five years of special probation recovery court. This can be considered to be a very heightened special term of probation. There are special probation officers, one judge in each district, a special assistant prosecutor that will handle those cases, someone from the public defender's office and, special court personnel that all form a drug recovery court team. When someone gets sentenced into this program, the individual does not go see a probation officer like regular probation and only go back to court when something is not followed-through, or a bad job is being done. When someone is in recovery court, they go through different phases during those three to five years. Prior to COVID, the individual would have to appear in the courtroom every week. Pandemic aside, the individual assigned to recovery court must appear in the courtroom on a special day with all the other participants that had been sentenced into recovery court and present to the judge with the whole team present an update of the latest efforts and happenings such as meetings are being attended, working, and testing clean. It is a very integrated hands-on approach that the court just does not send the individual out and hopes they do well. They see the individuals in the program weekly for quite a long time. It is possible to advance to attending court every two weeks. It's all contingent on how well the individual is complying and recovering. It takes a long while through achieving goals throughout this process exhibiting a true commitment. It is not easy.

M. Sweeney explained when he was in Middlesex County Prosecutor's Office during the early 2000's when drug court didn't exist. He started prosecuting in the early 1990's and drug court did not exist. People were either fined, incarcerated or imposed regular probation. The criminal justice arena has come so far with managing people with substance use disorder, and it is quite amazing to see the change in what happened. What had been recognized is that sending someone to jail for 90-days, six months or a year doesn't work. That person will be re-introduced into society with the same underline problems possibly in a worse position. When they get out, the resources are not available, and the support system is no longer there. This creates the person to be right back to where they started and back in the courtroom with another charge. The court and the prosecutor's objective are to not see that person standing back in that courtroom. If that person does not return, the court system has done a great job.

When the drug court program took flight, it became quite remarkable and is done very well in tracking statistics and the rate of recidivism. It is substantially lower on the people who are sentenced into this program. The recidivism rate is much lower than if the person is incarcerated for a length of time. Not all can be sentenced to drug court. There is a lot that has to happen; there is something

called clinical eligibility, as well as legal eligibility. Generally, violent offenders are committed into the program. A clinician that works for the court, who is called a Task Evaluator, produces a very intense clinical evaluation of that individual. The Task Evaluator can state if the individual does have a substantial substance abuse problem and it is causing them to commit crimes and leading them to involve themselves in the crime under the influence of the substance use.

Somebody can apply to drug court voluntarily or there are some situations called mandatory drug court. Some people had walked into the courtroom telling the judge they would rather go to jail than participate in drug court. He had seen on several occasions people under 30 years old and never been to jail before requesting a prison sentence instead of dealing with the hassle of drug court. Legislature passed a bill and made it mandatory for certain offenders with certain backgrounds do not have the option of choice. Judges can force certain offenders into the program but cannot necessarily force compliance. Drug court does not give up on the individual. It is understood that relapse is a part of the recovery process. Someone will have to work really hard to get kicked out of drug court and if the individual does, they will get sentenced for jail time.

The team is an impressive group that are committed to the well-being of the participants; there are the probationers; the special probationers. Certainly, some of the users in the community should be given an opportunity and the legislature has recognized that it is a good program, and it works. They continue to incentivize it. Recently, according to Legislature, if an individual successfully gets through drug court, they are given a mandatory expungement of all of the crimes not just the one that the individual was sentenced into unless they were very violent or of a serious nature. Legislature said it is important to have as many individuals as possible in this program and to put them on the best foot forward. If they made it through the program, graduate and wish them well with a full expungement, they're entire criminal history is expunged. This also entices people to apply for the program. Going to jail will not offer expungement of their entire criminal history.

Often with drug-type cases, through the help of attorneys trying to convince the individual to give drug court a shot. The monies, the resources and the personnel are all there. It's a group setting with other people who are going through the same type of situation. There are successes and failures. Overall, it's a good program. In Hunterdon, Judge Borkowski is very committed and is driven to its successes. It's not something every judge is committed to, although, it has been around for about 15 years. M. Sweeney offered if anyone is interested in learning more about the various nuances of the law to please advise.

C. Honthy inquired after the program has been completed, are there any peer-to-peer counseling or networking for the individuals who had been expunged. It is hopeful that the individual will be leaving with the same coach that had originally been there and the sponsors. Graduation typically offers some outpatient treatment and not in the high intensity residential inpatient situations with detoxes. That comes earlier in the process. A lot of times that is the very expensive part of drug treatment. If an individual is at year three to five and are graduating, most of the time, the person will be going through AA meetings, outpatient treatments and some OPs on a periodic basis. There is a sponsor. There had been several success stories of people who had graduated the program.

J. Griffith asked if there is housing available from group homes or the like. M. Sweeney replied the individuals have access to halfway houses, three quarter houses and residential treatment centers. Drug court does work with the individuals in terms of housing for the average duration of six to eight months. He explained this is where the funding comes in. If someone is on regular probation, this cannot assist you or provide any funding. Personnel does not hand over a check, but they will assist with locating a bed within a drug court approved residential facility.

V. Miller inquired about statistics and demographics. The percentage of people who had completed the program and may re-offend or relapse and end up back into the program. M. Sweeney confirmed those statistics and demographics do exist and he does not have them readily available to share but can provide at another time. Drug court does not stop trying. There were several people who ran through the program more than once. A lot of time it is at a maturity level. There had been a lot of younger offenders that had not developed to a point to take control of their lives. V. Miller conveyed that if the individuals are compelled into treatment, all of the programs generally will have a dual diagnosis type of treatment approach. M. Sweeney added the criminal justice system and recovery court are both struggling to handle individuals with dual diagnoses. He is expecting to see some progress in that area within the next 10 years. Right now, the programs and the criminal justice system are still struggling. There are people who have a serious substance use disorder, however the mental health component is too complicated for the service provider to address. Clients cannot come into the program because their mental health issues are too much for the program to manage. At this point, the program isn't designed to manage both. The program does not have the clinical expertise nor the funding to address the mental health side of the dual diagnosis people. He conveyed he would be shocked that in the coming years more attention and funding will come from a State level to support because it is a tremendously underserved area that needs to be addressed. It is on the radar, but again, it will take a while to get there.

M. Sweeney offered his ongoing availability to anyone who needs further information or clarity pertaining to the Hunterdon County Drug Court. A. DeLuca along with CASS members thanked M. Sweeney for his insight and education.

IV. REPORTS:

A. County Update: M. O'Reilly announced for 2022 the Commissioner Director is Commissioner Lanza, the new Deputy Director is Commissioner Rich. Commissioner Van Doren is the liaison for Human Services, which is the same as last year.

In terms of Human Services, the new year is the re-start of the County meetings and managing remote working options with the increase of COVID reported cases.

M. O'Reilly conveyed one of the big projects Human Services is overseeing is the Point In Time count which is for people who are experiencing homelessness for this month. That information had been over to other groups to get the work done.

B. Municipal Alliance Program: A. DeLuca reported that since the last meeting CASS had in November, all of the alliances met in December and so far for 2022, Voorhees Municipal Alliance and Delaware Valley Municipal Alliance had met. Central Hunterdon will be meeting tomorrow morning, January 13, 2022 and next week, North Hunterdon will be meeting on Thursday, January 20, 2022 and South Hunterdon is scheduled to meet on Monday, January 24, 2022. Across the board, all alliances are open to new members. They want to build membership and increase their participation. Attendance at the alliance meetings has been decent. Two of the alliances are sitting without a coordinator right now and one alliance is sitting without a chairperson. A. DeLuca encouraged if anyone knows of anyone who may be interested in either one of those roles to please reach-out to her. She would be more than happy to discuss the responsibilities of each of those positions. It is very important that every alliance has a coordinator and a chairperson.

In regard to programming, all of the alliances are planning to stick to the same programs as last year. Just about every alliance has run at least one program so far with the exception of South Hunterdon; they had not begun any programming but are in the process of doing so. Central Hunterdon Municipal Alliance had already completed the majority of their programs. Del Val, North Hunterdon and Voorhees had completed at least one program each. The programming has been going well and Prevention Resources, Inc. is very happy to be back working with the students. They were working with Voorhees during December and did a program covering drunk driving; specific to the sophomore-aged students.

V. UNFINISHED BUSINESS:

- A. FY2023 County Municipal Plan Grant Process Update:** A. DeLuca stated the grant process is moving along nicely so far. Over half of the municipalities have sent back their Form 1As and Form 1Bs. She is reaching out to the municipalities who had not returned this paperwork, yet which is part of the grant process. A. DeLuca explained that apart of the grant process, CASS is required to vote on the plan in order for the next steps of the application process to take place. She further explained she is looking for a preliminary vote on the strategic plan. She provided an example of a plan for viewing and explained the details. A. DeLuca conveyed this is to review the concept of finalizing. It is a plan update and is the same as last year. All paperwork that had been submitted last year is again being submitted this year. The programs will be the same and the funding will be the same across the board for each of the alliances. C. Honthy questioned if any of the By-law language had changed. She is unsure if it was reviewed after the changes were made. Discussion ensued.

A Motion was made by C. Honthy and seconded by J. Griffith to grant preliminary approval to move forward with the packet with the municipal alliances strategic plan.

J. Griffith inquired about the programming related to drunk driving using googles. This program had been suspended due to the pandemic. Discussion ensued.

VI. NEW BUSINESS:

- A. CASS Reorganization:** A. DeLuca stated that C. Honthy is the Chair and V. Miller is the Co-Chair for CASS right now. A. DeLuca offered if there are any other interests in maintaining these roles. After some discussion, it was decided to keep both individuals within their current roles.

A Motion was made by V. Miller and seconded by J. Griffith for C. Honthy to continue to serve as Chair and a Motion was made by R. Neiber and seconded by J. Griffith for V. Miller to continue to serve as Co-Chair.

R. Neiber provided an update on the Hunterdon County's Operation Helping Hands. The program is moving forward working with the new Hope One van in conjunction with Human Services and is really excited to join forces. Both ventures are doing similar outreaches. Operation Helping Hand will be on the road in April and the approximate \$55,000.00 is federally funded. The only hurdle is to secure a vehicle to suit its needs.

R. Neiber provided an update on the year-end statistics for overdoses. There were approximately 78 on non-fatal overdoses with 19 being fatal. He noted there may have been more because these were the ones that were counted; maybe add about 10% to get a more accurate number. This could have been the information was directly dropped off at the hospital and there wasn't any hospital contact. We are still seeing the same trends in the County. It is yet to be determined marijuana-wise when it will become legal. Some of the dispensaries that are popping up still

have no date set as to when they will be opening up.

Based on J. Griffith's question about the Fentanyl test strips. R. Neiber replied that a legislature is looking to change a law that will make it obsolete that those test strips are considered paraphernalia because there is a use in the street that an individual does use and only wants to use heroine wants to check the product before they put the drug in their system.

J. Griffith made a Motion and R. Neiber seconded. The Motion passed. There being no further business, the meeting adjourned at 4:19 p.m. The next meeting will be held on Wednesday, May 11, 2022 at 3:30 pm via Webex.