

CHARLESTON/DORCHESTER CMHC IMPROVES CRISIS READINESS BY PARTICIPATING IN SWAT EXERCISE

Matt Dugan, Charleston/Dorchester MHC



A participant in the critical incident exercise

Just after the passing of the 10th anniversary of the September 11th attacks, the [Charleston/Dorchester Mental Health Center](#) (CDMHC) participated in an exercise with local law enforcement agencies to evaluate the Center's response readiness for a critical incident.

On October 21st, the Charleston County Sheriff's Office, SC Probation Parole & Pardon Services, Mt. Pleasant Police Department, Charleston SWAT, Bomb Squad, and Crisis Negotiators Teams coordinated with the staff of the mental health center to conduct a hostage scenario on the grounds of the CDMHC. Role-players, equipped with dummy firearms, simulated taking control of the mental health center with the goal of stealing pharmaceuticals from the clinic's medication storage areas.

Though the Center's staff was thoroughly briefed about the generalities of the exercise prior to the

event, the actual details of the scenario were unknown to staff in order to test the staff's response to a 'real-world' crisis. Emergency codes, safety procedures, evacuation routes and inter-staff communications were tested during this scenario. Several role-playing staff members simulated being held hostage in the center. Meanwhile, Crisis Negotiators communicated with the hostage takers to negotiate the release of some of the 'hostages.' Other role-players maintained a 'protected' position inside the center, behind locked doors, until SWAT was able to recover them.

While the primary goal of the exercise was to determine the efficacy of center safety procedures, the staff wanted to do so without increasing mental illness stigma. Local media were alerted to the exercise beforehand, the center was closed and no clients were present during the simulation. Center Executive Director Debbie Blalock, insisted that the 'hostage takers' not role-play a mentally ill client, "While we wanted to participate in the exercise to prepare ourselves in the event of a real hostage situation, we did not want to increase stigma for those with mental illnesses. Therefore, it was important to us to make sure the scenario was not related to someone with a mental illness, but simply to "bad guys."

At the conclusion of the exercise, many lessons were learned. Center Safety Codes and Protocols were revised to incorporate new knowledge. For example, in the future, the Center will keep a portable 'cold box' of injectable medicines to aid clients in emergency situations, and the implementation of staff 'code word' will prevent additional hostages from being taken unnecessarily during emergency situations. The collaboration of local mental health agencies with law enforcement is a necessary relationship to increase the safety of employees and improve our Department's ability to serve those with mental illness.

COMMUNITY REHABILITATIVE SERVICES AT AIKEN-BARNWELL MHC

Aiken Barnwell CRS Staff

At the beginning of November, [Aiken Barnwell Mental Health Center](#) (ABMHC) re-organized clinical and administrative services to more effectively meet the needs of our clients and Agency. As part of this re-organization, Community Rehabilitative Services (CRS) experienced some changes and welcomed new staff in the Department.



*Case Management Coordinator
Sharon Britt*

Shannon Britt transferred to CRS, into the position of Case Management Coordinator. Previously, case management services were performed by various staff in the Agency. With this position, case management services will be centrally coordinated, with Shannon serving as primary case manager and completing the Targeted Case Management Plans of Care. Shannon will conduct an assessment of case management needs along with additional assessments, should a need be identified, for specialty mental health services, including Rehabilitative Psychosocial Services and Peer Support Services. Shannon, a long-time employee of ABMHC, received her bachelor's degree in Psychology in 2005 from the University of South Carolina at Aiken. She has worked in both administrative and clinical positions at ABMHC, and is currently building a community resource database and meeting staff from the included organizations. Shannon said, "I am very excited to be working directly with clients again."

Ron Pope, another long-term ABMHC employee, accepted additional job duties as part of the re-organization. Ron continues to serve as the program coordinator for Housing, HomeShare and Community-based Rehabilitative Psychosocial Services (RPS). In addition, he now serves the Center's hospital liaison and Community Residential Care Facility liaison. Ron's job includes meeting with a variety of people and resource providers to ensure clients have access to affordable and safe housing, as well as working with landlords to resolve any issues to help clients maintain community tenure. He also works closely with clinical counselors, providing community-based services. Ron will attend the DMH Housing, TLC and HomeShare meetings, visiting Bryan Psychiatric Hospital, and participating in community forums in ABMHC's catchment area. Ron, who has worked in the mental health profession for 33 years, in both clinical and administrative roles, has experience in both outpatient and inpatient settings: alcohol and drug treatment, inpatient psychiatry, outpatient psychiatry, psychological testing, and management of social work departments and a behavioral science division. Ron has bachelor's degrees in Psychology and Social Work.



Program Coordinator Ron Pope



*Program Manager
Tamara Smith*

CRS at ABMHC operates under the leadership of Program Manager Tamara Smith, LMSW, and includes the following services and programs: Clinic-based RPS; Peer Support, Community-based RPS, Case Management, Housing, HomeShare, Shelter Plus Care, and Hospital/CRCF communication. Tamara noted, "We are very fortunate to have 14 dedicated and committed staff members working in this department, which affords us the ability to provide quality clinical services to the clients we serve; teamwork is evident on a daily basis. We are excited about expanding our services as well as engaging in new opportunities in the near future, to include participation in the Integration of Primary Care and Mental Health Services Project and strengthening partnerships with existing community resources."

NAMI-SC CELEBRATES 25TH ANNUAL STATEWIDE CONFERENCE

Kersha Sessions, DMH Community Mental Health Services

The [National Alliance on Mental Illness-South Carolina](#) (NAMI-SC) celebrated its 25th Annual Conference October 28-29, 2011 in Columbia, SC. NAMI-SC Executive Director Bill Lindsey said, “This conference is one of the many premier events held each year, with quality speakers both from around the state and around the world. Members were able to get cutting edge information about mental health.”

The conference, the theme of which was *Winning Anyway*, provided members with three plenary presentations, including Michael Mayer’s *Going to Work with Mental Illness: Overcoming the Obstacles*. Lindsey said, “It’s a key thing that we don’t focus on quite enough. We are very fortunate enough in South Carolina that the Department of Mental Health (DMH) has been involved with supported employment for about 10 years. Employment is one of the things that can help get people on the road to recovery.”

Colonel Steve Shugart, a chaplain in the South Carolina Army National Guard, provided *The Second War* plenary presentation. A dynamic speaker, he explained the impact of the war in Iraq and Afghanistan on active and returning soldiers. Kenneth Rogers, MD, provided the closing plenary, providing personal life experiences. He has lectured widely on spirituality, mental health, cross-cultural and school-related issues.

The conference also featured eight break-out sessions, on such topics as Social Security Work Incentives and Access, Department of Corrections Class Action Lawsuit for Adequate Mental Health, Changes to Health Care, Building Your Recovery Team, Ask the Doctor, Dual Diagnosis, and Community Housing Options.

DMH Housing and Homeless Program Director Michele Murff and DMH TLC Consultant Mallory Miller, presented *Community Housing Options*. “It was a pleasure to speak at the NAMI conference on DMH housing initiatives,” said Murff, “As we all know, stable housing is necessary for our clients to recover. With limited housing resources, we need to continue partnering with organizations such as NAMI to ensure clients have community-based housing that is safe and affordable. NAMI also recognizes this is an important issue at the local, state, and national level.”

The mission of NAMI is to improve the quality of life for individuals living with mental illnesses and their families, by promoting the availability of effective services and resources, through education, support, and advocacy. Lindsey said, “As prevalent as mental illness is, there are a lot of people that have gone through it, and there are a lot of people out there who can offer help, and that’s what NAMI is about.”

On October 28, at its 25th annual statewide conference, NAMI-SC held its yearly awards ceremony. DMH would like to recognize two outstanding employees who were honored as **Mental Health Professionals of the Year**, Catawba MHC’s Brenda Parker and Charleston Dorchester MHC’s Tamara Starnes



Brenda Parker, MA, CAC II, (shown, left), was nominated by a member of NAMI-SC for her dedication to the provision of child-centered, family-focused, and compassionate care for the children, adolescents and families of South Carolina.

“I have had the pleasure to work side by side with Brenda for the past nine months and I have learned so much from her about what constitutes good care for children and their families and about good clinical supervision,” said Catawba MHC Executive Director Paul Cornely, PhD. “She is a tireless advocate for those we serve and NAMI, as the nation’s largest mental health advocacy organization, clearly recognizes her compassion and goal to make the lives of the ‘little ones’ and their families more loving and fulfilling.”



According to her colleagues, **Tamara Starnes**, manager of Forensic Services at Charleston Dorchester MHC (shown, left), has been an incredible champion of mental health services. In her role as manager, Tamara oversees CDMHC staff at the Charleston Detention Center, the

Charleston County Mental Health Court, the Charleston County Department of Juvenile Justice, and the Dee Norton Low Country Children’s Center. She works tirelessly in her day-to-day activities, and her passion for her clients and knowledge of mental health systems have led to numerous contributions.

Charleston Dorchester MHC Executive Director Debbie Blalock said, “As a result of the initiative, insight, and intelligence of Tamara Starnes, the lives of non-violent probationers living with mental illnesses may be forever improved! They may now participate in specialty courts and begin the journey of recovery, rather than being left to languish in detention centers. Tamara is one of the few DMH employees who will positively impact the lives of those she has never met, now and for decades to come.”

The NAMI award must now find a place in the increasingly limited space in Starnes’ office. In May 2011, she was awarded the Hassenplug Award for Outstanding DMH clinician.

COLUMBIA AREA’S COLLABORATION TO PREVENT TEEN SUICIDE

Sheila Arnold, Public Affairs/Community Liaison, Columbia Area MHC

More Than Sad, developed by the [American Foundation for Suicide Prevention](#) (AFSP), is a training program geared to help educators and students better understand suicidal behavior in adolescents.

The program includes two films with facilitator’s manuals, as well as a PowerPoint presentation to help integrate both films into a comprehensive suicide prevention program. The [South Carolina Chapter of AFSP](#) purchased *More Than Sad* training programs for every school district in the state, using donations from its annual Out of the Darkness Community Walks.

The South Carolina Department of Education (SCDOE) and AFSP joined forces to determine the best method for program dissemination. They established a “Summer Institute” for school district personnel, comprising a four-hour training, using a ‘train the trainer’ model. The training included review of the *More than Sad* program, a toolkit for postvention (after a suicide), and community-based resources. Presenters included AFSP staff, DMH Director of School Based Services Melissa Craft, and CAMHC Director of CAF Services Monica McConnell, PhD. Participants were also given a resource guide for DMH services, particularly school-based mental health services.

“*More Than Sad* and the postvention toolkit are wonderful tools to guide schools through crisis. It is my hope that my involvement in this program will help improve our community’s recognition of teen suicide, aid in the development of programs to intervene with adolescents at risk for suicide, and ultimately, save lives,” said Dr. McConnell.

Registration for the July 2011 Summer Institute far exceeded expectations, so an additional training was offered; they were well received and generated a great deal of interest in the *More Than Sad* training program.

To further disseminate information about the program, Dr. McConnell, Craft and representatives from the SCDOE and AFSP presented at the National School-based Mental Health Conference held in Charleston, SC in September. Their presentation focused on the successful collaboration among the SCDOE, AFSP, and DMH.



FROM MENTAL HEALTH MATTERS

Happy holidays to everyone at DMH. Thank you for serving those who are in need with your time and talents.

And thank you for your patience as Mental Health Matters grows, and changes. Our goal for 2012 is to further improve the publication, and continue to bring you DMH news and information.

Look for articles in the coming weeks about the **SOAR program**, an exciting presentation at **Morris Village**, the **2011 Lawyers and Judges Conference**, and a special issue to kick off the new year, highlighting some of the special ways DMH staff support those in need.

See you in 2012!

Mental Health Matters is a newsletter of the South Carolina Department of Mental Health (DMH). Produced by the Office of Public Affairs, it aims bring items of interest within the DMH system to the attention of Agency personnel, the Mental Health Commission, mental health advocates, and other stakeholders.

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