

**VSH Futures
Peer Support Program Development Workgroup**

**June 4th, 2009
Minutes**

Upcoming Meetings:

- **The workgroup will be meeting via conference call on June 15th from 11 – 12:30 to: 1) complete its discussion of recommendations re: the Peer Crisis Alternative Project Development Plan, 2) plan for the presentation of the Workgroup's recommendations at the June 29th Futures Transformation Council Meeting.**

To join this meeting, dial 1-866-642-1665 and enter Pin # 454481.

- **The Futures Transformation Council will be meeting on June 29th at the Waterbury State Complex, Stanley Hall, Room 100 from 2:00 – 4:15. The Peer Crisis Alternative Program Development Plan and recommendations of the Peer Support Program Development Workgroup regarding the plan will be presented at this meeting.**

Present:

Jean New
Ed Paquin
Keith Martell
Kitty Gallagher
Katelin Hoffman
Pam Corcoran
Xenia Williams
Jeannie Smith
Jennifer Marandino
Steven Morgan

Facilitator: Linda Corey

Minutes: Nick Nichols

Goals of the meeting:

The workgroup discussed the goals of the meeting, which included: 1) reviewing the final draft of the Project Development Plan, 2) discussing those components of the plan that

the workgroup supports and those components of the plan that we want to modify, change or supplement, 3) planning for the June 29th Transformation Council.

Review of the Project Develop Plan

Strengths of the Plan

Members of the Workgroup identified strengths of the plan:

- It does a good job describing administrative details (e.g. budget, information on non-profit development, board of directors).
- It has a lot of templates (interviewing staff, guests, etc) that will serve as a starting point and guide in the development of the program.
- The proposal does a good job responding to the RFP.
- It provides an excellent framework for developing the program. Parts of the plan may be modified once we are more advanced, but we may be able to implement some of the components quickly.

The following recommendation was passed by the workgroup unanimously:

Recommendation #1: The workgroup approves the report as an excellent framework to take the project to the next phase. While not all members of the workgroup agree with all parts of the plan, we agree that the plan largely responds to the RFP and covers all of the areas that we need to implement as written or with modifications.

Several members of the group added that they would have liked to get the drafts of the plan several days before the meeting instead of getting them at the meeting or the day before, and that the process felt very rushed at the end. Some workgroup members still haven't had time to fully read the plan.

The remaining portion of the meeting was devoted to discussing areas of the plan that the workgroup wanted to modify, update, supplement or change:

Funding and Operating Costs for the Program

The workgroup has a lengthy discussion regarding the allocated funding for the program and the estimated operating costs of the program. Comments included:

- \$230,000 will be available annually starting in July.
- The program needs to be both “good for the community” and be a part of the downsizing of VSH, though it won't be required to take individuals directly from VSH.
- Most of the DA Crisis beds have a budget around \$400K for only two beds AND these programs already have an organizational infrastructure in place (i.e. a designated agency that manages the program). We need to ask for more money

- from the state. It's not fair to expect staff at the Peer Crisis Alternative program to be paid half as much or expect the program to do twice as much as the crisis beds for less money.
- There have been national recommendations (see Program Development Plan) that each state should devote \$400K to create peer crisis alternatives.
 - We should stick with 5 beds and ask for equality.
 - We need additional funding to increase the staffing at the house.
 - Xenia doesn't support the comment in the plan that the program "offers significant cost savings," since it gives the impression that peer support staff should be paid less than professional staff.
 - Having only one peer mentor working during certain hours would not be enough to provide adequate crisis support.
 - The Washington County Mental Health Home Intervention program always has 3 direct service staff at all times plus nursing supervision most of the time. This staffing level allows staff to take residents out into the community.
 - We need to find other sources of funding (e.g. grants)
 - The current funding that is available should not be used for purchase of the house. If we spend the funds on the purchase of the house, there will not be any money left over for operating the house.

The following recommendation was approved unanimously:

Recommendation #2: The Workgroup recommends that the project should be budgeted \$400K/year based on the following issues:

- **Equality of funding compared to other DA Futures Programs (e.g. Crisis beds)**
- **Current funding would not support adequate staffing**
- **Additional funding is needed for start-up costs (e.g. rehabilitation of facility, purchase of facility)**

Number of Beds and Peer Support Programming

The Workgroup discussed the proposed number of beds for the program. Comments included:

- Steven reported that he researched the four other peer crisis programs that currently exist in other states (Maine, NH, NY and Georgia) to learn more about the number of beds they operated and the type of programming that is offered:
 - Both the Georgia and NH programs offer a 2-bed crisis program but also include peer support options during the day (e.g. the NH Stepping Stones program also operates a peer support program during the day).
 - The Rose House in NY was set up as a 5-bed program, but the program found that number of beds to be "unmanageable." The program has been reduced to 4 beds, but usually only 3 beds are full. In addition, based on surveys that the Rose House completed, they are also working on restructuring the program to add in peer support options during the day.

- Reports on the Soteria House (which no longer is in existence) also indicate that 5 beds were difficult to manage for that program.
- Based on this information, Steven recommends that the Vermont program should aim for 3-5 beds. There would be several advantages to this:
 - 1) It creates more real estate options.
 - 2) It would allow us to add in additional peer support during the day, which would create more options (meeting with other peers, groups) for people staying there.
 - 3) It would increase the staff to resident ration, which would allow the program to provide more support to the residents in crisis.
 - 4) It would not change the licensing requirements.
- Katelin likes the idea of adding in peer support during the day. The Assist crisis program doesn't have this option, and it would add to the experience greatly.
- Home Intervention chose to not add in a lot of options during the day to avoid people "getting comfortable."
- It is difficult for staff when all 5 beds are filled at Home Intervention.
- Xenia supports the 3-bed option, but she is not sure about adding in peer support during day. There could be confidentiality, privacy, and safety issues if outside community members are allowed to come to the program during the day. This issue could be figured out in the next phase. Safety of the people in crisis is paramount!
- Jeannie commented that having peer support available over a long period of time is very valuable, especially when coming off of medications.
- Kitty supports the 3-bed option, but she is not sure a "clubhouse approach" is best based on confidentiality issues and having staff available to provide one-on-one support to residents. The program could focus on bringing in certain activities vs. being completely open to community.
- The Freedom Center uses a model that we may want to adopt. They have community members come in and provide activities (e.g. Yoga) vs. operating an open-ended drop in center

The following recommendation was passed unanimously:

Recommendation #3: The Workgroup recommends that the program operate as a 3-bed facility. Developers of the program should consider building in focused peer-support options during the day that would include other peers and community members.

Hiring a Part Time, Acting Director

The Workgroup discussed the plan's recommended next step of hiring a part-time, interim director to oversee the development of the program. Comments included:

- Steven feels it is unrealistic that we could find such an individual based on all the expectations laid out in recommendations. This seems like an unnecessary step, and we should instead put out an RFP for an individual or organization to hire an

executive director who will run the program. It would be very easy to start up a 501©3 – only one person is needed to do this.

- A new 501©3 might not be able to complete some of the next steps -- in order to get federal or state funding you would need to be in good standing for one year. This is a very important issue, since there are probably different grants available that could support this work.
- Xenia recommended the following next steps: 1) select board of directors from those who can commit to responsibilities as described in plan, 2) the Board of directors would hire an executive director.
- Linda suggested that the sponsoring organization could be required to create a Board of Directors to oversee the program and help it move towards eventual independence. Federal guidelines/expectations regarding peer programs seem to indicate that independence of the program would be helpful.
- We could set up competitive RFP process to select the sponsoring organization.
- Xenia is concerned that the RFP process could be cumbersome and an unnecessary step. At this point in the process, we should transition from advisory group to a board of directors, which would likely include members of this workgroup
- Linda reminded the group that if we wanted VPS to act as sponsoring organization, the VPS board will need to approve this.
- Steven would like these issues to be decided before Transformation Council meeting.
- We may want to consider Another Way acting as a sponsoring organization
- Kitty suggested that we could set up a condensed, quick RFP process. An RFP/competitive process for hiring an Executive Director would also be needed.
- The peer program Vet-to-Vet has followed a process similar to the one being considered. Vet-to-Vet started out being sponsored by NAMI as it developed its independence. During that time, Vet to Vet developed its board and became organized to be an independent organization. The process is not that cumbersome, but it takes about a year.
- Ed suggested that DMH could give funds to VPS, which would be responsible for creating a program board of directors with whatever responsibilities we chose. However, it is important to remember that while the program board of directors might oversee the program, the ultimate legal oversight of the program would be the VPS Board of Directors.
- DMH could recommend that VPS and the Peer Crisis Alternative program's board of directors move towards creation of an independent, not-for-profit program. After the Peer Crisis Alternative program becomes independent, DMH could contract with the program directly or have VPS subcontract with VCA.

Recommendation #4: The Workgroup does not support the hiring of an interim part-time Acting Director. The workgroup recommends the following steps:

- 1) Chose a sponsoring organization: The Workgroup has identified two possible sponsoring organizations: VPS and Green Mountain Support Group (GMSG). Both organizations should be asked if they are interested. The selection process will be determined at a later meeting.**
- 2) Create a Board of Directors for the Program: This board of directors will be created by the sponsoring organization and will oversee the hiring of the Executive Director and the creation of the program.**
- 3) Hiring a Full time Executive Director using a competitive, widely-advertised process.**

Location

After a brief discussion, the following recommendation was approved by majority vote of the workgroup (one member abstained from voting):

Recommendation #5: Location of the program should be decided by the Peer Crisis Alternative Program Board of Directors and Executive Director based on the program development plan and additional recommendations and information compiled by members of the Futures Peer Support Program Development Workgroup.

Training and Staff Development

There was a brief discussion of the plan's training and staff development section. Some members of the workgroup supported the IPS model that was recommended in the plan, but others questioned if that was the best model to use as the core training. The workgroup approved the following recommendation by majority vote (3 abstentions):

Recommendation #6: The workgroup recommends that the Peer Crisis Alternative Executive Director and Board of Directors choose the specific training model based on what is most cost effective and useful. The training models recommended in the project plan could be considered as a potential model.

Evaluation

Several members of the workgroup did not support the proposed evaluation plan to use Yale as the evaluator, due in part to the high cost of contracting with that organization. However, there was general agreement among the workgroup regarding the need to have some sort of evaluation to ensure the program stays relatively true to the peer model it will be using. The following recommendation was suggested but not voted on by the workgroup:

Recommendation: The workgroup recognizes the importance of evaluation in support of a quality program. The Peer Crisis Alternative Program Executive Director and Board of Directors should decide what evaluation model should be used.

Buying vs. Renting

Members of the workgroup were interested in discussing the merits of buying vs. renting a facility, but there was not enough time at the end of the meeting to fully discuss. The following recommendation was suggested but not voted on:

Recommendation: The option of buying vs. renting a facility should be explored and determined by the Program Executive Director and Board of Directors.

Next Steps:

- Linda will ask the VPS Board to vote on whether or not VPS is interested in acting as the sponsoring organization for the next phase of developing the Peer Crisis Alternative Program.
- Steven will ask the Green Mountain Support Group (GMSG) Board to vote on whether or not GMSG is interested in acting as the sponsoring organization for the next phase of developing the Peer Crisis Alternative Program.
- The workgroup will meet by phone in two weeks (June 15th 11 am to 12:30 pm) to:
 - 1) Receive an update on whether or not VPS and/or GMSG is interested in acting as the sponsoring organization for the next phase of developing the program
 - 2) Finalize a recommendation for how the sponsoring organization should be chosen
 - 3) Continue the discussion regarding location and buying vs. renting and vote on recommendations for both of those issues
 - 4) Plan for the presentation of the Program Development Plan and the workgroup's recommendations at the June 29th Futures Transformation Council Meeting.