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Report on the Four Pilot Crisis Stabilization Units in Arkansas

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Sebastian County-open February 28, 2018/Fort Smith

Pulaski County-open August 20, 2018/Little Rock

Washington County-June 14, 2019/Fayetteville

Craighead County-Under construction to open fall of 2019/Jonesboro

With the leadership of Governor Asa Hutchinson to recommend and work the funding process for the Crisis Stabilization Units and the support of the Arkansas Legislature to appropriate the funding for these new facilities and enact Act 423 of 2017, establishment of the of the Crisis Stabilization Units in the State of Arkansas became reality.

The partnerships County Governments have with the Governor's office, State Government and our legislature for continued operation of these facilities is essential.

Each of the Counties is responsible for providing a facility to locate a Crisis Stabilization Unit. State funding for crisis intervention training (CIT) for law enforcement officers and train the trainer classes is also essential. Police officers and Sheriff's deputies throughout the State are being trained on another way to approach the mentally ill based upon the 40 hour Memphis model of Crisis Intervention Training.

Crisis Intervention Training throughout the Counties and Cities engaged in implementing these new facilities is a challenge as this represents a new approach for Law Enforcement Officers in working with these individuals versus the traditional authoritative more direct aggressive approach.

Since opening the Sebastian County Crisis Stabilization Unit over 1,297 individuals have been admitted and served. This CSU serves six Counties in the Western Arkansas catchment area of Sebastian, Crawford, Logan, Franklin, Scott and Polk. These 1,297 individuals receive stabilizing behavioral health services who would have otherwise been placed in jail, emergency room departments, psychiatric hospitals or other hospital facilities or would have had further involvement with law enforcement.

The stay at the Crisis Stabilization Unit is between 72 to 96 hours and is much less costly than the other alternatives in other facilities. In July of 2019 the Sebastian County CSU had a record high of 101 assessments. For those not admitted to the CSU the screening and triage services help persons be directed to the most appropriate placement for service. Over 2,043 have been referred through July with 1,297 treated in Sebastian County.

With training being a key the Western Arkansas Counseling and Guidance Center has collaborated with Charles Ellis with ALETA, and local law enforcement as well as members of the local criminal justice system, to train law enforcement, dispatchers and other key members of the community on the 40 Memphis model of Crisis Intervention Training for law enforcement. Based upon this initiative four Sebastian County trainings are scheduled each year. From experience the trainers have learned that smaller more individually selected officers' result in greater buy-in and tendency to utilize the training and the Crisis Stabilization Unit. The CSU training program has had a positive impact on all area law enforcement officers with the treatment staff at the CSU.

The Sebastian County CSU and the Western Arkansas Counseling and Guidance Center launched a pilot to utilize Tele-Health equipment for the purpose of a mobile triage team, specifically for jail diversion and utilization of the CSU. Tele-Health equipment, specifically computer tablets are placed with officers on the beat to be utilized in the patrol vehicles when faced with a person who appears to be having a behavioral health crisis. This video streaming is HIPPA compliant and will allow the officer to call into the CSU for a direct video call to assist in making an appropriate referral. Other approaches in other Counties and States have involved a mobile CSU team to go to the scene and relieve the officer on duty.

The CSU treatment team includes a staff psychiatrist, APRNs, Registered Nurses, licensed mental health professionals, qualified behavioral health professionals, licensed and/or certified alcohol and substance abuse treatment providers, peer or recovery coaches, licensed practical nurses and techs. The CSU program integrates evidence based therapy and intervention approaches as well as trauma informed care.

The Crisis Stabilization Unit is a 16 bed facility serving individuals 18 and up who are referred by CIT trained law enforcement officers. In opening the facility we have found that referrals were necessary from other sources including other treatment facilities and hospital emergency rooms and those families with individuals experiencing mental health crisis. The unit and staff provide immediate access to assessment, mental health treatment, triage, stabilization and aftercare planning and follow-up. The unit admits individuals on voluntary basis that are medically stable. The average length of stay is 72 hours. Referrals are also being made by the Western Arkansas Guidance and Counseling Center emergency crisis on-call therapist.

Passage of Act 423 of 2017 was a significant piece of legislation to support the implementation of Crisis Stabilization Units. Establishment of Criminal Justice Coordinating Committees to include a cross section of judges, prosecutor, public defender, sheriff, police department and community service providers is encouraged in Act 423, and is an important Justice System on-going operating component to help monitor the response to the Crisis Stabilization Unit and the broader operation of the Justice System.

Sebastian County was recently awarded a grant to conduct an intercept model workshop to identify gaps in the treatment of the mentally ill to assist in improving not only the operation of the Crisis Stabilization Unit but the Justice Systems response to those with mental health needs.

Sebastian County recently submitted a grant to implement a mental health court, which we hope to hear from later this year, to be implemented in 2020. A mental health court is also intended to support the Justice Systems operation and its inter relationship with the Crisis Stabilization Unit as well as other Mental Health treatment services within the community.

In closing it is important to realize that the mentally ill individuals being treated in Crisis Stabilization Units, are being booked into County Jails also have what is referred to commonly as co-occurring disorders of alcoholism or drug addiction along with their mental illness. It is important to continue to implement and operate Drug Courts, Veteran's Courts, and Mental Health Courts as a part of our Justice System. The number of individuals held in County jails and those sentenced and held in State prisons are of concern to each County government and jail operation and Justice System as well as the State government and operation of the State prison system.

The cost of operating the Sebastian County CSU has been offset by the \$1.6 million state funding and Medicaid reimbursement.

However, private insurance has not been recognizing treatment services in the CSU and is not providing reimbursement at this time. With engagement of private insurance to recognize CSU treatment services a more complete financial picture will be created for the CSU operational cost. More time for these facilities to operate and create revenue reimbursement data is needed, and for each labor market costs to be fully reported and evaluated to determine the necessary budget needed.

Continued funding of the four CSU's is needed, and expansion of another four is recommended.

All Arkansas Counties and their communities deserve to have a CSU to divert the mentally ill from jail to short term treatment.