ND Cares Coalition Meeting Minutes

June 2, 2021

Connie opened the meeting with a roll call of coalition members. There were 20 people on the call.

Cindy Miller and Jennifer Illich of First Link presented the Care and Coordination Program. It began in 2010 with the ND Dept. of Health and continues via a SAMSHA grant. The program follows-up with people who are struggling with suicidal thoughts or substance abuse treatment. Patients may join the program from internal contacts with First Link or externally from other sources such as hospitals, the Humans Service Centers, provide practice providers, the state hospital and others. Some people self-refer to the program. The follow up calls are to check in with the patient concerning their issue and may also include providing the patient with referrals to First Link resources such as telehealth support groups, rental or energy assistance, etc. The program helps patients adhere to care and safety plans. Phones calls are generally conducted once a week for three months, but the frequency can be adjusted as needed. Calls begin within 24 hours of receiving the referral. Patients may leave and re-enroll at any time. Continuity of care is key. The program looks to fill gaps in between therapy. Greeting cards of care and concern are also important to support patients.

On another topic Cindy Miller explained that once the 988 crisis number activates First Link’s call contacts are expected to increase significantly while calls to 911 should decrease.

Pam Mack Pam provided background information about the purpose of the Committee on ND Protection & Advocacy which is a state agency that advocates for the rights of people with disabilities. She also discussed the Committee’s responsibilities, priorities and activities of the agency. ND Cares is fortunate to recommend an appointment to the P&A Committee from the ND Cares membership.

Davina French talked about her experience on the P&A Committee. It meets at least quarterly. Members are given briefing on the activities and legal literature in various areas of disability law. She emphasized the importance of this discussion making board and she praised the work of P&A in general.

Michelle asked that anyone who wishes to volunteer to be on the P&A board to contact her or Connie.

Jerome Billups from ND Job Service reported it is still open for appointments only but the VET team will do outreach in the rural areas. The state has over 18,000 jobs available.

Dale DeKrey from the VA stated it is up to the normal workload, still fully masked, and screening at the doors. Even though there is limited travel, if the VA is invited to participate in an event there is a good change travel will be authorized. The VA is still offering vaccinations for any veteran, caregiver or family member who would like one – even at the CBOCs. 90% of employees are vaccinated as well as 45-50% of 33,000 veterans within their catchment area have been vaccinated.

LTC Flemmer of ND SMFS reported that the Griffin Project (Nate Griffin is a suicide survivor) is moving forward. Griffin will be speaking with ND Air Guard, creating TED Talks and connecting with the VA to talk to survivors, and to the incoming commanders and first sergeants. Youth Camps will be conducted this summer and there is a Yellow Ribbon event this weekend. SMFS recently devised a code that alerts the office when someone in crisis - that unfortunately was put to use today. The proper authorities were called and the self-harm crisis was resolved.

Davina reported that 11 ND survivors attended the TAPS conference in DC and 5 of them were Peer-to-Peer trained. During her trip she met with two members of the National Guard stationed in DC to protect the capital, who are also family members of fallen guardsman. Davina also announced that TAPS and the National Guard Bureau signed an MOA this weekend the “no matter how, or when a guardsmen or reservists died NGB will engage with TAPS and provide services to survivors”. TAPS will be working with the Survivor Outreach Services and on training of all the mental health coordinators, chaplains, suicide prevention and wounded warriors programs.

Nikki Frohlich of Military Outreach talked about Advance Your Future, a spin-off of Guard Your Future, which gives guardsman benefits information as a recruiting and retention effort. She is also scheduled to provide Military Culture Training to the ND League of Cities tele-conference in July.

Summer Hanson of the VA reported that her program is now called the Military to VA program. It reaches out to Post 9-11 veterans and as well as helping military members who are being medically discharged. The VA provided a women’s conference, a baby shower for homeless women veterans and is providing benefits information at food distribution events. The Caregiver Support Program is doing well. Check out the website to learn of all activities.

Brad Hawk of the Indian Health System Administration reported that they have been busy with COVID, but he also sees a big behavioral health need upcoming. The tribal Youth Leadership Academy is June 13 at Bismarck State College where they will discuss life after high school, cultural teaching and have a variety of activities.

David Francavilla from the Veterans Experience stated there will be $73M more in funding for the VA. The US is losing approximately 2.61%/year on average. ND is losing veterans as a lesser rate than most other states at .62%/year. Because of this, it puts more stress on VSOs and health systems to care for veterans.

Paula Heitmann of the VA Benefits Administration reported that the VA has added three more presumptive conditions as a result of Agent Orange exposure and respiratory conditions for burn pit exposure. They are moving back into normal operations.

BG Jackie Huber of the National Guard reported that the NDNG is scaling back its COVID mission and ramping up fire support. This also NDNG training season. Deployments includes Air Defense Artillery Battalion that will deploy to DC for the next year, engineer units, and Aviation will return in August. The Air National Guard will see almost 200 individual deployments across the globe. The Commanders Resilience and Readiness Council (CR2C) is engage in initiatives involving holistic health, suicide prevention and military sexual trauma. The Memorial Day Event at the Veterans Cemetery in Mandan was a success.

Pam Mack of P&A talked about key personnel changes due to retirements. P&A is seeing people struggling to stay in their homes due, mental health issue and youth that are also struggling due to COVID.

Carlotta McCleary of Mental Health of America, North Dakota announce their Annual Family and Consumer Network meeting on the 22nd of June. They are looking for new members on their Council (which works on policy issues from a consumer lens), so anyone with lived experience a mental health issue may join. Their Annual Conference is virtual June 28-29. She also reported that their peer support positions are fully staffed and certified. In the Bismarck area is the specialist is a veteran. They are funded through a SAMSHA grant so clients do not have to pay anything. Federation of Families for Children Mental health just hired Tracy Wilke as parent coordinator in Fargo. There will be Family Conference July 12 with topics such as supportive decision making in lieu of a guardianship. They are also finishing legislative session and interim committee documents concerning juvenile justice reform that will help kids with mental health needs. Those kids will be deemed “Children in Need of Services” or “Children in Need of Protection” which will allow them to access more services rather than enter the justice system.

Jennifer Illich of First Link reminded everyone that they are conducting lots of free training around the state, so please check their website.

Rebecca Quinn of the Brain Injury Network reported they are looking at the after effects of the legislation session. There is also ongoing work to provide Certified Brain Injury Specialist training. An intensive two day course brings brain injury knowledge on top of other specialize training someone may already have such as a physical or speech therapist, medical provider and substance abuse counselors. Some of the training is veteran related. Now there are 75 specialist in the state. The Network is also working on a screening system for the criminal justice system that identifies symptoms of brain injury for the appropriate referral to services.

Cassie Roness of Military Once Source reported that she is supporting Advance Your Future and Yellow Ribbon events. She has also participating in Resilience, Risk Reduction and Suicide Prevention (R3SP) activities, ASIST and ACE courses, and provided information to Human Service Center Providers.

Connie reported that she was granted emerita status as ND Civilian Aide to the Secretary of the Army but will continue to serve until a successor is appointed.

Michelle Thomson, Resilience Coordinator for the NDNG, reported that the Suicide Prevention Task Force of the Action Plan to Prioritize People and Teams, identified the top five stressors that lead to suicide for National Guard members: Financial, Legal Problems, Work Stress, Relationship Problems and Victims of Abuse. Michelle volunteered for the Legal Problems work group. A recommendation submitted to NGB was for the Army Guard to adopt a checklist of prevention steps for leadership to use to assist the service member with legal stressors - similar to what the Air Force uses. Amy Ruff attended the Victims of Abuse work group. Michelle also reported that 39 soldiers attend a Wellness Camp in May.

Kelli Weiand of Military Outreach is supporting Advance Your Future and will attend the VFW convention in Bottineau, the Flag Day Celebration on June 14 in Minot, PTSD Walk on June 24, American Legion Conference on June 25, and the State Fair on July 27.

Co-Chair Cindy Whitesell congratulated Kelli Weiand on joining the Minot ND Cares committee. Cindy is accompanying Kelli to several events and helping where she can.

Tim Wicks mentioned that he is free to help where needed.

Michelle Panos stated that the number of partner business remains the same at 19, but we now there are 49 communities as the town of Sheldon joined in May. She also reported that due to reduced activities due to COVID, 30% of the budget remains at the end of the fiscal year. For the Strategic Plan update, Michelle outlined the Communication Plan to Reduce Stigma and what was complete thus far.

David Francavilla of VA Veterans Experience is working on a military culture presentation for VA employees. He would like to include the ND Cares Military Reference Guide, once updated, into their Welcome Kits.

For the next Coalition meeting Michelle asked the group if they would consider meeting in person at RJB if their organization allowed it. She will send out an email asking for feedback before setting the next meeting.

The next Executive Committee with be July 14.

Connie adjourned the meeting at 3:12 pm.