Local Advisory Council (LAC) North

St. Louis County

March 17, 2022 4:30 – 6:00 @ Virginia GSC and Teams

**Present**: Melanie Smith, Jennifer Rich, Nicole Stone, Michelle Long, Brenda Shafer- Pellinen, Ann Marie Lubovich, Todd Swenson, Lacy Podlogar, Macy Viita, Heather Kainz, Katy Lofquist, Linda O’Neil Deremee

**Absent**: Jeff McNickle, Daniel Triestman, Darcie LaFlamme

**Guest Speaker**: Paula Stocke, Deputy Director SLC PHHS.

* Meeting starts at 4:30. Todd Swenson opens the meeting. Todd reads the LAC values. Introductions of current and new members. February minutes are approved.
* The council discussed appointing a new co-chair beings that Marjorie had to step down. Todd volunteered to take the position as co-chair along with Lacy.
* There was a discussion about who will handle the next recommendations for the County Board. Todd thanked Ann Marie for the great job she had done with sending out questionnaires to the school and organizing the information.
* 5:00 Guest Speaker Paula Stocke introduced herself. Paula has been with PHHS for over 20 years. Paula explained that she oversees Children and Family Services with the county and has been in the background during the establishment of this LAC board. Paula expressed that there is a decline of residential treatment facilities and that we need to grow our in-home services as well as treatment facilities. Facilities are closing because of a lack of employees unfortunately. Paula opened the floor to questions and asked what the council would like to see more of. The majority of the comments were more beds and more services across the board.
  + Ann Marie explained how they had sent out surveys to the schools to ask about mental health issues. She explained that the information we received back was that they need more professional staff in the schools and more access to mental health services. Teachers are over stretched and need some help. Paula shared that Northeast Service Coop is Hiring more people to help out in the schools. Also, Mountain Iron Buhl School has hired some new mental health staff. There is a hope for some real-time interaction with children and change. Paula asked if there were any suggestions how we can coordinate all of this together. There are many gaps and waitlists currently with children having to spend time in Emergency rooms because there are no open facilities local. There are many children who are sent to treatment facilities out of state because they are the only ones who have availability.
  + Katy Lofquist agreed with the fact that there are too many cases where we have to send children out of state for treatment and asked if the county is doing anything to try to bring local centers to the area. Paula explained that they are working with some providers, like Range Mental Health, to see if there would be a chance of creating a model like Healing Foundations in Grand Rapids. Healing foundations had recently closed due to a lack of employees. This model may work better in an area like Virginia and Duluth where there is access to more employees. There is a possibility that this will be happening, in the near future, in Duluth with Northwoods.
  + Paula brought up the fact that the county no longer has a contract with LSS and that we are using the Bethany shelter in Duluth. Currently, the Bethany Shelter has not been able to develop the mental heath services that are greatly needed.
  + There was talk about how we can keep the employees at these centers so that they would not have to close. Paula mentioned the Child Welfare Scholar Program that can give incentives to staff. She shared how Northwoods has given bonusses and incentives to increase their staff. Some places have gone from peridium to flat rates to help places be able to retain their staff.
  + Peer support groups were suggested as a way to help children in schools that do not have enough professionals. These groups can be a good first “go-to” place for children to express themselves and maybe receive the help of their peers. Macy and Ann Marie both shared how these peer support groups have been beneficial in other schools. Youth in Action was brought up as a place to go to get the thoughts of the children. Melanie and Paula will reach out to the director of this group and see if they would be able to talk at our next meeting and possibly bring some youth with them to express what they see as a need. There was a discussion as to how we could reach those children who are home schooled. A suggestion was that information could be provided during their yearly home school registration.
  + Melanie asked the board if they would like to invite an applicant to the board to fill the need for a member with indigenous experience. Melanie will reach out to this applicant and extend an invitation to join the council.

6:05 Meeting adjourned.