

DEPARTMENT OF MENTAL HEALTH

• Strategic Plan Highlights •

FY18 Third Quarter

DMH and MDE Increase Suicide Prevention Efforts

Goal 3, Objective 3.6 — Educate school professionals and youth on suicide prevention

The Mississippi Department of Mental Health (DMH) and the Mississippi Department of Education (MDE) have been partnering to increase suicide prevention efforts in the state's public schools by educating all school staff.

In 2017, the Mississippi Legislature passed House Bill 263 that requires all school district employees to have two hours of suicide prevention training in the 2017-2018 school year, and new employees annually thereafter. Previous legislation only required school professionals to have the training.

As a result, DMH was responsible for developing a model policy and selecting evidence-based curriculum for in-service suicide prevention training.

In August 2017, DMH established a focus group of teachers, school district administrators, mental health professionals, and people who have lost loved ones to suicide to select the curriculum and develop a model policy template. Based on the focus group's input and recommendations, two online professional development series were chosen. The Jason Foundation was chosen for classified staff, and the Society for the Prevention of Teen Suicide was chosen for certified staff. Both professional development series are flexible in their implementation. School districts have a choice to allow each staff member to take the trainings individually, or to conduct the trainings in a group setting.

School districts are to report implementation of the trainings to MDE. As of April 2018, more than 36,700 school staff have been trained.

DMH was also responsible for developing a model policy template on suicide prevention for school districts. According to the law, all school districts are required to adopt a policy for suicide prevention. A template was developed through focus group participation and provided to MDE for implementation.

The purpose of this policy is to protect the health and well-being of all students by having procedures in place to prevent, assess the risk of, intervene in, and respond to suicide. The policy template was adapted from the Model School District Policy on Suicide Prevention: Model Language, Commentary, and Resources developed by The American Foundation for Suicide Prevention (AFSP), The American School Counselor Association (ASCA), the National Association of School Psychologists (NASP), and The Trevor Project.

As part of the policy template, the focus group recommended each school district create a Crisis Team. Comprised of a multidisciplinary team of primarily administrative, mental health, safety professionals and support staff, the primary focus is to address crisis preparedness, intervention/response and recovery. These professionals have been specifically trained in crisis preparedness through recovery and take the leadership role in developing crisis plans, ensuring school staff can effectively execute various crisis protocols, and may provide mental health services for effective crisis interventions and recovery supports.

MDE has shared the model policy and procedural template with school districts and placed it on their website.



FY18 Third Quarter

DMH and DOC Partnership Sees First Graduates

Goal 1, Objective 1.8 — Provide treatment and supports both pre and post-release to improve the successful reentry of incarcerated people into the community

The first group of graduates from a pilot partnership involving the Department of Mental Health, the Department of Corrections, and Region 9 Hinds Behavioral Health Services received special recognition in March 2018 for completing their program.

The Mississippi Co-Occurring Reentry Program (MS CORP) was funded by a Second Chance Act Reentry Program for Adults with Co-Occurring Substance Use and Mental Disorders grant provided by the U.S. Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Assistance. MS CORP is aimed at improving identification of offenders with co-occurring disorders, training staff in mental health awareness, providing integrated individualized treatment plans, and tracking participant outcomes.

Six people graduated from the program on March 28, receiving certificates and awards acknowledging their completion of the program.

John Blackmon, one of the graduates, was serving a sentence for burglary – a burglary he attempted because of his addiction. Clean and sober now, he had been abusing drugs for 16 years. Even though there were periods of sobriety, he said he never sought the help he knew he needed.

“It was something I knew I was sick with. It was a problem I had. I was ashamed of myself. I didn’t want to be a burden to other people so I thought if I could go and take something from somebody and get me a little money, I could get high,” Blackmon said. “Ultimately, it led to me going to prison, where I had to get myself together. I had no choice.”

The three-year pilot program focuses on offenders who are returning to Hinds County and have a co-occurring substance use and mental health disorder diagnosis.

It also includes an intensive outpatient program, with those services provided by Region 9 Hinds Behavioral Health Services.

Blackmon said he sought help through the program because he had grown tired of himself – tired of being a drug addict.

“And it’s the best move I ever made in my life,” he said.

Stephanie Clanton, Reentry Therapist at Region 9, noted this program is focused on helping offenders get a new start in life after incarceration while also addressing mental health issues in a way to hopefully reduce chances of recidivism.

“This was the first class to start the program and we are very proud of them,” she said.

Ann Rodio, with the DMH Bureau of Alcohol and Drug Services, spoke at the graduation program. She said she knows the men have experienced growth in their time in the program, and will continue to experience growth in their sobriety.

“One of the things I heard when I first met these gentlemen, what came out the strongest to me, what I heard over and over, is that they were glad to be there for each other,” Rodio said.

She said that while the staff with DMH, DOC, and Region 9 have been instrumental in this program, they are not the only ones willing to help.

“There are a whole lot of people out there you’ve never met, who really care about you, and are there to help you every step of the way. All you have to do is ask.”

