

Mental Health Services for Children

The 2000–2001 Grand Jury provided several recommendations for improved Mental Health services for children. The Department of Mental Health (Mental Health) and Board of Supervisors (BOS) responses indicated that most recommendations were already implemented or would not be implemented. Mental Health scheduled two recommendations for implementation in June 2002.

Method of Investigation

The Grand Jury reviewed Mental Health and Board of Supervisors responses, documents furnished by Mental Health, information from the Special Education Local Area Plan (SELPA) Administrator, and the Mental Health 2002 Compendium of Services. The Grand Jury interviewed parents of children receiving Mental Health services and visited the Oak Manor Day Treatment classroom.

Findings

1. The Mental Health response to Finding 6 states “In a collaborative effort it often appears that responsibilities are blurred.” This statement emphasizes the need for a written Memo of Understanding to clarify the roles of each collaborating agency. Other agencies and parents need to know who the responsible party is so they know whom to contact.

The Grand Jury reviewed a 1996 DRAFT Memo of Understanding between Mental Health and the SELPA. The draft was never finalized.

2. Recommendation E stated: “Mental Health research the possibility of coordinating with other County agencies to hire a staff psychiatrist for children, who would assess children, create treatment plans, and evaluate therapeutic interventions, as well as monitor medications.”

The need for a child psychiatrist was not disputed, but the response stated it was unfeasible. They are not going to try. Having a child psychiatrist available in the County needs to be a future goal and Mental Health needs to find a way to collaborate with the Court, Probation Department, and the Department of Social Services, who also have a need for evaluation of children. Currently, County dollars are being spent for these services.

3. Recommendation H stated: “Mental Health develop a means of evaluating their service delivery outcomes.”

The Mental Health response stated they had submitted reports to the State. However, when asked for the reports, Mental Health stated that the “County submits raw data electronically to the State where it is transformed into a report.” Mental Health stated staff would obtain copies of the reports and forward them to the Grand Jury. The reports

were never received. Nonetheless, raw data sent to the State is not an adequate basis for needed evaluations.

4. Recommendation J stated “Children’s Mental Health develop and distribute to all school districts a specific written notice of services available to school districts and the procedures for obtaining those services.” Mental Health responded that the information had been given to the Special Education Local Plan Area Director; the BOS said the Grand Jury should ask the SELPA Administrator about how the information is distributed.

The SELPA Administrator furnished minutes showing dates when Mental Health personnel gave presentations to the school district superintendents and an essay entitled “School Based Mental Health Services,” undated and no author noted. The three-page essay presents general statements about the need for school-based mental health services, but does not give specifics on what programs there are or who to contact at the Mental Health Department to arrange for services.

Parents reported that Mental Health was not providing specified services for their children.

5. Recommendation K stated: “Mental Health develop guidelines that are in accordance with the Education Code for positive behavioral interventions.”

The response discounted the need for such guidelines; the Recommendation Implementation Schedule indicates the recommendation is already implemented. However, Mental Health has no written guidelines.

The SELPA employs behavior specialists who are knowledgeable about education law and school behavior plans.

6. Recommendation L stated: “Children’s Mental Health revise the Compendium of Services to be a readable, easily understood document that accurately provides a detailed list of services available.”

The Recommendation Implementation Schedule for Recommendation L states: “Will develop a separate brochure/flyer focused on services for children,” in June 2002.

Mental Health provided the Grand Jury with a revised Compendium of Services in May 2002. The Children’s Services section reports on some programs, but except for day treatment programs, contains no information about other services offered on school sites.

Recommendations

- A. Mental Health and collaborating agencies adopt Memos of Understanding which clarify what each agency is going to do. (Finding 1)

- B. Mental Health study County use of psychiatric evaluation services throughout the County to determine the feasibility of hiring a child psychiatrist. (Finding 2)
- C. Mental Health develop a way to evaluate service delivery outcomes. (Finding 3)
- D. Mental Health coordinate with SELPA staff in developing guidelines for school behavior plans. (Finding 5)
- E. Mental Health distribute the brochure developed in June 2002 directly to all school principals and counselors, as well as to the SELPA and district superintendents. (Findings 4 & 6)

Comment

The Grand Jury commends the Ukiah Unified School District for installing a window in the quiet-room door of the Day Treatment Program classroom, and the classroom teacher for using positive behavior interventions and classroom procedures; when the Grand Jury visited the classroom this year, children were not isolated and no punishments were posted.

Response Required

Mendocino County Board of Supervisors

Response Requested

Department of Mental Health Director

Mendocino County Special Education Local Plan Area Administrator