

## **Testimony for Ways & Means Human Services Subcommittee**

**March 25, 2015**

Dear Chairs Bates and Nathanson, and Members of the Subcommittee:

Malheur County is the poorest county in Oregon; it also has the highest crime rate per capita. Lifeways, the local mental health provider, was awarded a reinvestment grant in February 2014 to initiate a Jail Diversion Program based upon the Sequential Intercept Model, an Evidenced Based Practice. To be most effective, there was a lot of preparation involving collaboration between local law enforcement, corrections, veteran's advocates, court system and mental health to identify needs. One of the accomplishments was the first Crisis Intervention Team Training in Malheur County. It was co-sponsored by Lifeways and the Coordinated Care Organization, Greater Oregon Behavioral Health Inc. This is Step #1 of the model and has already reaped reward as there have been several incidents where officers were able to safely de-escalate a potentially dangerous situation with warm hand offs to mental health crisis staff.

With the grant provisions, Lifeways has a full time Qualified Mental Health Professional stationed four days in the jail and one day at corrections. She is able to identify and assess persons with mental illness so as to initiate treatment, provide case management, consultation with the court and corrections and to advocate for services post incarceration. Additionally, Lifeways has placed a half time Alcohol and Drug "CADC I" at the jail, as well, to identify and assess for substance issues and to initiate treatment. We celebrate that two men recently graduated from their court mandated drug treatment while incarcerated and were able to leave jail with certificates of completion. Both of these men were able to find immediate employment and resume their roles as productive citizens. Our CADC staff has been able to assist those incarcerated needing more intensive treatment with access to residential services directly from jail to reduce risk of relapse in community.

Lifeways Jail Diversion Staff is available at Corrections to offer specialized treatment services, continued case management and support as inmates leave jail to return to community. Jail Diversion staff refer to and participate in the four behavioral health courts in this county. This staff is available to law enforcement "CIT" trained officers and correctional officers to consult, home visit and do "ride along's" strengthening our commitment to collaboration.

A success story involves a 54 year old woman with severe mental illness, who had been homeless in the community for about ten years. After 32 police contacts over the past year, law enforcement cited her and she was incarcerated. Jail Diversion staff was able to develop a relationship with her and assist her to be released to our Mental Health Court. Lifeways Community Support Services Unit provided the on-going community based treatment services including case management aiding her to acquire permanent housing, entitlements and medical insurance. The following year, this woman had no police contacts. These are good outcomes for such a short time frame. Outcomes include the following:

- Improved community collaboration;
- Knowledgeable and safe crisis intervention by Law Enforcement with timely mental health crisis response. Service emphasis on diversion from incarceration or hospitalization;
- Screening for inmates suspected of behavioral health issues with treatment such as mandated drug treatment package, trauma informed services and counseling;
- Referrals to behavioral health courts, Supported Employment, Community Support Services (ACT/ICM), peer services and residential treatment; and
- Continued engagement and supportive services via behavioral health courts, outpatient services and case management without a timeline for discharge.

A year ago, the community law enforcement agencies were frustrated with available services. This year, Lifeways was awarded the Malheur County Sheriff's Exceptional Service award for 2014. We cannot solve all the issues of poverty, crime and mental illness but the collaboration and dedication to a community approach is impacting the citizens of Malheur County.

Submitted by Alice Mills

Lifeways, Malheur County

## Testimony to the Success of Supported Employment for People with Mental Illness

March 25, 2015

By: Allyson Morrison, Program Manager, Lifeways, Inc.

To: Co-Chairs Bates and Nathanson, and Members of the Joint Ways & Means Human Services Subcommittee

The supported employment program at Lifeways, local mental health provider for Malheur and Umatilla Counties, has been serving the population of Malheur County for nearly a decade. Since its early beginnings the program has expanded to five full time employment specialists, three part time peer positions, and one full time supervisor position across both Malheur and Umatilla Counties. Both counties carry full caseloads of 20 people per specialist, with 100 clients receiving employment services at any given time.

The past two years have shown impressive growth in the delivery of services, but there is still significant demand that cannot be met at this time. Even with combined caseloads of 100 people, the supported employment program is only serving approximately 3% of the population of work-aged clients who receive services from Lifeways. There are consistently waiting lists as we do our best to provide services to those who need them while applying this proven model of supported employment. Working the model has allowed the veteran Malheur team to see their employment outcomes grow, and at this point two of the three employment specialists have over 40% of their caseload employed and in 2014 nearly a dozen clients graduated from the program with jobs.

As of January of this year, Umatilla County joined Malheur County in being fully staffed with two full time employment specialists. Despite the fledgling status of this program, as the employment specialists in this county continue to become more accustomed to the model they, too, have found success. In the month of March alone there have been five job placements at different employers in Hermiston and Umatilla.

The program also serves as a method of education and outreach to the community. The model requires each employment specialist to contact six different employers every week, totaling 30 contacts across both counties every week. The employment specialists become one of the most visible parts of the community mental health agency for people who are not actively receiving services. Employment specialists work to educate employers about mental health, often answering questions and fighting the stigma that follows those who chose to disclose that they are in recovery from mental illness. Through membership and attendance at community events such as chamber lunches, economic development meetings, and employment department programs, the employment specialists work hard to educate the public and advocate for people with psychiatric disabilities.

Supported employment has long been supported by a plethora of research, and the experiences of our clients matches up to the positive outcomes research says we should expect. One such client had been a long-term client who was diagnosed with schizophrenia. He was a frequent utilizer of crisis services, and even right up to the point of his job start he was hospitalized several times and had involvement with the criminal justice system. Since his job start three years ago, he has completely dropped out from receiving mental health services aside from medication appointments. He is able to pay his bills with his partner, and he reports increased self-worth and happiness ever since starting his job. He has remained stable in his employment for several years.

Employment is a goal of so many people. For those with mental health issues, supported employment is the most successful, evidence-based model available.