

Office of Mental Health

Report To The Developmental Disability Council

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December 11, 2007

Introduction

The Office of Mental Health, under the direction of the Assistant Secretary, has continued to develop strategies that will result in successfully achieving its goals. Herein is found a review of ongoing programs in the Office of Mental Health.

Greenwell Springs Hospital

System recently added a new residential unit at the Greenwell Springs Campus. This unit has 12 new beds for adult males, and once renovations are complete, 12 beds for adult females will be added.

Department of Health and Hospitals, Office of Mental Health operates the Eastern Louisiana Mental Health System. As DHH is one of the largest providers of psychiatric services in Louisiana, this expansion is greatly needed.

Ex-DHH Secretary Dr. Fred Cerise explained, “Hurricane Katrina forced the closure of over 100 psychiatric beds in New Orleans and the surrounding areas. This new unit is a necessary step for us to regain the beds we lost in the aftermath of the hurricane.”

Throughout the New Orleans-Baton Rouge corridor, DHH has now opened a total of 76 new psychiatric beds. In addition to the 12 more planned for the Greenwell Springs campus, 20 additional beds are planned for Villa Feliciana and 25 more for East Hospital, both in Jackson, LA. Eastern Louisiana Mental Health System also lost vital personnel as a result of the hurricane. Officials are actively recruiting staff to fill vital nursing and support positions.

Louisiana Spirit

***Baton Rouge* – Louisiana is now making it easier for citizens in need of mental health counseling to find those services. A multimedia advertising campaign launching recently promotes a toll-free telephone number that people can call to receive help.**

Sponsored by Louisiana Spirit, the Department of Health and Hospital’s crisis counseling program, the new advertising campaign is the second phase of a public awareness effort designed to emphasize the importance of mental health in the recovery process since the 2005 hurricanes.

First launched in August 2006, the campaign focuses on helping citizens get help for their mental health issues in the aftermath of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita. The program's workers have counseled every kind of storm-affected citizen, including first responders, the homeless and young children. This campaign reminds citizens that even now, more than two years after the storms, these services are still available and easily accessible. People can be connected with experienced crisis counselors by calling 1-800-273-TALK.

According to Charles G. Cook, executive director of Louisiana Spirit, the campaign's message is also designed to remind people that it is normal to need assistance, and that Louisiana Spirit is here to help.

Louisiana Spirit offers its counseling services free of charge to anyone in Louisiana, as well as community organizations, government employees, rescuers, disaster service workers, business owners, religious groups and other special populations. Services include individual counseling for all ages, group counseling for first responders and specialized counseling and stress management services.

Established following the storms of 2005, Louisiana Spirit offers counseling services statewide. Almost two million crisis counseling contacts have occurred since Louisiana Spirit was formed.

SELH

Southeast Louisiana State Hospital (SELH) continues to operate 20 acute psychiatric inpatient beds to replace, in part, the acute psychiatric beds lost in the closer of Charity Hospital in New Orleans. The acute unit at SELH has 10 acute beds for males and 10 acute beds for females. Plans are to expand the acute unit at SELH to 40 beds, with the hospital currently continuing an extensive recruiting campaign to secure the necessary personnel to staff those additional beds. The bulk of the staff used in the current program are staff that worked at the former Charity Hospital location. Housing for employees has been an issue in the Mandeville area. As a result, SELH had provided transportation to some of the staff who were housed at a FEMA trailer park in Walker, Louisiana.

