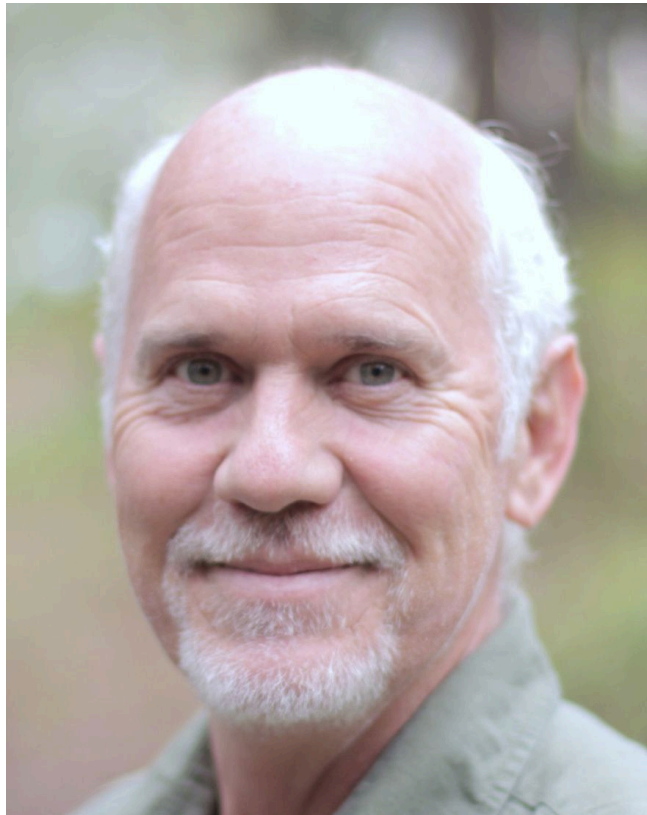

In My View: Old news that's fit to print

May 1, 2023



I am adjusting to the new Triplicate production schedule and have had to adapt my subject matter slightly.

In my prior schedule I would submit a column on Tuesday to print on Friday the same week.

Under my new schedule I still submit my column on Tuesday, but it does not get published until the following Tuesday.

By the time you read what I wrote, it is no longer new news, it is old news. My challenge then is to find old news that's still fit to print.

It is overwhelming sometimes how much news gets spewed at me on any given day. Sometimes there is no time in the moment to fully appreciate an issue when it is first reported. Fortunately, the internet never forgets, and it is always possible to go back and find a story.

One such story was originally reported in the Wild Rivers Outpost (3/20/23), "Del Norte County Spearheads Mobile Mental Health Crisis Response Team." This story described a presentation to the Crescent City Council about local mental health services and the lack thereof.

I went back and read this story, watched the recording of the council meeting, and read the report prepared for the County by the Indigo Project. These are my sources.

Crisis Care

The presentation to the City Council was from Shiann Hogan, Program Manager of the Behavioral Health Branch of the Del Norte County Department of Health and Human Services. Last year they received a Crisis Care Mobile Unit (CCMU) Planning Grant from the Behavioral Health Community Infrastructure Program.

A Crisis Care Mobile Unit (CCMU) will provide an option to respond to mental health and substance abuse crises when uniformed law enforcement may not be needed.

Here's how it will work.

People would call into dispatch. Working in partnership with law enforcement, a mobile services van will be deployed to respond to a person experiencing a behavioral health crisis. If the crisis cannot be resolved in the field, they would transport the patient to the hospital.

The over-reliance on law enforcement to respond to individuals suffering from a mental health crisis coupled with limited service options for people in crisis contribute to a revolving door in jail and large utilization of the emergency department for mental health and substance use related crises.

Collaboration

This planning grant was used to hire consultants with the Indigo Project to meet with a collaborative of stakeholders to inform the development of a CCMU Needs Assessment and Action Plan that “will guide future pre-development activities; pave the way for subsequent funding requests; and set forth plans to successfully integrate mobile crisis response into the existing system of services.”

This collaborative of stakeholders included Del Norte County Sheriff Garrett Scott, Crescent City Police Chief Griffin, Supervisor Valerie Starkey and representatives from the County Department of Health and Human Services, Sutter Health, Open Door Clinic, Remi Vista, Mission Possible, Yurok Tribe, Tolowa Dee-Ni' Nation and others.

Within CCMU planning, the Needs Assessment led to the collaborative establishing three goals for crisis services. Goal 1: Reduce the number of people experiencing crisis. Goal 2: Provide crisis services to individuals wherever they are. Goal 3: Build community capacity to respond to crises.

Once the Action Plan is approved by the State, Del Norte County is eligible for the remainder of their base allocation to support CCMU implementation.

Funding Available

The State of California has allocated over two billion dollars to build back behavioral health infrastructure. This represents a pivotal opportunity for Del Norte County as infrastructure funding of this size is extremely rare and unlikely to be available again anytime soon.

One of the goals of this collaborative is to improve behavioral health services at Sutter Coast Hospital which has recently been awarded a \$2 million grant to create a crisis stabilization unit at the hospital. This grant will help build strategies to reduce emergency room utilization and hospitalization.

This will streamline the health assessment for mental health patients and quickly transition them out of the emergency room into a calming space designed for mental health clients in crisis. Behavioral health staff can then come in, figure out a safety plan and determine next steps outside the chaos in the emergency room.

While counties across the state struggle with staffing, these issues are especially pervasive in Del Norte County which often cannot attract staff for positions, especially when specific clinical credentials are required.

To fully implement this program, the Behavioral Health Branch must hire 8 additional staff. There is an acute local shortage of mental health clinicians who are required to conduct the assessment of all new clients. Hogan reported that as of mid-April, Del Norte County will have no clinicians.

The CCMU grant will only pay for the equipment, vehicle, and other infrastructure needed to implement the program, but will not pay for staffing. To address this, Behavioral Health is partnering with Sutter Coast Hospital to apply for a grant that will help pay for staffing.

Services Needed

At the end of the presentation, Crescent City Council member Kelly Schellong observed, “This is probably the most needed thing in our community right now.” I agree.

This is a critical step in reimagining public safety services in our community. This Crisis Care Mobile Unit will free up our overstretched local law enforcement personnel from responding to many calls that can be handled more appropriately by mental health professionals.

I commend the staff of the Behavioral Health Branch and the group of collaborators for going above and beyond the call of duty to seek funding for this ambitious new program. We should encourage our law enforcement agencies, elected officials and the general public to embrace this program.

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