



STAFF INNOVATION SUMMARY—SAN MATEO

Name of Innovative (INN) Projects: Health Ambassador Program –Youth

Total Requested for Project: \$750,000

Duration of Innovative Project: Three (3) Years

Review History

County INN plan approved by County Board of Supervisors on May 24, 2016.

Mental Health Services Oversight and Accountability Commission (MHSOAC or Commission) consideration of INN Project: July 28, 2016.

Project Introduction:

San Mateo County proposes to adapt their existing Health Ambassador Program (for adults) so that it can be completed by youth, ages 16-25. The program comprises training for certification as a Health Ambassador, so that these trained youth could take a proactive role in community forums, serve as panel members and generally become youth leaders in their communities. By developing youth, the County feels that it can reduce stigma and improve access to mental health services. To obtain certification, participants would be required to complete at least four trainings from among the following: Mental Health First Aid, Applied Suicide Intervention Skills Training, National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) Family to Family Education Program, NAMI Basics, Stigma Free San Mateo and/or Wellness Recovery Action Plan, and Digital Storytelling and/or Photovoice or other relevant course. After completion of the four required courses, graduates will be presented with a Health Ambassador certificate and be part of a pool utilized by the project to provide outreach into communities, facilitate discussions or focus groups, and be points of contact for and assistance to local wellness events and efforts.

The County anticipates that it will be able to recruit and train 30 HAP-Y candidates per year for the program. Of those 30, the County estimates that about 30% will be persons with lived experience. They also plan to recruit from diverse cultural and gender backgrounds as well as get a geographic balance of youth from its “four corners” as well as its geographically remote areas. This all, they feel, will ensure that the HAP-Y program is reaching diverse youth.

The Need

San Mateo County states that it identified a need to decrease stigma and build the capacity of communities to engage in improving access to mental health services during its comprehensive community planning process (CPP), held preparatory to developing its

Three Year Plan for fiscal year (FY) 2014-2017. This need, along with others, identified in the CPP, was brought to the Mental Health Services Act (MHSA) Steering Committee, which is responsible for prioritizing MHSA projects in the County. The County further states that while the value of peer education and advocacy in health and wellness (smoking, healthy eating, sex education, etc.) is well documented, research on the efficacy in the mental health setting is scarce. Further, the County states that evidence-based models for training youth peer educators/advocates are limited. The county indicated in discussions with Staff that their key, proposed innovation is their proposed delivery method (for over a year) to prepare youth to be peer educators/advocates.

The Response

The County states that its need to implement a curriculum to develop health ambassadors for youth is validated through the lack of evidence-based models for training youth to be educators/advocates. The adult version of this program was developed by the County Office of Diversity and Equity (ODE) with Prevention and Early Intervention (PEI) funding in 2013. The County does not indicate if the ODE will continue to sponsor this program simultaneously while the County runs the youth program with Innovation funding.

In the adult version of the Health Ambassador program, participants completed a 12-week parent skill-building class and four of eight other public education course to expand their knowledge of behavioral health. The adult program appears not to have been formally evaluated as to whether it has improved access to services or decrease stigma. The County notes that the adult HAP is still fairly new. The County may wish to address the degree to which the adult HAP program has been evaluated in order to clarify how evaluation of HAP-Y will assess the impact of program adaptations.

The County suggests that its health ambassador program for youth would be innovative in three respects: (1) its adaptation to youth; (2) its year-long training approach to certify individuals as Health Ambassadors; and (3) the potential effectiveness of youth ambassadors in increasing youth access to mental health services.

Health ambassador programs are not a new concept, even for youth. A review of literature and programs, nationally and internationally, speak to the development of curriculum for youth-oriented health ambassador programs, as well as delivery systems for such programs. According to its website, San Mateo County already has a yearlong training in South San Francisco. The Canadian Mental Health System has developed a complete teaching curriculum for delivering health ambassador-like programs to high school students during the academic school year. There are likewise numerous health ambassadors programs in other states, (e.g. Illinois, New York, Nevada) as well as internationally, (e.g. Canada, Australia).

What is not codified in these reports of programs is the extent to which any of these has reduced stigma or increased access to mental health services. San Mateo County is positioned to look at this through its youth health ambassador program. Further, the County does not know if the adult version of the program was successful at either decreasing stigma or provider better access to services. That information could not only inform the County's decision to adapt the program curriculum and delivery systems, but might also lead to another aspect of the youth program.

The Community Planning Process

The community planning process that led to this proposal appears to have been robust. While these meetings were conducted primarily for the Three Year Program and Expenditure Plan, distillation of the Community Program Planning (CPP) Process led to the development of this Innovation proposal. This strongly suggests that all interested stakeholder groups and demographics had the opportunity to be represented. Additional details on the demographics, stakeholder group representation, and engagement are provided in the County's Three-Year Program and Expenditure Plan, FY 2014-15 through 2016-17, (pages 7-14). The Innovation ideas were then brought to the San Mateo County MHSA Steering Committee in March 2015 by stakeholders, MHSA Steering Committee members, and Behavioral Health and Recovery Services (BHRS) staff as potential projects. The Steering Committee made recommendations on the projects to move forward.

Learning Objectives and Evaluation

The County cites two primary learning goals:

- Is the HAP year-long psychoeducational process an effective method for building youth capacity and engagement in reducing stigma in their communities?
- Are youth ambassadors effective in increasing access to behavioral health services for other youth, families and communities?

The County may wish to clarify how their evaluation approach will compare and contrast the County's year-long training process with training approaches utilized in similar programs in other states or internationally.

The County may further wish to clarify how their emphasis on whether youth ambassadors can increase access to services for other youth, families and communities differs from the objectives pursued in other, similar youth ambassador programs.

In December 2015, the County released a Request for Proposal for a contractor to run the Innovative program. StarVista was selected to develop and run the Youth health ambassador program. No budget (delineating administrative, program or evaluation costs) is available for review, although the County indicated that after a contractor was hired, they would develop a final budget. Later, it released a second RFP for a program evaluator. In the RFP the County proposed that the successful bidder could receive up to \$100,000 (total) for the first two years to evaluate 3 of their proposed Innovative Programs. As of date of this writing, no evaluator has been identified by the County.

The Budget

The projected budget is \$750,000; \$250,000 per year over the three year project duration. The County has not provided any budgetary detail to date, including estimates for administration or for evaluation. Staff have discussed with the County the lack of detail and anticipate that the County will address this issue in its presentation to the Commission.

Additional Regulatory Requirements

The project proposal as presented to Commission staff lacks sufficient detail to establish that it meets all minimum regulatory requirements, particularly with respect to evaluation and the budget. Staff have discussed these issues with the County and anticipate that the County will provide further detail in its presentation to the Commission.

References

“South San Francisco High School Peer Leaders Trained in Youth Mental Health First Aid.” San Mateo County Behavioral Health & Recovery Services Blog. May 16, 2016. <https://smcbhrsblog.org/category/workforce-development/>

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