

A Letter to the Community
January 2012

The start of a new year helps us think about what has happened in the past and anticipate what might happen in the future. This is true for me as CEO of the Mental Health & Recovery Board of Clark, Greene, and Madison Counties.

Looking back on the past ten years, funding to communities from both the Ohio Departments of Mental Health (ODMH) and Alcohol and Drug Addition Services (ODADAS) has been drastically reduced. ODMH cut community services for the uninsured by 70%; ODADAS cut services by 51%. I would argue that the system was underfunded in 2002, making current funding levels vastly inadequate.

Alcohol, drug addiction and mental health services are often described as, “the glue that holds the rest of the social service safety net together.” For example, the vast majority of individuals who come in contact with the criminal justice system have substance abuse problems, a mental illness, or both. Recently legislated sentencing reform requires that adequate mental health and substance abuse treatment be made available in local communities. Because of the grossly inadequate state support for community treatment, the availability of services is very uneven across the state. In some areas, if a person does not have the ability to pay and does not have benefits such as Medicaid, there are simply no available treatment services.

Our three-county region has suffered state funding cuts similar to the rest of the state. We significantly reduced the Board’s administrative staff and anticipate additional reductions in the near future. Unfortunately, we have also been forced to reduce funding for programs and services. Our regional detoxification and crisis stabilization program was closed. Waiting times have increased, the intensity of some services has decreased and the overall number of individuals we are able to serve has dropped.

I personally want to thank you for your ongoing support and advocacy on behalf of the citizens of our region. Because of strong local levy support, we have fared better than many areas of the state. Levy funding makes up approximately 70% of the money the Board has available to support local services. Without levy dollars, our ability to fund anything other than the most basic services, such as 24-hour crisis support, would be lost and the local safety net would disappear. Local levy revenue is that important. In Greene County we will be on the ballot in November 2012. In Clark County we will run in 2013 and in Madison County in 2015.

Our Mental Health & Recovery Board of Directors have strategically focused resources to assist agencies in improving their efficiency and clinical outcomes by implementing the Feedback in Treatment (FIT) philosophy in clinical care and renewing our focus on community-wide prevention and health promotion initiatives.

We are beginning our second year with Dr. Scott Miller to guide implementation of FIT for clinical care. FIT empowers clients to direct their clinical treatment. Decades of research shows that when clients are fully engaged in treatment they attend sessions more regularly and successfully complete treatment more quickly. Faster progress with better outcomes means that agencies have the ability to serve more clients and system-wide capacity is increased.

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Our Board enlisted Dr. Dennis Embry to enhance sustainable, community-wide efforts to prevent mental, emotional, and behavioral problems. Dr. Embry, a prevention expert, works around the world from local communities to entire states and regions. His low-cost, simple practices are proven and needed to prevent or delay the onset of mental illness and alcohol/drug problems. We are pleased to bolster this initiative and believe that measurable results will be evident in the near future.

While this is an extremely challenging time, it is also an exciting time. State funding has been dramatically reduced; local levy revenue is down due to changes in the law and property devaluations. However, demand for services is up, while our ability to respond is reduced. Yet we are resolute to maintain a strong safety net of effective, efficient behavioral health services. We also look upstream with an aim of reducing the severity and incidence of mental illness and substance abuse problems for future generations.

Feel free to contact me if you have any questions (937) 322-0648 x110 kent@mhrb.org. Thank you for your continued support.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Dr. Kent Youngman". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized "K" and "Y".

Dr. Kent Youngman, LPCC-E
CEO