



# Hogg Foundation for Mental Health

THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT AUSTIN

## Sunset Advisory Commission Public Hearing June 25, 2014

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The Sunset staff did an incredible amount of investigative work, talked to a multitude of people and developed some very valuable recommendations. The foundation would like to thank them for their thoroughness and professionalism. My comments today will address areas that were not included in the reports that the foundation believes are important to consider during this Sunset process.

### **Department of Aging and Disability Services**

The Sunset Report references the need for crisis services for people with challenging behaviors. The best way to address crises is to prevent them from happening whenever possible. People with intellectual/developmental disabilities (IDD) are two to three times more likely to experience a mental health condition than the general population. We need to change the way we think, talk and react to people with disabilities with challenging behaviors. We need to consider their mental wellness by assessing for underlying mental health conditions and medical conditions that may be causing the behaviors.

An individual with a “normal IQ” who exhibits aggressive or depressive behaviors receives mental health assessments, treatment and supports. For people with IDD, those same behaviors are more often addressed with behavior management plans intended to control behaviors and produce compliance or with psychotropic drugs meant to address the behavior and not a specific mental health diagnosis. The disability often overshadows any underlying mental health or medical condition. Individuals with IDD deserve the same quality mental health supports and services as anyone else. DADS and DSHS need to begin to share responsibility for ensuring that people with IDD receive those services. A copy of comprehensive comments provided to the House Human Services Committee is attached identifying both challenges and recommended strategies.

### **Department of State Health Services**

There is a critical mental health workforce shortage in Texas. One of the most effective and cost efficient ways to support people living with mental illness is to make peer support services and family partner services more readily available. In Texas we are building a strong contingent of certified peer specialists and currently have approximately 500 certified across the state. These peer specialists are currently working in state psychiatric hospitals and at local mental health authorities. Under current rules they are approved providers of mental health rehabilitative services and those services are reimbursable through Medicaid. Unfortunately, however, this means that their services are only reimbursable when provided at the local mental health authorities because the authorities are the only ones authorized to provide rehab services.

To broaden the opportunities for peer services to be reimbursable in other settings we need to make peer support services a Medicaid reimbursable service. This would make it easier for their services to be offered in a

variety of other settings including hospital emergency rooms, local clinics, integrated health care settings, and more. The level of commitment, professionalism and sophistication of the peer specialists certified through Via Hope is extremely impressive and their services are some of the most valuable we could offer to individuals experiencing mental illness. Attached is a document with more information on peer support services.

### **Department of Rehabilitative Services**

You have in the packet of information a copy of my daughter's resume. My daughter is 23 years old and has autism and intellectual disabilities. As you can see, she has a significant amount of volunteer work experience. She is extremely good with animals and has volunteered at the animal shelter, Petco, a dog day care facility, a horse barn, the Austin Nature Center and an animal hospital. In fact, she has been volunteering for almost two years at a local animal hospital where she works for two hours a day, four days a week on her own.

Erin has been a client of DARS for 19 months. In that time she has *had only two interviews and one temporary 3-day job*. DARS is not doing a good job in finding jobs for people with IDD or people living with mental illness. What they've been doing historically isn't working so new and different efforts need to be made. One major obstacle is the lack of a strong employer base that understands the value of hiring people with developmental disabilities. DARS relies on their contract providers to develop potential employers and it's simply not happening for far too many young adults with disabilities. DARS needs to do more at the state level to develop an informed employer base. We need a new direction with a strong focus on employer recruitment.

For More information, please contact Colleen Horton at 512/740-5891 or [colleen.horton@austin.utexas.edu](mailto:colleen.horton@austin.utexas.edu).

#### Attachments:

- 1) Copy of testimony provided to the House Human Services Committee on June 4<sup>th</sup>, 2014.
- 2) Policy brief on peer support services
- 3) Resume of DARS client