



## MENTAL HEALTH LOCAL ADVISORY COUNCIL

September 8, 2025

12:00 – 2:00 PM

Gallatin County Courthouse Community Room and Via Zoom

**Voting Members Present**- Erin Taylor, Margaret Kachadurian, Yvonne Rudman, Jennifer Boyer, Nicole Madden, Andrea Lower, Shawna Lockhart, Susan Gregory, Ryan Mattson, Lori Christenson, Amanda Rosenkoetter, Eric Szemes, Bekki McLean

**Non-Voting Members Present**- Chad Berg, Rick Gale, Todd Lester, Christina Powell (HELP Center)

### **Voting Members Absent**

**Guests**- Godfrey Saunders, Diane Taylor, Susan Wadsworth, Beth Sir, Linda Gabel, Faye Boom, Marcia Leritz, Diane Moser, **Mike Chavers**, Joy LaClaire, April Smith, Elizabeth Marum, Patti Steinmuller, Dori Brownlow, Beth Boyson, Reilly, Joye, Courtney Giles, Karen,

**Staff**- Caitlin Avey, Cola Rowley,

- Call to Order- Erin Taylor called the meeting to order at 12:04PM.
- Roll Call- Nicole Madden took attendance.
- Approval of Minutes: July 2025 minutes – Erin Taylor approved the minutes as distributed after corrections.
- Public Comment-
  - Godfrey Saunders – I have made promises to individuals and as an educator for 40 years I have been with students struggling. I knew students who are not with us today from natural causes, accidents and by their own hand. This is very personal to me. I don't like nights and weekends because of these experiences, they bring the greatest pain one can feel. It is a need in this valley – it has always been a need. We have a great school system here, but we cannot meet all our needs on our own. Thank you for seeing the need and taking the time to address it. We haven't had the ability to make it happen but now we have a coalition to make this happen and it is good to have disagreement, but this is a need that our community doesn't have, and it hurts students, families and teachers. Give this a chance, it is so critical.
  - Yvonne – LAC should participate in the walk out of darkness next year for suicide prevention and remembrance
  - Rick – thank you to the VA team who participated in the walk out of darkness event
  - Linda Gabel raised \$850 for the cause.
- Committee Reports and Updates
  - Strategic Planning Committee- none
  - Membership Committee- none
  - Accounting- no changes except some funds to Amanda

- Central Service Area Authority- Nicole: September 25<sup>th</sup> webinar on WRP and the international conference is Oct 6-8 in Great Falls. NAMI in MT has a conference in Helena on Sept 22-24. The service area is doing a mini event on the 22<sup>nd</sup> to kick off the conference. CSAA is working to allocate additional funding that we will need to apply for.
- Gallatin Behavior Health Coalition Update- The Bloom Consulting contract is supported by, and services are based on the crisis diversion grant. This was originally from the MT Health Care grant from Bozeman Health. The grant includes a plan to use old warming center for a crisis receiving center – we are working with HRDC and the state to ensure we can operate sustainably.
- Gallatin County Commission- no updates
- Media Committee- Amanda: we have a website in the works, and we have content that is getting organized to have a central location for resources. Work with Nicole to transfer social media accounts.
- Unfinished Business
  - Lighthouse Ranch- Follow-up Conversation with Mike Chavers, et al- Yellowstone Boys and Girls Ranch
    - How have the concerns regarding employees been addressed? What is the response? The GBHC has a history of getting in agreements that have not been realized and fully executed – how will this be different? Is it financially viable?
    - This venture is a gamble, but we have too many kids dying and we have scoured the region for services, and we have a vetted partner that yes there are allegations, but every youth organization has allegations.
    - The issue is that this process has not been transparent, and the LAC has been left in the dark? The GBHC is not a legal entity, and the LAC is and why are we in the dark?
    - The answers from YBGR and announcement that Mike Chavers would be present today were emailed on August 19<sup>th</sup>.
    - HOW YBGR GOT HERE – I am here to be transparent and reflect our cores values of integrity and relationship. As we work together to build services in Gallatin, we are committed to answering questions and working together. We have been here for decades but through more partnerships (YBGR does not compete with other organizations, we work to fill gaps). We came here to fulfill our mission and support partners to help establish services. We couldn't afford to hire people here given the high cost of living in Gallatin in the past. We feel we can hire now and sustain staff because there is housing, our foundation, our nonprofit status and service fees, we operate with NO debt we focus on services, not land holdings. The GBHC came together to secure the ranch with support of county and HRDC – everyone agrees there is no guarantee but if we waited until all was set 100% nothing would happen. We are already hiring people – 8 people including home support and case management to provide services and we will continue to hire and serve even if Lighthouse doesn't happen – the best services are for kids in their homes and in their communities – but sometimes they do need residential services. The campus is by far the least expensive option for a service and setting like this and will never be less expensive in the future.

- The allegations are not news to YBGR – WE reported them! We take mandatory reporting seriously and we have always executed this, and we have always followed these standards. There are no sanctions or findings otherwise. (Yvonne had questions about reporting).
- The state does background checks and YBGR also does an independent background check, references and training (see past responses provided). YBGR is not a school but there is a school on the property where students get education and the teachers there are highly regulated like all schools. The best defense is to establish a culture of reporting and systems that reinforce our values, and we report, and we listen to kids. The vast majority of any reports to authorities and disability rights etc. are from us and we also make these resources available to families.
- Yvonne questions: Are we prioritizing tertiary treatment over prevention? How did we make this choice? YBGR agrees 100% on the value and need of prevention. YBGR works closely with Shodair and we have different models of care and currently Shodair doesn't have the staff to operate all their beds. We are not making a dent in the number of referrals we are receiving.
- The Financials for YBGR – we get regular and timely medicare payments, but the rates are low at 70% of the cost. We get private insurance and some out-of-state contracts and endowment, and this mix of financial support makes it work. We need community support and staff across the state, so we have support across the continuum not just on our campus. We are hiring staff and building programs in Gallatin now today.
- S. Gregory – There is never a perfect situation, and the vigilance is important to keep all the time. We see kids who can't go home, kids who sleep in parking lots and we need a place when kids are in crisis, and we should look at the big opportunities and picture.
- We certainly need prevention, but we also need a place where kids are in crisis and move forward to develop care at this level.
- We share the same concern about prevention at the VA and the questions and transparency and culture that you create is so critical. You are embracing the questioning and the invitation to bring the services here. Of course, we need both prevention and residential. This is an incredible feat that we are creating an environment for the life-saving services to exist here. It will save lives.
- Some populations are not aligned with prevention and will need residential, our community really needs this type of service, and the cost is not excessive even though \$1M is a lot of money.
- The conversation has allowed me to think more deeply and compassionately. There is no reason to delay the development of this service and center. Delaying is not responsible. Take a vote (LAC in support Y or N) next month?
- There are no signs of negligence from my perspective and you showing up is absolutely showing your transparency. Families need to be involved and going to Shodair is not accessible and allows families to be involved in treatment and all the tools and services the child and the families need.
- LAC Minutes of May 12<sup>th</sup> and June 9<sup>th</sup> have updates on the campus.

- We have a significant need in our community – we would be remiss if we did not support our youth in this manner.
- Community Cares is working to develop and expand preventive support.
- If we wait and do nothing – nothing will be accomplished and if we do something, then we can do something great.
- Nicole motion: LAC continues support of YBGR operating Lighthouse Ranch
- Jennifer: second
- Comments – discussion
  - GBHC does not communicate well with LAC – we should slow down to allow for more learning
  - Go to YBGR – go visit.
  - This is a great way for the LAC to operate. We should continue to discuss prevention

CALL THE QUESTION: YES – ALL but No – 1

- New Business
  - New Member Expectations ~ Tabled
  - Steve Nash and Anthea George ~ Tabled
- Agenda Suggestions~ Erin Taylor requested members email him with agenda items.
- Announcements~ N/A
- Adjournment~ Erin Taylor adjourned the meeting
- Next Meeting is **Monday, November 10, 2025**, at 12:00PM in the Gallatin County Courthouse Community Room. County offices are closed on Monday, October 13, 2025, in observance of Indigenous Peoples' Day.

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**Erin Taylor, Board Chair**