

EDITOR'S PICK

## Grant to address mental illness, recidivism

Adam Smith 19 hrs ago



A \$50,000 grant could eventually lead to a reduction in the number of mentally ill people being jailed or seeking treatment in an emergency room.

The grant, awarded by the Alabama Department of Mental Health to the Mental Health Center of North Central Alabama, coincides with the goal of the national Stepping Up Initiative. Stepping Up's mission is to divert people with mental illness from jails and into treatment.

“Today our local jails and hospitals — neither of which have it as their mission — are serving as mental health providers, which is creating a dire situation that is both dangerous and unsustainable,” said Commissioner Lynn Beshear of the ADMH. “It is incumbent upon communities and regions to work together in partnership to reduce the number of individuals with mental illness in jails and ERs and to direct these individuals to the appropriate care. It will be a win for those individuals, a win for the community and indeed for the entire state and prison system.”

Bill Giguere, development officer with the MHCNCA, said the money would be used to hire a caseworker to work with officials at the Morgan County Jail and Decatur-Morgan Hospital. He said even though the scope of work is isolated to Morgan County, it could be expanded to Limestone and Lawrence counties in the future.

“We have a tremendous problem where people are seeking psychiatric care at the emergency room, and we have people in jail who have mental illness who end up back there,” Giguere said. “The case manager would work with the jail and hospital to identify those individuals so we can stop the repetition. It will also be cost effective because it will keep more people out of jail and the emergency room.”

He believes the grant represents the first time money has been spent to address the issue. He set services are set to begin in December.

“We're very excited about it, and it's something we've been wanting to do for many years,” he said.

## A growing concern

According to the ADMH, people who have serious mental illnesses are admitted to jails across the nation two million times each year. Almost three-quarters of these adults have drug and alcohol use problems.

Though a national program, the Stepping Up Initiative is managed at the county level to establish effective partnerships across individuals in law enforcement, local governmental entities, elected officials, mental health and health care providers, courts and any others needed to meet the goal.

In June, the Morgan County Commission passed a resolution to join the Stepping Up Initiative. More than 450 counties have passed similar resolutions.

The MHCNCA was one of five groups to receive the grant. The others were Wellstone Behavioral Health in Huntsville and Cullman; the Mental Health Board of Chilton and Shelby Counties Inc.; Cherokee-Etowah-DeKalb Mental Health Center; and Marshall-Jackson Mental Health Board Inc.

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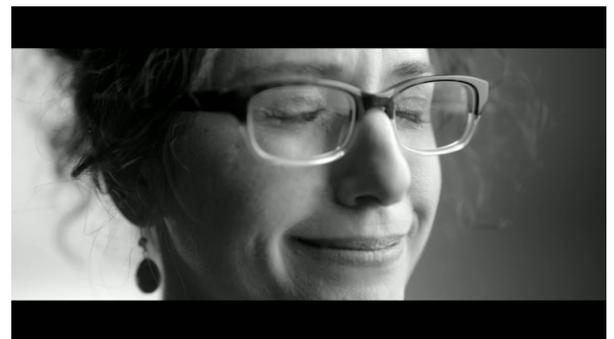


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